



Automation: a whole business issue

Clara Howard, TLT and Lisa Urwin, TLT



Automation: an issue for the whole business, not just the lawyers

There has been much discussion in the last few years about automation of documentation and related processes and its use by both in-house legal teams and law firms. The focus has tended to be on the use of automation by lawyers, how it could benefit them in reducing time taken to draft standard documents and automate inefficient processes. For many law firms, the automation of precedent documents has become commonplace. And automation is also now used widely within in-house legal teams.

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But the contracts and other documentation traditionally “owned” by lawyers do not just relate to the workloads of lawyers working for a business, either in-house or as external providers. All businesses carry legal, financial and other risks, and therefore the automation of the processes and documentation associated with these things are not just “legal” issues. They are, of course, “whole business” issues. We need to move forward and change the narrative and perception that automation is exclusively a legal issue. In so doing, the business as a whole will benefit from the automation process, through reduction in business risk and ensuring more effective contracting across the business. This can free up budgets and legal team time to concentrate on more strategic and legally challenging issues.

So how do we make the shift? Moving from “legal” issue to “business issue”

As with so many things in life, knowledge is power. Educating the business about automation and its benefits is key. People around the business may well ask: ‘What do we mean by automation?’ ‘Why should we care?’ And: ‘How will it benefit the business?’

When we start to answer these questions, we should keep in mind the fact that the use of the term “legaltech” is prevalent amongst lawyers and the business community but that, even amongst this cohort, the term can mean different things to different people. It can also be a misleading term to use when in-house teams are looking to solve business issues generally. Automation tools are often referred to as “legaltech” by default, but no legal tech tool is narrow enough in its application to address purely legal issues. Without exception, they have the potential to be applied across the business, from the automation of HR documentation to procurement and beyond.

“Automation technology” and “legaltech” should, arguably, be referred to simply as “technology”. Technology designed to solve business issues. Explaining this will not only help with business teams’ buy-in and openness to considering such technology to assist with their pain points, but it can in turn free up budgets within the business to purchase automation tools. Budget constraints remain a key barrier to entry for many automation projects seen only as a legal issue and, by demonstrating the benefit to the whole business, this barrier could be significantly reduced as the wider business benefit is recognised.

Automation technology needs to be seen by the majority within the business as a tool of empowerment and efficiency, making their lives easier. By ensuring these key benefits are front and centre at the start of discussions around the benefits of automation within a business, we should see all in-house teams wanting to learn and understand more about how this technology can help them.



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A case study - automation for an in-house HR team

We have been working with a FTSE 250 waste management company, assisting them with the automation of their employment offer letters and contracts. This was very much led and for the benefit of the in-house HR team rather than the legal team. Gaining support from the wider business and other in-house teams was relatively straightforward as demonstration of the benefits in time saving and efficiency were clear to all.

The process of review and ensuring all documents and processes were in place before automation was key to its success. This process resulted in a lot of welcome simplification, ensuring everything was in order before automation. The result is a more efficient, time saving process that allows the HR team to now concentrate on their value-add and strategic activities for the business.

Whole business benefits

So, in summary, what are the benefits for the whole business that automation can bring?

- Efficiency in all areas.
- Effective contracting – speed and risk management.
- Consistent documents of known quality.
- Risk mitigation – enabling business users to self-serve and create their own documents but in a controlled environment that mitigates risk and ensures compliance. This may prevent issues that arise when done outside an automation process, in which the legal team is not involved.
- Use of automation demonstrates a forward thinking business with a progressive culture, a business looking to assist employees with the repetitive and mundane. A key feature for the recruitment of new employees and retention of existing talent. Demonstrating the value placed on the workforce and commitment to doing business better.
- Greater efficiency leads to greater productivity, ultimately benefiting the bottom line.

The collaboration of law firm and tech provider

The current technology and legaltech market is a confusing and crowded one for the untrained eye. Knowing where to start can be a daunting task and beginning the process of talking to various automation tech providers can be time consuming and frustrating.

The experience of finding the right automation platform and tech provider to meet your needs can be a much smoother process if you take advantage of existing collaborations between law firm, tech provider and the business. Law firms can assist with ensuring processes and documents are up to date and drafted correctly, they then work with the tech provider to assist with the smooth automation of those documents and processes working directly with the tech provider. Allowing the business to concentrate on ensuring a smooth roll out of the automation once in place.

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There are so many moving parts to an automation project that getting the widest possible expertise is essential. Working with law firms and tech providers can allow a business to get it right first time.

Not just a legal issue

In conclusion, the automation of documents and processes is not just a legal issue, it is a business issue. The benefits of which can also be felt across the whole business. Legal teams have been leading the way in the automation process and undoubtedly businesses will be able to benefit from the lessons learnt by their legal colleagues from implementation within legal teams.

As automation becomes more commonplace within businesses we need to empower all in-house teams to understand what automation is, the benefits it offers their team and the wider business and how best to undertake such a project.

Legal teams can lead the way in shaping those internal discussions, helping to demonstrate the clear benefits that automation can bring to the business as a whole.

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Should you have any questions or wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this article please contact Clara Howard, Senior BD Manager or Lisa Urwin, Professional Support Lawyer in our FutureLaw team.





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