GETTING ON BOARD WITH DOCUMENT AUTOMATION: WHAT TO EXPECT

PART 1: A GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOCUMENT AUTOMATION PLATFORM FOR YOUR FIRM

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A GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT DOCUMENT AUTOMATION PLATFORM FOR YOUR FIRM

The legal profession – like many other industries today – is facing increasing pressure to deliver more for less, provide greater transparency and <u>cultivate innovation</u>, or risk losing out to more agile competitors.

Technology can help firms of all sizes deal with this pressure by reducing time spent on routine tasks, which then allows for more focus on value-adding work.

Imagine cutting down the time it takes to assemble a fully compliant contract by up to 82 per cent.[1] Automating your firm's document management procedures is one – increasingly necessary – way to simplify processes and make cumbersome document creation a thing of the past.

It goes without saying that choosing the right platform can make all the difference when you're transitioning to an automated process – an ill-fitting solution or lack of engagement with a new tool can mean missing out on the many benefits this change can bring.

In this guide, we take you through the process of choosing the right software: first by examining how your firm can benefit from a document automation platform, then by familiarising you with the features commonly available in document automation platforms today.

> "It is no understatement to say that the legal profession… across Australia is undergoing change at a pace never experienced and in ways most lawyers would have found hard to predict at the beginning of the 21st century."
>
> Gary Ulman, Chair, Future Committee,
> The Law Society of New South Wales[2]

THE PROBLEM WITH MANUAL PROCESSES

Legal work can be synonymous with mountains of paperwork and manual processes, but there are a few obvious downsides to manual document assembly:

IT WASTES TIME AND MONEY: Research from Thomson Reuters Legal Australia found that 2.3 billable hours are wasted per week in a typical firm that still relies on manual processes for tasks like document assembly and review (based on three documents per week).[3] In a world where the billable-hour model is quickly diminishing in favour of more value-adding fee structures, can your firm afford to waste money on such inefficiencies?

IT LACKS CONSISTENCY: Dealing with multiple different layouts and naming conventions can result in a lack of version control and uniformity when manually producing documents.

IT RISKS ERRORS: Drafting documents manually means a risk of human error, mistakes that could be costly for your firm both financially and reputationally.

2.3

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THE BENEFITS OF DOCUMENT AUTOMATION

Document automation means you don't have to keep reinventing the wheel every time you need to prepare a legal document, and you don't risk all the issues that come with manual document production. Its many benefits include:

- improved productivity and better margins
- reduced risk of errors and improved client relationships
- freeing lawyers and senior-level resources to focus on higher value work
- uniformity and consistency throughout all documents
- improved continuity in passing on work to junior resources.

If your firm is ready to get started with document automation, it's important to arm yourself with the right knowledge before jumping on board.

Clarifying your firm's expectations, needs and goals around document automation, and getting familiar with what's available, is crucial in deciding which solution is right for your firm.

> "The key value is efficiency – our lawyers can get to a first draft quicker and they are free to focus on more interesting and more valuable work."
>
> Gail Swaffield, Director of Knowledge Management Systems, Clifford Chance (UK) Thomson Reuters Contract Express (UK) customer

KNOW WHAT YOUR FIRM WANTS FROM A DOCUMENT AUTOMATION SOLUTION

We've established the many benefits of document automation but, as with any change, it isn't enough to do it just because others are. Before even thinking about purchasing document automation software, you need to consider what a 'document solution' really means for your firm, and what you expect from the platform you adopt.

Deciding what problems you want to solve, what gaps you want to fill and what goals you want to reach with a document automation solution is the first step in narrowing down your selection from the wide range of options available today.

The size of your firm and its capacity to manage its own precedents will also be a factor driving your decision.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER BASIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOST FIRMS:

ACCESS TO CURRENT AND HIGH QUALITY CONTENT

If you don't have access to accurate, current precedents and updated court forms you risk unnecessary delays and costs when working on a case. A document automation platform that can incorporate updates from changing legislation, court forms or precedents saves your firm time and provides peace of mind when drafting complex documents.

AUTOMATING YOUR IN-HOUSE DOCUMENTS

If your firm already has its own content library, you'll want to consider a platform that can integrate with and automate the documents, precedents and forms you already have.

Automating documents and workflows can allow more efficient use of lawyers' time, opening up new areas of profitability and increasing margins.

It can also provide the greater predictability required when entering into alternative fee arrangements, such as a fixed-fee billing structure.

