



Knock, knock?

Why the legal 'front door' will be the big theme for in-house legal departments in 2020

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Introduction

In-house legal departments are increasingly looking to tap into new technologies in their drive for efficiency, better risk management and improved client experience. Over time, this has led to development of the legal 'front door'; a digital interface between a corporate legal department and its business users. In this article, Bruce Braude, CTO, and Tim Wistow, legal technology consultant at Deloitte Legal, explain how in-house legal teams can use existing and new technologies to create a legal front door that improves the service experience a business receives from its legal department, providing users with real-time status information on their legal requests.

Both legal service providers and in-house functions have shown an increased interest in legal technology over the last decade. The former have tended to use technology to improve service delivery internally whilst, externally, client-facing portals and new online services have been introduced with the aim of enhancing the client experience.

For the majority of in-house legal departments, the implementation of new technologies has tended to focus on improving the overall function. In these instances, the technology has typically included aspects like e-billing solutions, to better understand and manage legal spend, as well as matter management platforms and contract lifecycle management solutions to oversee contractual processes and obligations. Aside from a few exceptions, there has been little focus to date by in-house legal functions on their clients' experience of legal processes.

This is now changing, and GCs and Legal COOs are increasingly turning their attention to the 'legal front door.

If a front door acts as the main entrance to a house, then a 'legal front door' plays a similar role in being the main way for a business to access its legal department. In essence, it is a platform that enables business users to log legal requests with the in-house legal department, but it can encompass a lot more. Self-service examples include Frequently Asked Questions, intelligent systems and bots for answering queries, contract generation and even access to the organisation's contract repository and associated contractual obligations.

Whilst some have been using the legal front door for years, for many in-house legal departments it is still an emerging trend. In both cases, businesses are now exploring its various technologies, which may range from using existing corporate intranet platforms, legal matter management platforms with built-in service request portals or existing help-desk type tools.

Opportunity knocks

There are a number of problems and opportunities that the front door concept seeks to address and there are clear benefits, regardless of what side of the 'door' you are on. Some of the core benefits for both business users and in-house legal department are outlined below:

Benefits to users

- In an increasingly digitised and 'always on' world, business users often want to access their company's lawyer as quickly as possible. Rather than simply resorting to sending an email or trying to get hold of them on the telephone, users want immediate service. A legal front door system will enable them to log requests through a self-service portal, with minimal effort and human interaction. This will help resolve issues faster, resulting in obvious productivity and resourcing benefits.
- The adoption of a portal also has the ability to provide users with data transparency, using real-time status information on their legal requests. This is in contrast to user experiences to date, which can be opaque, and therefore less efficient.

Benefits to legal departments

- The front door acts as a filter, meaning that requests can be properly captured and directed to the most appropriate individual within the legal team. This is far more efficient than manually having to pass requests to the right person.
- Using a legal front door with self-service elements frees lawyers up from routine queries allowing them to focus on more complex issues.
- Perhaps the most significant benefit, however, is around how the front door allows for detailed information to be captured and analysed relating to the legal requests in the business. Such valuable information can be used to improve the service and identify trends and emerging legal risks facing the business. This in turn will help GCs and legal teams inform C-suite colleagues to make appropriate, insight-led business decisions, further demonstrating the value that the legal department brings to the business.

The efficiency opportunities are apparent when looking at how similar portals have benefited other industries. In one front door implementation undertaken by Deloitte for a global retailer's HR function, 20% of service interactions were able to be resolved with no human involvement. In another case, a 25% increase in service request volume was able to be handled with no increase in team size. These are considerable savings that can be translated through to a legal function with relative ease.

Getting a foot in the door

Whether using existing platforms within the organisation, or adopting entirely new technology, there are business factors to consider before getting the keys to the legal front door.

A key consideration will be the platform's functionality: will it be used for simply logging requests or will it include more sophisticated self-service elements?

Understanding what data that the platform will capture and how it can be effectively analysed will be particularly important. In addition, internal communication and education sessions will certainly be required in order to get buy-in from employees who will be using the system regularly and may be reluctant to change. A phased roll-out may be required to smooth any teething problems, and so certain parts of the business will need to be prioritised.

Fundamentally, it is worth remembering that the implementation of any new technology into an organisation can be make-or-break depending on how 'useable' it is, particularly if it integrates with other platforms and systems that the business already uses.

Adopting a legal front door will be a defining trend of the next few years for in-house legal.

It has the potential to significantly enhance the service experience that a business receives from its legal department, evolve the legal department to become more insight-led within the business and deliver material improvements in service levels and efficiency. It also has the potential to contribute to the data-oriented approach to managing the legal department, most likely already underway with the various in-house legal management technologies discussed above.



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For more information on how to adopt a legal front door solution, please connect with our team.



Bruce Braude
Chief Technology Officer,
Deloitte Legal UK
Tel: +44 20 7007 2399
Email: bbraude@deloitte.co.uk



Tim Wistow
Senior Manager – Legal Technology Consulting
Deloitte Legal UK
Tel: +44 20 7007 6427
Email: twistow@deloitte.co.uk

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