The legal hub

**Create the ideal state for your corporate legal team**

HighQ

The corporate legal landscape

Corporate legal teams are under constant pressure to deliver more value to their organisations. Growing demand and changing expectations from the business mean that legal departments are adapting to embrace innovation and requiring their network of external counsel to do the same. Generally, corporate legal teams are adopting new technologies and adapting to changing pressures more rapidly than the rest of the legal industry.

The evolving legal landscape has created new challenges for corporate legal teams. General counsel find their departments taking on more work internally and delivering more strategic advice to the business while also managing risk, service requests, contract negotiation, knowledge, external counsel and more. In short, today's corporate legal team must become more strategic, lean and effective.

Increasing workloads

One of the biggest challenges for in-house legal teams is an increasing volume of work. The Thomson Reuters Legal Tracker LDO Index surveys legal departments and recently reported that 62 percent of departments have seen an increase in work, but interestingly, most report no corresponding increase in human resources. As demand for legal services outpaces supply, legal teams must operate internally like a business, prioritising efficiency and productivity in order to deliver value to the business.
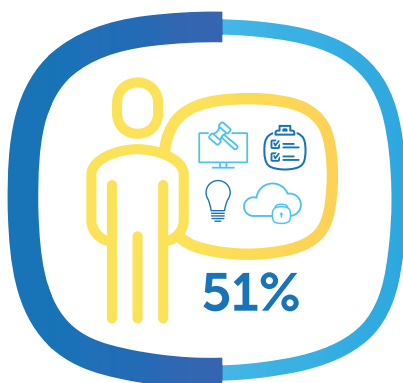
The Thomson Reuters report also indicates a shift in business priorities with an increase in legal operations roles. **Nearly 51 percent of legal departments reported having at least one role dedicated solely to legal operations.** The rise of legal operations roles within legal departments is just one signal that legal departments are prioritising strategic, data-driven processes and resource management.

Communicating value

In addition to taking on more in-house work, legal departments must ensure that the value of their work is visible to the business and understood by stakeholders. Clearly and quickly communicating matter progress, business insights, risk analysis and legal team updates is key to maximising business engagement.

Reporting legal team updates back to the business takes time. Corporate legal teams are largely embracing technology as a way to capture more information. They're taking advantage of new solutions that enable better spend tracking, contract management, team communication, workflow management and more, but an increase in the accessibility of technology has been a blessing and a curse for data management.

