Legal Technology –

Creating a Functional Ecosystem

Background

In order to discuss where technology for the legal department is today, and where it's going, it helps to review where technology has been and the corresponding philosophies corporate legal departments have employed. Database technology for legal professionals has been around since the 1980s in the form of simple data field screens designed to track legal entity information. These simple systems resided on a particular computer typically used by a small group of individuals. Database technology got more robust through the 90s, but companies were still applying one piece of technology to serve a specific purpose. When attorneys or other departments needed information, a request funneled through a database gatekeeper for each different tracking method: one for entity information, one for litigation, one for intellectual property, one for contracts, and so on.

The New Millennium

As we approached the new millennium and the true advent of the business Internet, technology took great leaps both in function and deployment. The early 2000s saw Web-based software become a viable option for companies of all types. Since technology always lags growth, not every company took advantage of available functionality. As companies grew, their data tracking and reporting needs hit critical mass.

Having worked with companies big and small through these times, it was clear that companies were investing in technology. Business was good, but most companies were still addressing their technology needs in silos–if they had a need, it was filled with a specific piece of technology. This strategy may have delivered good functionality in each area but was also providing the backbone for inefficiency as key users needed access to data in different systems. Logging into many different databases and the lack of ongoing training caused user adoption rates to dwindle. The reality of people running their own reports shifted back to the old gatekeeper mentality where reports were requested. Many times the data being reported was tracked in more than one database.

The Enterprise Legal Management Ecosystem

The term "Enterprise Legal Management" (ELM) dates back to the 1990s[1] and generally refers to the overall management strategy for legal technology across a variety of departments and disciplines. There were many different drivers that led to the evolution of Enterprise Legal Management. One key driver was the increased focus on regulation and corporate accountability in the wake of different scandals. Management began to take a proactive stance in the areas of risk, compliance, and overall corporate governance. As mentioned, since companies found themselves with overlapping technology, the ability for the General Counsel and others to truly have transparent and interconnected data was a challenge.

What resulted from the adoption of an ELM strategy was a legal "ecosystem"–a connected platform of data sources, enterprise systems, and dedicated applications. Users could still get best-of-breed features from dedicated solutions but benefit from the ability to report on data across multiple systems without many different logins. Furthermore, IT departments could deploy technology investments that were justified at the current time and respond to future requests through this scalable technology platform. Any database application connected to the ecosystem would take advantage of the established reporting, user security, mobile

access, workflows, and audit trail.

There are a number of different vendors in the Enterprise Legal Management space. Some provide an out-of-the-box product that attempts to address many needs in one system, and a few of them provide a scalable legal technology platform that allows for integration and a true ecosystem. Some typical ecosystems will have matter management, legal spend management, risk management, legal hold, on the same platform as the accompanying enterprise systems such as AP, HR, and dedicated document management systems. When document management systems are integrated into this type of platform, it provides secure access to related documents even though the documents are not replicated outside of the main document management system.

Going Forward

Companies will continue to evolve with technology advancements, and the General Counsel's office will be a key area of focus. Since the GC's office touches so many different areas of the company, running their operations like a business will be a necessity since adding new headcount is not widely predicted. The use of a legal technology ecosystem provides efficiency, data reliability, and scalability that will show the return on investment necessary to control legal costs. Even with the ability to handle more legal work in-house, companies and their law firms will still need to

have a collaborative partnership. Legal technology platforms are built with this goal in mind.

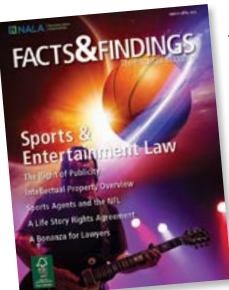1   Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enterprise_legal_management

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Chris Weaver has more than 15 years of experience in the legal technology space. Before joining ELM Solutions, Chris worked for another corporate legal services division within Wolters Kluwer, CT Corporation. At CT, he was a Business Consultant working with companies both big and small to adopt entity and compliance management technology. Prior to his work in the legal industry, Chris was a Sales Engineer working in the manufacturing, automation, and robotics sector. He holds a degree in Ceramic Engineering from The Ohio State University along with Dale Carnegie accreditation. He resides in Houston, Texas.

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