KNOW WHAT YOUR FIRM WANTS FROM A DOCUMENT AUTOMATION SOLUTION
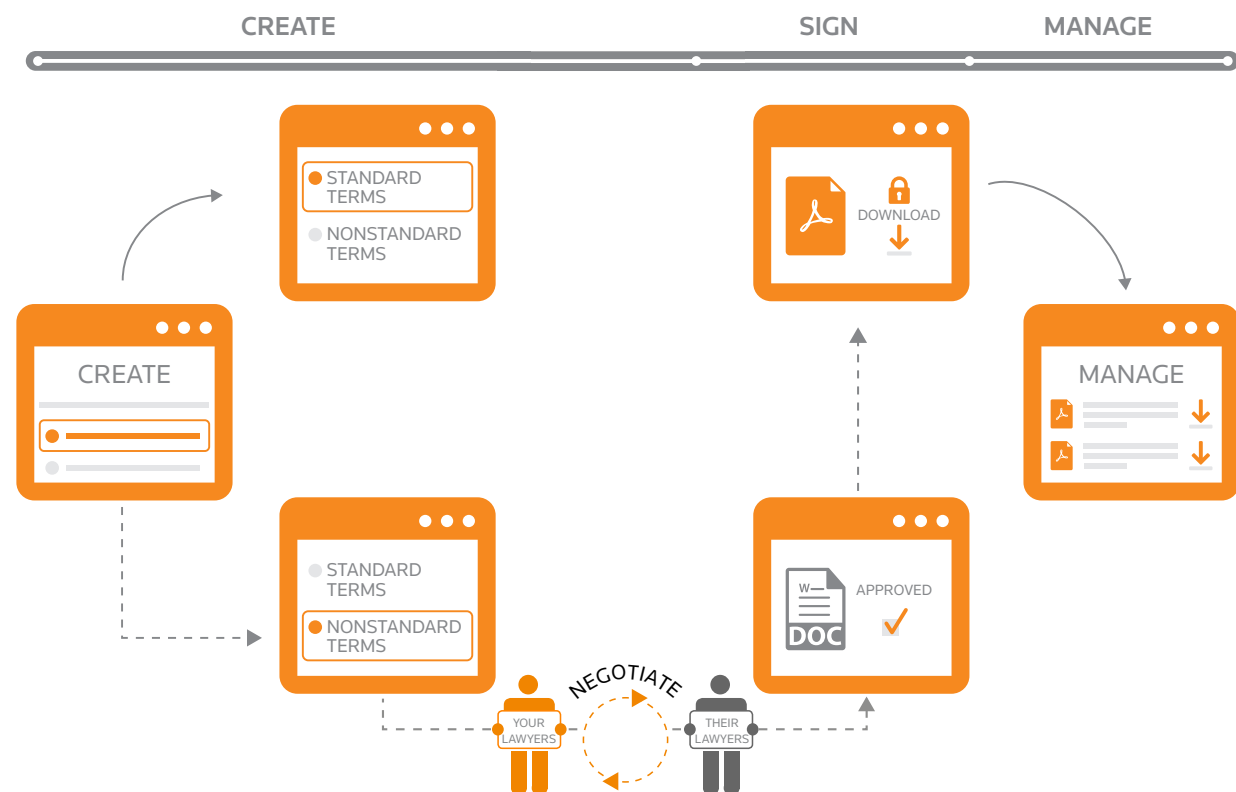
IMPROVED DOCUMENT AND MATTER MANAGEMENT

Version control becomes an issue when one document gets passed around various individuals for editing and approval; this often results in the duplication of information and bottlenecks in the document review process.

Consider a platform that allows you to store all documents relating to a particular client or matter in one place, which also allows for easier retrieval later.

CLIENT SELF-SERVICE

An extension of document automation is self-service document creation, an increasingly popular option for many corporate clients. This allows your clients to participate in the contract creation process (and reduce their costs) by completing parts of the work themselves.

TRUSTED SELF-SERVICE CONTRACT CREATION

CREATE   SIGN   MANAGE

STANDARD TERMS
NONSTANDARD TERMS

CREATE

DOWNLOAD

MANAGE

STANDARD TERMS
NONSTANDARD TERMS

APPROVED
DOC

NEGOTIATE

YOUR LAWYERS   THEIR LAWYERS

IMPORTANT FEATURES TO CONSIDER IN A DOCUMENT AUTOMATION PLATFORM WITH ACCESS TO CURRENT AND MAINTAINED PRECEDENTS

If you want a solution which includes a library of precedents, consider these essentials in a document automation platform:

HIGH-QUALITY FORMS AND PRECEDENTS THAT ARE ALWAYS UP-TO-DATE

To provide the most accurate client service and do their jobs well, lawyers depend on access to updated court forms, precedents and legislative changes. A platform that automatically updates its library of precedents according to legislative or case law updates will ensure that it takes less time to produce accurate documents. This comes in handy, especially during busy periods.