Tools to analyse and interpret data empower legal teams to present relevant, engaging metrics to stakeholders. However, the easy availability of technology means that legal teams may be using a dozen or more disparate systems to complete their day-to-day work.
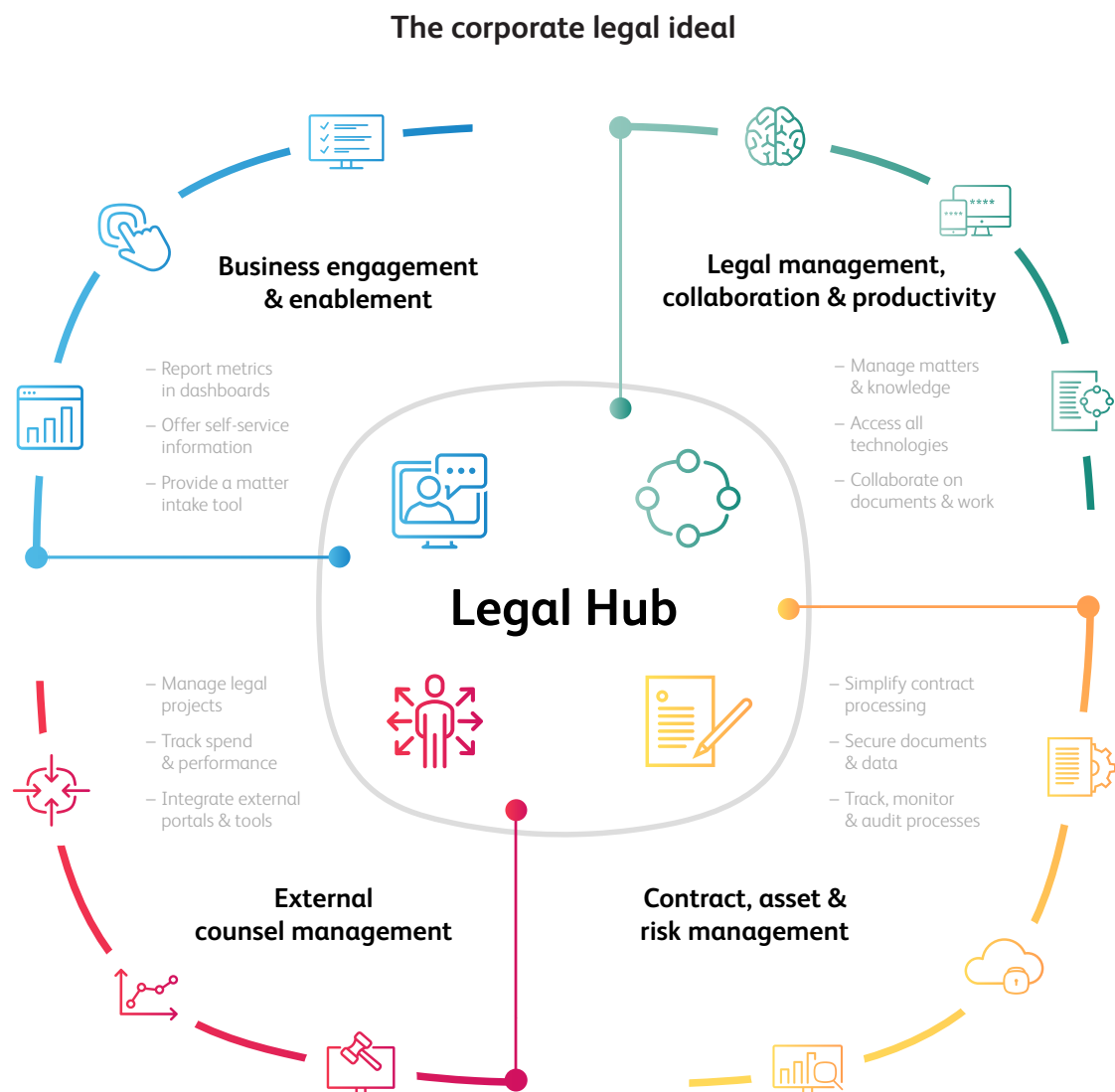
Each individual follows their own process, using their preferred technology, resulting in data that is spread throughout a variety of consumer-grade programs, point solutions and IT-sanctioned legal technology. Understandably, the abundance of solutions results in untracked data, siloed knowledge, and in the case of consumer-grade software, security risks. With so much information housed in so many systems, needless inefficiency is inevitable.

Introducing the legal hub

The challenges of increased workloads and communicating value to the business can both be addressed by the concept of the legal hub.

A legal hub is one central platform that improves business engagement and enablement; enterprise legal management, collaboration and productivity; contract, asset and risk management; as well as external counsel management.

The corporate legal ideal

Business engagement & enablement

– Report metrics in dashboards
– Offer self-service information
– Provide a matter intake tool

Legal management, collaboration & productivity

– Manage matters & knowledge
– Access all technologies
– Collaborate on documents & work

Legal Hub

– Manage legal projects
– Track spend & performance
– Integrate external portals & tools

– Simplify contract processing
– Secure documents & data
– Track, monitor & audit processes

External counsel management

Contract, asset & risk management

The corporate legal ideal

Given the current, fast-paced corporate legal landscape, it can be difficult to imagine what a truly optimised legal department would look like within a business. Each organisation is different, but common themes emerge when talking with successful in-house legal teams.

Imagine the ideal state

Business enablement and engagement:
The C-suite and executives of your business understand your work and feel confident in your consistent delivery of legal services and the value your team delivers. You offer deeper insight by using your legal hub platform to create real-time visual dashboards of key metrics that stakeholders can easily access. You are a trusted advisor, offering strategic advice to business leadership.

You design and customise dashboards on your own to empower better decision-making and provide valuable input to the business. The legal hub also hosts a self-service page where standard contract templates can be accessed without the need to track down the latest version, providing quick resolutions and speeding the sales process.

Business clients use a self-service portal to offer quick access to automated contract assembly for everything from NDAs to outsourcing agreements. These documents are accompanied by integrated legal guidance and automated negotiation playbooks so business clients feel informed and empowered when handling the process themselves and, in turn, protect the business and mitigate risk.

For more complex issues, business clients turn to your matter intake tool. They use tailored forms to properly instruct the legal team. Once submitted, automated workflows track and assign the legal request to the appropriate legal team member or outside counsel. The matter can be tracked by both the person who submitted it as well as the legal team, keeping all parties informed in real time.

