

HOW LAW DEPARTMENTS CAN AVOID COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS WHEN CENTRALIZING DATA

There may be a few common misconceptions law departments often have about the process, but centralization can revolutionize your department if done correctly.

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Getting quick answers to operations-related questions from general counsel can be challenging in law departments where data is kept in siloed systems and non-standardized formats. Even as technology makes data far more accessible, it is not uncommon to see legal professionals scrambling to locate critical data like the spend for a particular matter or the total hours billed by outside counsel.

The inefficiency caused by this disparate data wastes a significant amount of valuable time within law departments and, with no shared source of truth, it creates an environment of uncertainty around the data being accessed. Multiple data sources can also invite risk when organizations fall out of regulatory compliance or become more susceptible to data breaches because they have too many data sources to secure.

If these issues sound familiar in your law department, consider developing a formal

data centralization process. This process begins with cataloging, organizing and standardizing data so it is ready to be stored in a unified place. A central information repository can not only help reduce cost, but it can also help quickly and accurately retrieve and visualize information about department operations via an analytics dashboard. But before beginning the centralization process, there are several important factors to consider to avoid common misconceptions law departments often have about the process.

Data centralization is not simply an IT undertaking. It is easy to assume that since it involves data and connecting systems, centralization is an IT job. That is not the case. During the process, many different departments may need to be engaged, including legal operations, finance, corporate and the attorneys themselves. Before any work is done, strategy and expectations need to be clearly communicated



to all groups involved to ensure a smooth transition.

Your data will not always be easy to connect. If your data is stored in multiple systems and formats, it is likely that it has been kept and updated in that manner for quite a while. Because of this, the data you wish to centralize might not have common identifiers that will allow you to easily connect it to other systems like time-tracking or e-discovery platforms. If you choose to take on centralization in-house, you will have to determine which data needs to be scrubbed or

updated. In many cases, this means making sure all data points tie back to a matter ID or key. If you engage a third-party vendor to centralize the data, they will likely need several vetting calls with different departments to understand how to integrate the systems.

Adoption is not guaranteed. As in any operation, law departments do not always adapt well to change. With data centralization, you are changing the way people access and communicate information they rely on daily. It is therefore critical to establish a change management plan from the outset and ensure everyone who will use the system is properly trained. Another strategy to ensure full adoption is to identify “power users” or “product champions.” These are individuals in the organization who are well-versed on the new system, and can help train their colleagues and evangelize the benefits of the new system.

Things will not be perfect right away. Often, law departments expect a seamless transition and a flawless system on day one, and get bogged down in fixing these flaws. It is important to keep in mind that centralization should be an iterative process, and that certain challenges or pain points may not present themselves until users of the system actually begin using it. If you are



concerned about the time it will take to get the system in place and working optimally, consider engaging a third-party vendor that can provide support and system updates based on user feedback.

Centralizing data can revolutionize the way the law department operates and greatly reduce the amount of time it takes to produce answers to routine questions. When everyone has a central source of truth, you enjoy a more proactive, productive law department operation. By avoiding some common misconceptions about the process, you can ensure your investment pays dividends in the future.

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