

How to Use Technology To Strengthen Partnering

- **Share Data Across Law Firm Systems.** With the evolution of “open architecture” computing standards, new opportunities are being realized to share data and information resources housed in law firm databases that were previously isolated from one another because of dissimilar computer environments.
 - For example, one law department hosts a system that is able to receive formatted data about expert witnesses from the case tracking systems of its various law firms. This pooled expert witness data can be searched by authorized users for favorable or conflicting witness testimony to aid in the preparation of cases. Thus, a lawyer in Arizona may be able to find precisely the right expert witness from a case in Massachusetts to refute an upcoming plaintiff expert.
- **Implement Document and Knowledge Management Systems That Include Law Firms.** Many law departments have developed global document management systems that enable both inside and outside attorneys to search for stored documents relevant to their cases. Systems, such as those offered by iManage and Documentum, enable legal teams to connect and access documents 24/7 through the internet.
- **Utilize Workflow Systems to Accelerate Projects.** Several departments are using “workflow” software in web-based systems to streamline the process of approving case settlement authority requests. Outside counsel input settlement authority requests online and the software routes the requests sequentially through the supervisory chain based on pre-determined rules governing who inside the department is required to approve the amount and nature of the settlement. Thus, a request might first be routed to the supervising attorney who reviews the request online from a hotel room in Tucson. Upon approval, the request is automatically routed for final approval to a higher level lawyer who happens to be in London for case. The approval thus is expedited and data about the request and approval is automatically logged for tracking purposes.
- **Implement Dedicated Web or Extranet Systems.** Many law department clients and their respective law firms have developed dedicated extranets that enable their lawyers to share work product and knowledge resources as well as accelerate the flow of project materials among team members. The managing partner of one firm reported that in the IP area alone, the use of the extranet has resulted in a 30% reduction of costs to the client.
- **Utilize E-Billing to Monitor Use of Agreed-upon Best Practices.** E-billing data can be used efficiently to track whether best practices are being utilized as planned. Collaboration with the e-billing vendor can result in “one-button” special reports that quickly reveal how these practices are being applied to legal work.

Key Points

- Whereas many law departments acquire one technology system at a time, there may be real advantages in developing a technology plan through which this acquisition process is accelerated

so that there are suite of integrated tools available that will together lead to major process improvements.

- Systems dedicated to supporting specific case and matter teams can often be relatively inexpensive, not difficult to implement, and yield tremendous benefits. In the long run, there may be a greater pay-off from implementing several smaller systems to support specific teams than there is to be gained from a major, department-wide system that provides only some benefits to each team.