

LIVING ON THE LEADING EDGE: CLIENTS' NEEDS MEAN EMBRACING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

By Vanessa Vidas

“Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without the talking about the other.” – *Bill Gates*

The impact of emerging technologies, both innovative and disruptive in nature, and the evolving needs of the business community cannot be overestimated. We are living at a time when the pace and scale of technological change is unprecedented.

These advancements and client needs are driving the development of new products and services, and new means of delivery. Artificial intelligence, blockchain, cybersecurity, SaaS and cloud computing, to name a few, have banished static legal business practices. The resulting shifts are both cultural and organizational for all companies, including legal service providers, as innovative offerings demand behavioural change.

A 2017 survey of more than 200 in-house counsel conducted by Thomson Reuters found legal technology is now moving up on the agenda. Innovative service delivery through technology was ranked as a more important factor in choosing a law firm supplier than other elements such as personal relationships.

The majority of legal service providers have clearly anticipated this trend: in the Lawyer UK 200 Business Services 2016 report, 84% of law firms placed investment in IT higher on the strategic agenda than in the previous year and 66% increased their budget for IT investment. It's clear technological change is not only affecting the practice of law but

also a driving force behind the increasing importance and rapid-fire advances of the business of law.

To remain competitive and meet clients' evolving demands, firms are bringing innovative services to market. For instance, McCarthy Tétrault focused on creating a faster approach that allowed us to bypass potentially slow decision making and long lead times to get these services up and running. We developed a nimble operating platform that worked alongside firm infrastructure to provide new processes, systems and technology. Thus, our new operating system, an agile cloud-based platform, was developed to provide central access to the tools needed to support new business offerings, under our MT>Division.

The new cloud-based environment allows users of each new business line to login whenever and from wherever they're working (often remotely) to access all the tools they need to do their job in one secure place. Tools available include Office 365, Skype, Sharepoint, Click Time (time entry), Basecamp (collaborative project management) and Salesforce.com (client relationship management).

Its most innovative features are its cost-effectiveness and scalability, which will continue to meet the firm's needs as new business lines emerge. Security protocols are consistent across the firm and adhere to our clients' requirements. In ad-

dition, we are able to leverage resources from our firm-wide operating platform when necessary, giving the new business lines considerable flexibility.

Business lines currently supported include MT>OnDemand: access to flexible legal resources to support clients' in-house needs; and MT>3 (formerly Wortzmans; acquired in January 2017): e-discovery, information governance and data management solutions. This fall it will also support MT>Iplus: an immigration legal advisory business; and MT>Play: advisory, strategic, technical and operational services for the gaming industry. MT>Iplus, led by Partner Stéphane Duval, works to support clients with end-to-end immigration services, providing strategic advice on the intricacies of Canadian immigration law. MT>Play will be led by one of Canada's most highly regarded gaming practitioners, Ilkim Hincer, who recently joined McCarthy Tétrault. All of the new service lines leverage technology to great benefit for all stakeholders.

As adopting innovative business practices for the legal community is certainly the way forward, the community itself must move beyond its self-consciousness in embracing it. It is essential *all* lawyers are deeply involved in the evolution of relevant technology and innovative solutions as they continue to develop and transform the business of law. See the disruption for what it is: an ever-flowing source of new opportunities and a chance to problem solve in new ways. ■

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