



Providing “one-stop” service for business clients through Practical Law

The small and mid-size businesses that Hurley Law in Cincinnati represents rely on the firm to handle just about all of their legal needs. “Between seven lawyers, we cover pretty much all practice areas,” says Dustin Hurley, the firm’s managing attorney. Hurley Law specializes in estate law, business law, criminal defense, divorce, and tax law services to families and businesses in Southwest Ohio. Dustin Hurley’s own practice focuses on business law and commercial real estate, with occasional forays into civil litigation. “For most of my clients, I’m a kind of outside general counsel,” he says.

And for companies of any size, “there’s a huge range of legal issues that can come up in the business life cycle,” Hurley notes. Sometimes, those issues aren’t in his firm’s wheelhouse. But when his clients need help on such issues, he doesn’t want to have to send them elsewhere. That’s inconvenient for them, and it makes him less useful as an “outside general counsel.”

Five years ago, Hurley and his firm subscribed to Thomson Reuters® Practical Law, the company’s digital legal know-how service.

“Practical Law allows me to pretty much tackle anything that’s going to come up for a typical small business,” Hurley says.

Life before Practical Law

Before Hurley Law signed up for Practical Law, its attorneys found themselves spending a lot of time on certain tasks — time that they couldn’t bill.

A large part of the firm’s work involves drafting business contracts. Though contracts can contain a certain amount of boilerplate language, each one is different — and it’s not always simple to come up with all the language that’s required.

Before Dustin Hurley started accessing Practical Law, “I would probably spend about 30 to 60 minutes of nonbillable time just going through my files to pull up a good starting template for drafting a contract.” Now, he adds, “that process is about 30 seconds.” Using Practical Law, he can conduct a search for a template or sample contract via Practical Law, which offers him a variety of different options “that I can go through to find what is appropriate for what I’m working on.”

Another significant part of Hurley Law’s work involves drawing up leases for both commercial landlords and tenants. These, too, vary greatly depending on the client, the type of project, and so on. Accessing Practical Law, Hurley can access a short-form lease, a long-form lease, a pro-landlord lease, or a pro-tenant lease. “There are any number of other versions of that starting point template that I can go in and immediately access and start drafting right away, with the confidence that that starting-point sample template is going to have all of the provisions that I need for that particular client,” he says.

A central resource

Like contracts and leases, each client is different. And each business has its own particular legal needs. “Any attorney is going to have situations where they’re faced with an area of law they’re not familiar with,” Hurley notes. In some situations, he’s had to refer the client to a specialist law firm. But many businesses don’t want to pay more for that expertise — or aren’t able to. As a result, Hurley and his colleagues have to dig in and find out about that issue so that they can provide useful counsel.

“I was spending a tremendous amount of time trying to educate myself on legal issues that I didn’t deal with on a daily basis,” Hurley recalls. “I would do some research and other applications that I have, I would talk to other lawyers, call people that I know that have done it before. They are generally not available to take my call on demand. There’s a lot of time lost in that process of just trying to even get to the point where I know what I’m looking at.”

“And because I didn’t have access to a lot of resources, I would frequently tell myself that I don’t feel comfortable doing this. I would just refer people out,” he adds. What’s more, “that education process is nonbillable.”

By using Practical Law, Hurley has found that “the amount of time educating myself and bringing myself up to speed is a fraction of what it was before,” Hurley says.

What’s more, the resources in Practical Law, such as practice guides and the sample contracts, “are prepared by and maintained by some of the top lawyers in the country. That gives me a heightened degree of confidence.” As a result, “I don’t find myself feeling uncomfortable and needing to engage co-counsel as experts on a subject matter. Generally, I’m able to get up to speed and talk to a client competently on a legal issue, even if it’s not something that I deal with regularly.”

Measuring ROI

Like a great many of the clients it serves, Hurley Law is a small business. That means it too needs to keep a close tab on expenses and the bottom line. A platform like Practical Law is an expense. So what’s the return on investment?

Hurley looks at it this way: “When you look at the cost of the subscription per user on a monthly basis, one way you probably recapture that if not more just in the time that’s lost in educating yourself on certain matters and that nonbillable time that most lawyers are currently not billing their clients for just to get up to speed.”

Hurley suspects that ROI on his firm’s investment in Practical Law is three or more times of “whatever I’m spending on a monthly basis for the subscription.” That noted, he also believes that “the real return on investment is the ability to tell more clients, ‘Yes, I can help you, and I don’t need to send you to another lawyer.’” One recent month, for instance, “I was able to take on five more matters that I would have otherwise turned away.” In addition, being able to offer that kind of legal guidance helps to “maintain the client relationship so that they truly see you as a partner in their business.”

In other words, Hurley Law’s clients want the firm to be a one-stop legal resource for their business. And for Dustin Hurley, having “a one-stop resource like Practical Law to get answers to questions ultimately is going to lead to a lot more matters from that client over time — and probably a lot more referrals from that client.”

“When you are trying to grow a legal practice and you’re trying to be a one-stop shop for clients, there are times where you have to be able to take on matters that are slightly outside of your comfort zone,” Hurley adds. “And Practical Law allows me to do that with a much higher degree of confidence.”