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Can ALSPs Coexist with Law Firms? Of Course

BY RAM VASUDEVAN ON JULY 12, 2019 ·



Much has changed in the 15 years since QuisLex launched as one of the first alternative legal service providers. For our company's first five years, we were competing with law firms almost 100% of the time, and when we did work together, it was at the direction of our mutual corporate clients. Over time, however, as we continued to meet tight deadlines and prove the quality of our work, those firms started to get comfortable with us. Today, many law firms see ALSPs like us as partners who can benefit their clients.

Part of the reason for this evolution is that clients are looking for better ways to deliver value and manage increasingly complex issues, and want their team members to work collaboratively. Smart law departments realize that they can deploy a "best-in-class" model, with seamless collaboration between law firms, other service providers and the law department itself. This approach assigns work by specialist and specialization, with each stream getting pushed to the most efficient and cost-effective resource available that can deliver with appropriate quality. All resources are supported by proven technology and processes.

In fact, the desire to better deploy technology and processes—not just less expensive human capital—is typically the primary driver for ALSPs. All the work can be done by law firms under traditional models, but much of it is cost-prohibitive compared to a work delivered by process experts who know how to leverage technology. Firms that understand that simple fact often take a longer-term, more client-centric view, build new models and look to partner with companies like ours. Those not willing to adapt will eventually lose to ones that find innovative solutions.

Where collaboration makes sense

No project is completely insulated from innovation, and no project is inherently too complicated. Nothing is so specialized that it cannot be broken down to steps. Big litigation and M&A are two areas especially ripe for collaboration.



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In M&A, while the agreement itself should probably be negotiated by the firm, other tasks can be more efficient when delivered by automation, or an ALSP, or a combination of the two. A good example is a process of identifying which customer and vendor contracts have a change-in-control provision and getting those companies' consent to continue doing business once the deal is finalized. This work is highly process-oriented, and therefore cost-prohibitive under a traditional law firm model. Technology also can be used effectively to streamline the diligence process and increase efficiencies.

In litigation, document review is clearly ripe for collaboration with an ALSP, and also provides a good example of a successful workflow. Rather than simply "handing off the baton" to the ALSP and allow it to identify responsive documents, a deeper, more communicative integration allows for trial preparation, early case assessment and the providing of intelligence from the documents so lawyers can decide how to dispose of a case. This partnership approach, while reducing costs for the end-client, also reduces risk, as the knowledge from documents is typically leveraged for consistency.

Collaborating with outside counsel

The key to collaboration is workflow management. It is useful to keep the decision maker close to the process with frequent checkpoints. For example, in a document review, whoever decides the key issues should be available to provide guidance on a day-to-day basis. Established protocols for working together and frequent check-ins with the larger team help to make sure the project is completed on time and on budget.

Here are some tips for getting the most out of a law firm-ALSP collaboration:

- Approach the collaboration as a partnership, not a competition.
- Take a long-term approach whenever possible.
- Create an environment where different players can work together—with checkpoints and routine calls so everyone feels like they have a voice.
- Let the ALSP lead team project management. They are experts with the most expertise and experience in process control and project management. It's their bread and butter.

About the Author

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