

How Corporate Law Departments Can Keep Up with Increased Demand for Legal Services Using Advanced Work Management Systems

Already encumbered with a mandate to do more with less, corporate legal departments (CLDs) are seeing major spikes in demand for legal services stemming from a growing dependency on in-house attorneys to support everyday operations and increased legal obligations. More frequently, in-house attorneys are becoming much more involved with sales, marketing, finance, operations, HR, risk and compliance and other business functions much earlier in the process than before. And according to the 2022 ACC Chief Legal Officer Survey, 60% anticipate an increase in work volume just due to privacy and regulatory enforcement.

Not only are the requests for legal support increasing and expanding, the requests themselves are coming at them from a multitude of vectors—internally, via phone (or Zoom), email, instant message, texts, group meetings, or casual watercooler conversations; and from external stakeholders like law firms, vendors, partners, suppliers and more.

Compounding this is the impact from COVID-19, which generated increased risk factors for businesses, slowed down court processes, and disrupted the workforce. Pandemic-related litigation is expected to increase at a strong pace throughout 2022. Litigators can expect a steady stream of business interruption and breach of contract suits across industries, plus an uptick in insurance claims for physical damages, employment disputes, bankruptcy, and real estate litigation.

All of this puts enormous strain on CLDs in terms of capacity, managing workloads and costs, and balancing the legal and business needs of the organization. Unfortunately, CLDs have to manage all of this while continuing to stay ahead of any issues or crises and proactively mitigate risk, and managing these inbound requests can be a full-time job without advanced technology.

Managing Increased Demand for Legal Services

Faced with increased demand and resource constraints, CLDs need tools that help them work more efficiently and effectively and give them big-picture insights that help them better manage demand, allocate resources, control costs and plan for future needs. It all starts with data—ideally captured when the legal request is made, collected until the matter or task is resolved, and organized and analyzed for auditing and reporting purposes. In fact, a recent industry survey notes that Workload/Resource Bandwidth is the #1 challenge facing CLDs, and that Legal Service Request/Intake technologies are second only to A.I. in terms of planned implementations over the next two years.

Many CLDs currently use Microsoft Excel, Outlook, or other project management software for matter intake, some have already started using an advanced workflow management system such as CounselLink (and are seeing the results), but the majority currently still do not have any kind of comprehensive platform to manage and optimize the flow of legal work into and around the department, facilitate collaboration, analyze performance and outcomes, and generate insights.

Without this central source of data and analytics, CLDs have no means of communicating to executive management how many inquiries they are receiving, the sources and types of requests stakeholders are submitting, how much time is needed to address them, how much it is going to cost, and who is going to do the work—which makes it impossible to make

staffing recommendations and justify budget requirements.

Leveraging Technology to Close the Resources Gap

Technologies that automate tasks and incorporate tracking mechanisms help CLDs better manage their caseloads while making well-reasoned resource decisions. With an advanced work management platform, CLDs can address a host of questions and decisions with confidence: What's the most efficient and cost-effective way to successfully handle this request? Should this matter be staffed using in-house resources or an outside law firm? Does our internal team have the capacity and/or expertise? If not, which outside law firm should we hire?

Although work management solutions may or may not reduce internal headcount or overhead costs, the technology can help CLDs make smarter decisions for resource planning. When the department has visibility into the origination, volume, and types of in-bound requests, leadership knows exactly what types and amounts of internal legal resources are required—for instance, how many contract reviewers should be hired vs. how many litigators—which helps optimize the quantity and distribution of skillsets within CLDs.

Similarly, data-driven insights on outside counsel performance can help CLDs make better decisions on which firms to hire and how large their legal team needs to be, quantify the value a firm delivered in the past and benchmark results against other firms—all of which can contribute to lower outside legal spend.

Incidentally, many law firms are also deploying advanced technologies to make themselves more knowledgeable, efficient, transparent, and collaborative. As such, these firms would likely appreciate a work management platform that helps them interface more closely with their clients and better manage their workflows.

Realizing the Benefits of Advanced Work Management Systems

Selecting the right advanced work management solution creates transparency around how your department works while exposing issues that were previously unseen.

Data-driven recommendations and decisions lead to better organization-wide outcomes. Further, the transparency achieved through advanced work management systems positively impacts collaboration, enabling contributors to communicate and track the work that they're doing individually and collectively.

When selecting an advanced legal work management solution, CLDs should look for comprehensive data-capture capabilities, analytics tools that provide insights into staffing optimization and return on investment, rich collaboration and workflow management tools to track and manage progress, and robust reporting capabilities that can be used to communicate resource planning and budget requirements to executive stakeholders. As a result of having such functionality built in, CounselLink, a leading advanced work management solution for corporate legal departments, is able to provide its users with an average cost savings of 8-10%.

Developing a long-term legal technology strategy to help manage legal requests and analyze performance and outcomes will help CLDs weather the increasing workloads and changing legal environment in 2022 and beyond.

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