SOMETHING EASY TO USE

A platform that is easy to learn and seamless to use means you're more likely to get the buy-in required for success and start getting a return on your investment straightaway. A platform that doesn't require complex technical skills to operate (although that is the remit of some firms today), and can easily be configured with limited IT assistance is more likely to be adopted firm-wide than one that is difficult to use. Also, a solution that lets you access and use existing document formats (say on Microsoft Word) will save you time.

IMPORTANT FEATURES TO CONSIDER IN A DOCUMENT AUTOMATION PLATFORM WITH ACCESS TO CURRENT AND MAINTAINED PRECEDENTS

CUSTOMISATION

An automation platform that allows you to customise your documents, including details like your firm's letterhead or special fonts, means greater uniformity in client-facing presentations, and reduces the time it takes to produce aesthetically pleasing, on-brand documents.

A SOLUTION THAT WORKS WITH THE SOFTWARE YOU ALREADY USE

A document automation platform that integrates with your existing systems (such as practice management, legal guidance and know-how, document management and online research software systems) can help you save time by pre-populating data, further streamlining workflow and eliminating double-ups on certain tasks.

ACCESS TO RELIABLE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

When implementing a firm-wide change in software use, a provider that offers adequate training and support can make the transition much smoother. This can include face-to-face employee training at the time you roll-out the new software, as well as a local support team for ongoing support, webinars, guides, video tutorials and more.

> " You can ... make smart variables that apply information and even formulas ... so the level of customisation is just that much greater, with no extra work. I can't imagine having to create everything from scratch, digging around amongst 3000-odd clauses!"
>
> Helen Benge, Operations Manager, Kells
> Thomson Reuters Softdocs customer

IMPORTANT FEATURES TO CONSIDER IF YOU'RE AUTOMATING EXISTING CONTENT

If your firm wants to automate its own documents, say a library of existing forms and precedents, here's what's important to consider:

A SOFTWARE THAT STORES INFORMATION FOR LATER USE

A document automation platform that stores important data (such as addresses, special terms or contact numbers) means greater efficiency in creating future documents. It also means you can reduce errors and save time on duplicating entries later.

TO CATER TO SELF-SERVICE USE

If part of your firm's offering includes a self-service element for clients or third parties, consider whether your document automation system provider can accommodate this.

A SOLUTION THAT LOOKS AND FEELS EASY TO USE

First impressions are important, particularly when it comes to introducing technological change among a large group of people. A document automation tool that is easy to understand and doesn't require too much technical skill to navigate will get more engagement and prompt buy-in from users, and require less training overall.

TO BUILD IN AN APPROVAL PROCESS

Document production bottlenecks in law firms are often the result of lengthy, confusing approval processes. A platform that lets you build governance and workflow into your document creation cycle means a streamlined approval process that translates to a better use of billable hours. It also means senior lawyers can confidently delegate work to juniors.

> "Automation can produce vastly improved business practices. It can result in better client engagement, driving down costs (and placing pressure on competitors)."
>
> The FLIP Report 2017, The Law Society of New South Wales[2]

CONCLUSION

By understanding what your firm wants to achieve
with document automation and then matching
this knowledge against the features of document
automation software packages on offer, you're
better equipped to find the right solution for
your firm and maximise the many benefits
of automation.

To find out how to go about implementing
a document automation solution in your firm,
be sure to read part 2 of this series.

**Part 2: A Guide to Implementing a Document
Automation Platform in Your Firm**

READ NOW

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Successful law firms turn to technology to reduce inefficiencies and boost profitability.

Softdocs

Softdocs provides you with a comprehensive set of legal templates across a range of practice areas and jurisdictions. Generate contracts, letters and others documents with speed and precision knowing that your templates are constantly maintained and updated to reflect the latest changes in the law.

FIND OUT MORE

Contract Express

Contract Express is an intuitive and easy-to-use platform that quickly and accurately allows you to automate and update your legal documents and contracts. Deliver more efficient and compliant legal services, and take your document production to the next level by drafting, negotiating, executing and managing all your firm's documents from one central location.

FIND OUT MORE

DID YOU KNOW?

By automating your processes, you could **save up to 82 per cent**[1] of the time you spend on document production?

REFERENCES

1. 2017 Contract Express customer user survey, Thomson Reuters USA

2. http://www.lawsociety.com.au/cs/groups/public/documents/internetcontent/1272952.pdf

3. http://insight.thomsonreuters.com.au/resources/resource/firm-manual-processes-costs/

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