



WHITE PAPER

LAW AS A TEAM SPORT



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An average Formula 1 (F1) pit stop takes about two seconds.

This requires a team of nearly 20 people to perform a specific set of tasks with perfect precision and cooperation. In fact, it takes three people to change a single tire. While the driver gets all the glory, winning the race requires a team of highly skilled individuals working to achieve a common goal.

Success in the legal market requires the same strategy — a team approach to legal service delivery. Lawyers, data analysts, project managers, pricing experts, and more working side by side. “Non-lawyer” is a four-letter word in today’s top firms. These allied professionals bring as much value as lawyers to their clients who want legal expertise matched with business expertise to help them deal with the broader scope of their legal concerns.

This team must also include clients to achieve success. It is not enough for your firm to optimize internal processes without including your clients in the discussion. They demand transparency and collaboration. In fact, [86% of large law firms and 57% of midsize firms](#) are working with clients on creative fee options — an important indicator of the future of the industry.

This kind of integrated, open collaboration is quickly becoming table stakes for clients around the world. Law firms that want to preserve key relationships and gain new business need to embrace a team approach to legal service delivery — one that brings legal professionals, business professionals, and clients together as equal contributors to a shared goal.



LAW DEPARTMENTS ARE CHANGING WHAT THEY DO

The 2020 [State of Corporate Law Departments](#) report notes the pressure corporate law departments are facing to increase their collaboration with other functions — to create a more integrated approach to managing the business. Given the rapidly evolving landscape of 2020, the push to move beyond legal advisors toward strategic business partners is even greater.



This helps give context to the industry-wide push toward improved efficiency, cost reduction, and transparency that has dominated the last few years. Clients have come to the table saying they have reduced budgets, but similar or growing legal needs. This “more with less” demand has driven the rise of legal operations, significant technology investments, and a marked shift toward data-driven management of legal spend.

The cost-consciousness and data obsession that drive many decisions in the larger business have come to bear on the legal department. It may have seemed like a reaction to the Great Recession that would normalize over time. Even as recently as 2019, firms saw worked fees increase by as much as 6% year over year. But the rise of alternative legal service providers (ALSPs) and the Big Four consulting firms suggest that the corporate legal department will continue to become a more central part of their business. And as they are called on to provide much more than legal advice, so too will law firms.

THEY’RE ALSO CHANGING HOW THEY DO IT

When we asked GC’s what constitutes an effective law department today, one response echoed a common theme — “To become more closely aligned with our business units to provide best-in-class counsel, so the company can be agile while also mindful of measuring and mitigating risk.” But the volume of legal work moving through these departments often makes it difficult to find time to take a strategic approach.

Nearly half of respondents cite increasing efficiency as a top priority. Twenty-one percent say cost control, specifically automating processes, is the key driver of this efficiency. These clients aren’t putting price and technology pressures on their firms simply because their budgets have shrunk, but because they need to find ways to free up resources to focus on the business.

Unsurprisingly, 90% of respondents say controlling outside counsel costs is a high priority. One respondent noted, “We are trying to consolidate our spend among the fewest number of law firms possible.” With clients claiming that enforcement of general billing guidelines is the single best way to control costs, firms hoping to retain these clients must evolve. It’s not enough to be the fastest or most affordable option. Long-term success means fundamentally rethinking the approach to client engagement.

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Things like automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics can sometimes feel like worn out

buzzwords. But for the larger business community, these are regular components of modern strategic operations. As legal departments move closer to this line of thinking, they're looking for ways to streamline, simplify, and speed up their day-to-day work. Your legal expertise is a given, just as theirs is a given within their business. The key question you both share is, "how can we improve the way our expertise is delivered?"

MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR YOUR CLIENTS

For firms, there are two components to addressing this question. First is the literal delivery of information and services — the mechanics of how your clients engage with your firm. Is it easy to interact with your firm? Do clients have access to information and quick collaboration that simplifies interactions? Do they feel "part of the team" handling the matters or do they feel like a customer?

