Wake Up GCs: You're Your Companies' Tech Visionaries

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The reluctance of legal departments to adopt new technologies to improve their work is a tried but true narrative. While many general counsel are making progress in adopting technologies, perhaps by necessity as budgets shrink, there are still many GC at legal industry events who are avoiding technologies that have the potential to evolve their practice and their teams for the better.

It doesn't need to be this way. General counsel can serve as the champion in their department for legal technology, and the reality is that technology is here to stay. There are certain basic technologies that have become absolute imperatives for successful GC leadership.

Here are the five basic technologies every GC must adopt now:

1. LinkedIn Is No Longer Optional

Despite the networking site's recent $26 billion acquisition by Microsoft cementing its ubiquity, I continue to encounter an astonishing number of otherwise brilliant GCs who have little to no appearance on the site. This is a mistake, as LinkedIn provides many opportunities for in-house legal departments. For instance, the site's massive talent pool is essential for recruitment. In addition, GCs can use their blogging platform, Pulse, to demonstrate their expertise to those outside the company, as well to prove to the C-Suite the value of the legal department in budget allocation. For GCs who are not on the site already, the time is now to set up a LinkedIn profile, complete with a photo, and begin taking advantage of its potential for both recruitment and

reputation-enhancement purposes.

2. ELM Software Streamlines Legal Operations, Especially E-Billing

Electronic Legal Management (ELM) software is a no-brainer for general counsel seeking to free up space within a budget. ELM adoption overall is expected to increase by 20 percent by 2020, but even then that will only account for half of in-house legal departments. Do not be among those late-adopting GCs who will only start considering these solutions in 2021. At the very least, waste no time looking into e-billing software that automates invoicing. Some e-billing services that can help get you started are SimpleLegal and Serengeti Law.

3. Analytics Are Crucial for Keeping Employees Engaged

Within a legal department, work can sometimes feel tedious and slow. Working solely to fix problems and provide brief counsel can leave you with an excess of idle time, leading to boredom among staff and, in a sense, reverse burnout. Interestingly, integrating data analysis into the work of employees can help keep them engaged by expanding their perspectives past the company.

A recent survey by the Coalition of Technology Resources for Lawyers found that seventy-one percent of legal departments expect spending on analytics to either increase or stay the same, but this was specifically for e-discovery. Analytics provide so many more interesting opportunities for law departments to survey the legal industry as a whole, such as using predictive analytics for behavior of particular judges, types of plaintiffs and competitors. Implementing analytics in these creative ways can energize the legal department when work begins to get dull.

4. Collaboration Tools Are Now Indispensible for Profit

The benefits of collaboration for lawyers are well documented. Harvard Law Scholar Heidi Gartner found that among some major international law firms, those execs who work with more people to service a client either hold profitability steady or increase it over time. Meanwhile, a recent Raconteur survey of C-Suite executives found that 73 percent believe their organization would be more successful if their employees were able to work in more collaborative and flexible ways.

Technology has the power to enhance collaboration among legal colleagues. The obvious technology for facilitating workplace collaboration is phone conferencing using tools like UberConference. However, there is increasing potential for social enterprise tools in the workplace. According to a McKinsey survey, 72 percent of executives expect their organization's investment in social tools will increase. As a GC, you may not see investing in such services as an urgent need, but given the research on the relationship between collaboration and profit, neglecting tools that can enhance collaboration is like leaving money on the table.

Bottom Line

Like all other industries, technology is continually transforming the legal profession. As such, today's general counsel have the unique opportunity of serving as the visionary for their organizations and keep their departments relevant, efficient and capable of delivering real value. As new technology continues to evolve, there are certain basic technologies that have already become "musts" for general counsel. By ensuring a solid LinkedIn presence and by implementing ELM software, analytics and collaboration tools, GCs will establish a solid tech foundation for their departments today that will benefit them in the future as well.