Legal management, collaboration and productivity:

Your corporate legal team is united, working from the same playbook and on the same page. The legal hub platform integrates with all of the best legal tech solutions to serve as the team's nerve center. **All members of the legal team use the platform for matter management and collaboration, as they negotiate contracts, share progress, organise knowledge, track tasks and evaluate team metrics.**

Data is captured from tasks and workflows, reviewed and optimised to create more efficient, streamlined and repeatable processes. The legal team's work is measured and reported in a dashboard to business clients using key performance indicators (KPIs) like spend against budget, cycle times, number of matters per lawyer, spend by business and so on. Data is highly organised and potential issues and bottlenecks are identified and resolved quickly.

Document management is simplified as information is securely stored with version control, digital rights management, advanced permissioning, auditing, MS Office and G-Suite integrations and more. This central, searchable location for documents becomes your single source of truth for your legal team, freeing information from emails and local drives.

The responsibility for knowledge management is shared among the legal team. Each member shares, socialises and categorises legal knowledge and expertise within the portal making it searchable and easily accessible when needed.

Contract, asset and risk management:

The contract management system, including intake, review, approval and signing—in addition to a full audit history for risk and compliance—all exist within the central ecosystem of the legal hub.

Business clients instruct the legal team on new contractual matters, and the legal team organises all contract activities, processes, versions and associated documents in one central repository. Automated workflows speed the review and approval process, and at the same time, create a full audit trail for risk and compliance purposes. Notifications are sent to business and legal users to inform them of progress and risk. Electronic signatures are collected and data is extracted from the executed contracts including key clauses, renewals, termination dates and payment terms to deliver valuable contract portfolio insights.

In the same way, the legal team creates solutions in the legal hub to manage real estate documents and data, store information relating to subsidiaries and other entities for compliance and administration purposes, as well as track patents and trademarks to protect the business's intellectual property.

Solutions are deployed to help the legal department audit, track and manage business processes to ensure regulatory and legislative compliance. The legal hub contains tools that help the legal team monitor business processes through workflow approval, risk questionnaires and compliance trackers. Early warning systems are in place for manual and automated alerting of potential risk issues—helping the legal team take the necessary early action to mitigate the risk.

External counsel management:
Your external counsel work closely with your legal team, communicating, collaborating and sharing information within your legal hub. Expectations are clear, progress reports and spend tracking are available in real time, documents are secure, and all relevant information is retained and controlled by the legal team.

External counsel portals are used for financial reporting, including budgeting, invoice submission and approval, WIP reporting and analysis of spend against budget. Billing guidelines and approval processes are easily enforced, ensuring external counsel meet established standards before submitting invoices.

The portal empowers better legal project management with easy file sharing, project planning, task management, matter status tracking and more. As internal and external teams collaborate, knowledge is centrally stored and routinely updated, speeding onboarding for new counsel, experts, contractors and more. The knowledge and data you pay for is retained for future use and analysis.

Some external counsel may continue to use their own client portals to keep your legal department updated about regulatory and legislative changes so that they can take the necessary steps to mitigate risk to the business. The portals are also used to share and manage legal training and know-how, current awareness, secondee requests and so on.

These portals are interconnected and integrated with your legal hub, delivering a consolidated experience—creating greater value for the legal team.

Build your legal hub

The ideal state may seem out of reach, but each of these key areas are the spokes of the legal hub and can be addressed individually and in increments. Just imagine how much more powerful and efficient your department would be if you could do all of this in one platform. That's the legal hub.

First steps

Develop your legal technology strategy
Start with an assessment of your current technology maturity. Use your existing solutions as a foundation to build a plan for successful implementation. Develop a three- to five-year roadmap to outline how technology will support strategic objectives.

Seek best practice and leverage your external counsel
If the rise of collaboration has taught us anything, it's the power of people. To overcome challenges, crowd-source knowledge and leverage the experience of your network. Request a technology audit and roadmap from your external counsel to gather knowledge and see what products they offer and their use cases.
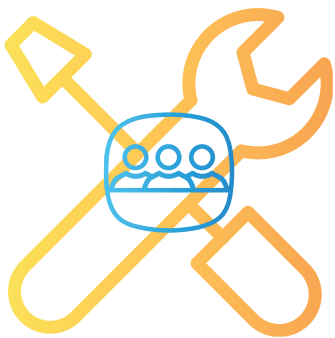
Use your current digital toolbox
Coordinate with your IT team to evaluate existing technology that may have additional applications within your legal team. Be sure to inquire about integrations within existing technology. After optimising your use of current technologies, evaluate any gaps that emerge.