No firm wants their clients to think poorly of their experience, but the truth is that there are several factors that can contribute to poor client engagement. Absent or substandard client engagement tools (which we'll discuss later) make it difficult to manage multiple clients at scale. In turn, inconsistent status reporting, disorganized data collection, and a lack of internal collaboration lead to confusion and slow response times.

All of this can have lasting effects on your firm's brand and make it difficult to differentiate. In a world where clients are won or lost by the way you interact with them as much as the services you deliver, this can be disastrous. In contrast, several Thomson Reuters client firms have reported winning a larger share of business from their clients simply because of the quality of their client experience.

Web portals or extranets are a common first step to enhancing client engagement. These personalized, password-protected microsites allow clients round-the-clock access to a workspace where they can find and collaborate on shared documents, check matter status, and get self-service answers to questions they may otherwise have had to call for.

More advanced firms may consider using them for project management, billing status, or data visualization. Providing this level of transparency often helps answer questions and solve problems before they arise. Clear data and visualizations also afford clients the opportunity to take those insights into their business and provide better strategic advice. For instance, automated claims management sites can display counterclaims or payouts by geography, demographics, or any other metric in convenient charts.

Developing this kind of client engagement typically involves giving clients more direct access to information than many lawyers would've been comfortable with in the past. But a central location for clients and lawyers to collaborate and communicate increases clients' satisfaction and fosters a sense of teamwork that can drive retention and bring more work into the firm.

REIMAGINE THE LAW FIRM TEAM

The second major component affecting the quality of service delivery is the firm's personnel. Team structures, expertise, and their ability to collaborate effectively can have a tremendous impact on client engagement. As work and communication become increasingly digital, building and preserving these relationships becomes both more difficult and more important.

While many law firms have introduced so called “allied professionals” with expertise in disciplines like project management and finance, the lawyer remains the focal point. Like the F1 driver, lawyers are in direct control of the matter — the face of the team and the individual held most responsible for success or failure. But clients are clearly beginning to recognize the value of the team that surrounds the lawyer. No longer supporting players, the legal “pit crew” is every bit as talented and integral to success as the lawyer.

As Reese Arrowsmith, head of legal operations for Campbell’s Soup, noted, “the business professionals’ presence adds a different perspective than that of a relationship partner focused on the immediate fulfillment of a client’s legal needs. They can make sure the firm is delivering services with the same strategy and methods that the in-house operations person has for the company.”

Some lawyers may balk at the idea of allied professionals in the firm taking on client-facing

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— Reese Arrowsmith

Firms who haven’t yet embraced this team approach face challenges both internally and externally. Partners in today’s law firms are rarely loyal to the firm, often believing that their clients choose them, not the firm they work for. Thus, partners frequently move from firm to firm in search of better compensation or seniority. This idea of law firms as hotels rather than homes for talented lawyers poses serious problems for talent retention, client retention, acquisition, and engagement.

In contrast, teams of specialists with complementary skills supported by the right processes and technology can create stickiness to the firm rather than individual lawyers. These business professionals add perspective and expertise that amplifies the legal services and create added value that clients need and appreciate.

roles and assuming similar authority. An industry observer once noted that lawyers often feel like they need to be the smartest person in the room — that they need to know the answer to every question before it is asked. Though these tendencies may be helpful in some situations, they tend to be counterproductive when it comes to client management.

A team comprised of lawyers and allied professionals offers a much broader set of advice and services based on the foundation of solid legal expertise. In fact, the benefits of this team approach are wide-ranging. Many clients and lawyers alike praise the “bridging” aspect of these professionals. Their ability to speak both “client” and “lawyer” helps both sides work more quickly with clearer understanding. In one instance, allied professionals were sent to the final pitch for an RFP. The client had already established the firm’s legal credentials and wanted to know how the firm planned to carry out the work.

THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE TEAM

Even as widespread acceptance of remote work grows, many law firms don't have the necessary tools to foster this kind of teamwork — both internally and with clients. Communication and document sharing over email and messenger programs is inefficient, unsecured, and opens the door for errors and oversights. Furthermore, disconnected software creates manual processes that are time-consuming and frustrating. Low visibility into work in progress and performance hampers decision-making and client service.

