

## **The future of legal services**

*The lawyer is out to lunch and robots are taking over the firm!?*

### **It is about delivering service!**

There is a temptation, when thinking about the future of legal services, to simply think about unique structures, or outsourcing or other ways of billing. The thing is that it's more a question of how law firms and legal departments deliver their services. And since there has been written a lot regarding the future of legal services, one just might want to bend over and think "here it comes again!" But do not let me be misunderstood!

Since the first predictions on the future (or the end) of lawyers, whether or not replaced by robots, many have recognized the importance of taking a much broader view, and to consider just why it is that general counsel have moved their work from traditional firms to other law firms and legal service providers in the first place. More interesting is the fact that general counsel return to law firms if the latter do show their ability to change into a versatile law firm.

General counsel are no longer committed to traditional and rather conventional law firms and how they deliver their legal services. General counsel, at least I am, are looking for more accessible, efficient, and client-friendly legal services. If that means replacement of (parts of the) bespoke services by E-legal solutions then that is fine for me. What puzzles me therefor is that many traditional law firms believe that what they decide to offer is what matters to me. And what worries me is that they hardly ever ask me how I want them to deliver their legal services.

Law firms must make the leap into their future of providing legal services in a different way. The challenge for law firms is their ability and willingness to change. The same challenge applies for those general counsel who still think that pricing is the only way to create more value for their companies money. We all know that robots can't take over the legal profession. But the evolution of lawyers and the growth of E-legal solutions proof that law firms have to adept new ways of providing legal services.

### **The evolution of lawyers**

Legal experts have existed since the days of ancient Greece and Rome. And today we find them everywhere. The conventional lawyers, today's lawyers and even tomorrow's lawyers. The question is, where or what are you?

#### **Conventional lawyers are to become history**

Conventional lawyers have their roots in the 7th century, when the practice of law became a real profession due to the knowledge, skills and expertise needed. We can agree that law firms are in fact professional services organizations. David Maister compares them to a medieval artisan's shop. So in this shop we will find lawyers being "apprentices" (new kids), "journeymen" (more experienced), and "master craftsmen" (senior partners). Just as in those early days, there is a leveraging system in place to maximize revenues. Law firms do not want to sell products! They provide high quality legal services by giving bespoke advice (trustworthy relations need 'face time').

There are many reasons for law firms why not to change that routine. Most important reason might be that general counsel does not yet ask them to! So why change the play? General counsel, at least some of them, has been, since the start of the more-for-less-challenge in 2007, seeking new ways to reach an innovative level of executing the legal profession. By now we all know that law firms are unwilling to standardize or 'mass-produce' their services. Their revenues come from billing hours, with clients who have different needs and demands. Clients who accept the law firm ancient business model. So why worry? Let us go out to lunch!

### **Today's lawyers use technology**

The thing is there are already game changers in the legal industry. Legal service providers whom are driven by the proliferation of technology in our everyday lives. What started as a gradual process is turning into an ever faster moving transformation.

Companies like Axiom are streamlining basic legal processes for corporate clients. Others are creating new legal marketplaces for businesses, threatening the traditional corporate law firm structure. USG Legal Professionals introduced in 2005 the outsourced legal department for corporate clients, leaving the conventional law firms puzzled. It was not legal knowledge but the application of knowledge that made a difference. These early adopters of legal services based on the use of technology are moving on, keeping themselves ahead of the pack.

The rate of innovation is only increasing, with hundreds of other new legal startup companies emerging every year. This will continue to affect the way lawyers operate in the future. It's time for lawyers to take their future seriously. How to become a versatile law firm is not the question. But how fast your law firm can become competitive and deliver efficient, affordable legal services at a profit.

The years to come will present an interesting landscape for today's lawyers. Will they step up to the challenge, and evolve to the needs of a changing market? Or will they cling to the ways of the past, and end up on the dark side of the street?

### **Lawyers of the future reinvent legal services**

Predicting the role of lawyers in the future is not difficult. Some interesting trends will shape the way lawyers deliver services in the near future. A future that started when robots took over the law firm. That was a decade ago! A brief overview shows the past and present future of lawyers.

Lawyers and general counsel participate in social media. That is for sure. But what is the purpose of social media for them? They both engage online but there is no interaction whatsoever. The activity on networks is, to be frank, low. Why bother to engage when you don't have a strategy? In the end one might consider your attempt to keep up with the future rather foolish.

Cloud-based solutions in legal services are on the rise. With a group of general counsel of Dutch multinationals a contract management solution in the cloud is being developed. A solution that will be made available for companies with lesser resources to deploy such technologies. These kind of solutions are more efficient and less expensive than hosting it in-house. More important is the willingness to share that knowledge with other general counsel.

The use of technology provided law firms with tools to become more efficient. They were and are able to streamline repetitive tasks and thus add more value at lower costs for their clients. The

flipside of the coin showed that most law firms did not drop their rates. They even kept that technologies for their own benefit. That can be considered a major misjudgment of general counsel.

I am on the brink of introducing more self-service for non-legal users to create resolution letters using standard clause libraries at my company. Why is that important? Because it saves time. Time that will be used to deliver more added value services by the legal department. Which means that I don't need a law firm to provide me with those services. Basically at the bottom of the pyramid technology (or robots) are in place and that reduces the all over legal spend.

Furthermore I explore opportunities to integrate legal activities within operational systems for the core business of our company. This approach of supply chain management enables the legal department to become more efficient and effective.

Slowly but surely court appearances will be conducted virtually. In the Netherlands it is already possible to access legal advice with the tap of a button. More and more legal services will be packaged up and delivered instantly to consumers with minimal work on the lawyer's end. Because the lawyer does not add value. Our society is always online and more connected by technology than ever. This hyper connected world affects the conventional business structures of many traditional law firms. More and more legal services will be delivered online, and facilitated by the use of technology and mobile devices. It has created a level playing field in which small and niche law firms are on the rise.

The roles lawyers play today have changed and in the near future the changes in the field of legal services will accelerate. Robots will not take over the law firm or the legal department. Legal professionals just have to be keen enough to constantly adapt and reinvent themselves. Embrace opportunities presented by technology and the new legal landscape. Leave the vertical tradition of the artisan law firm behind and expand horizontally by unbundling their legal activities. Lawyers will soon no longer perform most of the legal work, because that will be conducted by sophisticated computer software. But in the end the human element is something that is irreplaceable. Simply because we want to interact.