Select the right tools to build your legal hub

Now that you know what areas need the most attention, you need to evaluate solutions that can fill the gaps.
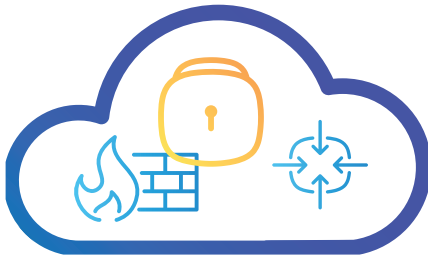
Look for cloud solutions

With worldwide access, frequent updates and enhancements, easy scalability and quick deployment, cloud solutions are the clear choice for legal departments who need to adapt to changes quickly. Cloud solutions empower you to start small and grow as your needs develop.

However, it's important to consider only cloud vendors that offer enterprise-grade security and meet the most recent security standards.

Prioritise great integration

Systems that connect and share information offer more opportunities to create improved processes, better efficiency and more reliable data. Legal tech solutions that operate independently are ultimately less useful than those that easily integrate with other technologies.

Win buy-in and budget from your business

So, now you've selected the ideal solution to unite and empower your legal team, it's time to make it happen.

Link the business case to value

The best way to secure budget and investment is to show, in detail, how the technology will help the legal department to deliver value to the business. For example, document management can improve knowledge sharing; contract management can speed sales cycles, help surface risk and identify missed value; document assembly can reduce the business's reliance on costly legal resources. Use analysis of your current key metrics to project and demonstrate potential value.

Look for broad appeal

Budgeting is always competitive and your legal team will be up against other functions when you seek funding for new technology investments. Look for solutions with a wide array of customisable features that could easily be adopted by other departments. Where possible, be sure to highlight how your selection will empower additional areas of the business. The broader the ROI, the better.

Don't relinquish the decision-making

While broad appeal is important to buy-in, it is also crucial that other business functions like procurement and IT do not take over the decision-making process. Certainly they, like you, are doing their best to serve the business, but they won't be the day-to-day technology user and may not fully appreciate the nuance and demand of your of legal work. You must stand firm and represent the best interests of all members of your legal team.

Put it to work

The value of a solution lies in its application and depends on adoption. Start here to make sure you're getting the most out of your investments.

Develop a robust training and change programme

Create an education and engagement plan to help overcome objections. Your plan should include detailed training and support mechanisms to ensure your team, and the business, are guided through the change.
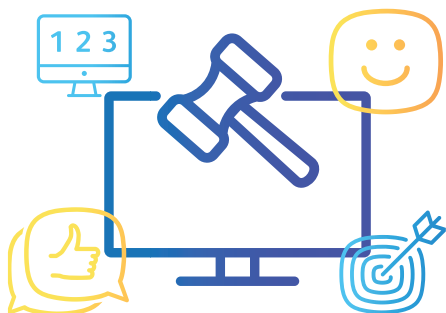
As you introduce your technology and begin training, clearly outline benefits for everyone who may interact with or be affected by the new technology, so no one feels left out or overlooked. Cultivate champions who will enthusiastically spread the word about the benefits.

Start small and deliver quick win
It can be tempting to try to solve all of your problems at once, but resist the urge. Focus on identifying a small problem that requires a solution and set out to solve it. Measure ROI from the outset and share success stories quickly. Success breeds success, and even more crucially, investment. Implementation that delivers value-add to the business will lead to further buy-in, wider adoption and additional investment.

Take your legal hub to the next level

Once you've deployed your own legal hub, there are a few things that can take it to the next level.

Use value metrics to demonstrate ROI
After implementation, you want to be able to prove your investment was sound. Keep track of key metrics to assess the performance of the legal department over time and whether your technology initiatives are having a positive impact. Link function delivery to a scorecard to demonstrate progress against objectives.

Ensure ongoing awareness, support and feedback
One-time training alone is not enough. People need to be able to access support where and when they need it. It's therefore important to have a Helpdesk function that can answer questions and address issues. Ensure a mechanism for raising awareness of the new technology and taking feedback to identify improvements.

Invest in new roles and skill sets
As your use of technology expands, empower superusers who can answer questions and address issues. Or consider creating a role with duties that include raising awareness of the new technology, ensuring processes are established and followed as well as receiving feedback to identify improvements.

The beauty of the legal hub concept is that once you've brought it to life within your department, it's easy to make changes to meet the ongoing needs of the business. When put into practice, the legal hub can easily be adapted to incorporate new processes and more advanced technology.

Embrace the legal hub concept and put it to work in your legal department to increase business engagement; improve productivity and collaboration; enhance contract, asset and risk management; and better manage outside counsel—all while offering visibility and uniting your team.

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