Centralized tech platforms offer a simple, one-stop shop for nearly all your firm's internal and external collaboration. Top law firms use them as intranets for news and updates, communication hubs for practice areas and teams, and document collaboration. Many law firms have individual tech solutions for these needs, but bringing them together simplifies and accelerates much of the work moving through the firm. In some cases, there is even a financial gain in moving from several systems to one.

Perhaps the most valuable application of these tools is in automating time-consuming administrative tasks. Using extranets, firms have automated things like check requests, intake, and expense reporting. More advanced firms have implemented project management with automated task assignment, tracking, and alerts that have saved teams hours of tedious administrative work.



Connecting internal collaboration with client-facing extranets brings together the full power of a team-based approach to service delivery. Parties on both sides can communicate quickly in a central location, track progress, and share updates. Data visualization keeps critical information easily accessible. Task management helps work move more quickly.

But all of this must be kept secure. Especially during a time when nearly everyone in the firm is accessing resources from their home networks, the need to protect your firm and your clients' data is paramount. Administrators must have confidence that these cloud-based platforms have the necessary security in place to safeguard against cyber attacks. Alongside user-level permissions to control access to information, the best of these platforms offers an opportunity to safely and securely improve collaboration.

SHARE AND COLLABORATE ON DOCUMENTS SECURELY

The single greatest risk law firms face as they collaborate internally and externally is in document sharing. Email attachments are easily intercepted and make it difficult to preserve the master document. Even firms using document sharing solutions like Box or Google Docs are only solving half the problem. Permissioned access to documents is a good first step, but legal work requires strict version control and change records. All of this must not get in the way of document creation, revision, and sharing.

In fact, this may be the reason so many elite law firms tolerate substandard document sharing tools. Security often hampers speedy collaboration. And if the tool is poorly designed or difficult to use, it's

hard to blame a team member or client for resorting to email. But document collaboration integrated into a team-based collaboration platform can improve efficiency without sacrificing security. Imagine the speed and simplicity of email or social media messaging combined with the power and familiarity of productivity tools like Microsoft Office.

And with teams and clients scattered across regions and continents, a simple, secure place to collaborate on documents reduces reliance on email. People can send files, make changes and comments, and even sign documents in the same platform. Improving security and efficiency while delivering a better client experience is a simple, tangible way to set yourself apart from competitors.

Beyond the transfer of documents back and forth, these systems function as a central repository. Clients and legal teams alike appreciate the ability to access large documents from anywhere. Freeing crucial knowledge from desktops and hard drives and transferring it to a shared workspace also helps break down silos. With the proper oversight, this kind of open information sharing between internal and external teams builds trust and can help overcome communication challenges.

CREATE IMPROVED LEGAL TEAMS

Law firms must begin to think of “legal teams” as including the client. Not only in name, but in practice. And like the F1 pit crew, the best legal teams must find ways to increase the speed and precision of their work. Inefficiencies, delays, or (worst of all) missing skill sets are unacceptable and put the firm at risk of losing business or market share.

As clients are being asked to stretch by their business, so too must your firm. Legal counsel provided with the context of a variety of business perspectives and additional services is becoming the norm. Allied professionals can support lawyers to provide exceptional client value that differentiates the firm, boosts retention, and helps the client drive greater value for their business.

Clients’ assessment of your firm’s value may, in large part, depend on what you offer beyond legal expertise. That may take the form of a broad set of additional services and expertise, intuitive technology that enables improved collaboration and transparency, or a combination of the two that makes you uniquely valuable to them.

Law, in firms and client corporations, is becoming more fully integrated into the rest of the business world. Forward-thinking firms positioning themselves as full-service strategic advisors stand to dominate the industry over the next decade. Those who lag behind will likely see their market share continue to be eroded by ALSPs and the Big Four offering more holistic services.

As the world reacts to and changes from this dramatic upheaval in the way we work, one thing is certain: the legal industry will never be the same. As one GC put it: “The industry will see what truly matters in order to operate an efficient, effective legal practice, whether in-house or at a firm.”

The good news is that the strategies and tools necessary are available today. It only takes a firm leader with the vision and commitment to make law truly a team sport for their clients.

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