

Law Firm Technology: Choosing and adopting the right tools to support your strategy



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Introduction

The UKLTA is the LegalTech Association for the UK. Its mission is to form a community where legal professionals, technology providers and consumers of legal services can come together in order to help shape the future of legal services delivery collaboratively.

The UKLTA with Thomson Reuters conducted a series of roundtable events around the UK looking at how law firms choose and adopt legal technology. Lawyers, legal engineers and technologists discussed how to identify the right technology, and get the most out of it—for the benefit of their organisations and clients.

Whilst some of these findings were gathered before COVID-19, the takeaways remain relevant and, in some cases, even more applicable in a now largely digital legal world. This report has also been buttressed with results from a pulse survey conducted in mid-2020, asking firms their views on how demands for legal services may change and what the responses to these changes may be.

For the purposes of this report, the following meanings have been used:



Round table events took place in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh and Belfast.

These events aimed to inform the UKLTA's strategy for supporting law firms, technology providers and the relationship amongst them in the future.

**How technology supports law firm strategy:
some characteristics of innovative law firms**



Business of law:

- Lawyer targets are made up of more than hourly billing targets
- Partner compensation is aligned to firm performance rather than heavily driven by work origination or team/individual performance
- Recognition and reward for disrupting the established business
- Deliver client facing solutions
- Capture data at a task/matter level to support profitability analysis
- Menu of alternative billing options—with understanding of impact on profitability of each
- Robust business development, client relationship, and experience management processes in place
- Development staff in house or partnerships with third parties

Practice of law:

- Utilise leading technology to improve legal practice
- Emphasise process efficiency that aides lawyer activities
- Employ project management techniques to defined matters
- Embed automation across relevant transactional areas
- Measure metrics for adoption of technology solutions
- Methodology for creating optimal team for each matter
- Deep understanding of continuous process improvement techniques

Supporting technologies:

- Integrated systems/tools/data (e.g. document and matter management systems, knowledge management (KM) systems)
- Pricing and profitability analysis tools
- Legal analytics tools
- Automated document creation and review
- Client collaboration options such as portals, self-service tools, applications or chatbots
- Secure online communication tools for 24/7 messaging
- Tools for easier on-boarding (e.g. electronic signatures, identification checks)
- Risk management tools (e.g. cyber and other security issues)
- Business intelligence/analytics tools
- Project management tools

How law firms and legal departments explore solutions

Key discussion points:

- If you identified a process or task within your firm that you thought might become easier to complete if you were to employ a tech solution—how would you go about exploring your idea and who would be involved?

The delegates were largely both well-informed and cautious in their approach to going to market to source new solutions. Many were focussed more on exploring the capabilities of their existing solutions before looking outside their firm or company: *“we have an in-house first policy”*, while recognising the drawbacks to producing home-grown solutions.

Before they even start, law firms spoke of the need to identify whether technology would even help. There may be other reasons for inefficiency—and a technology solution might not be cost-effective.

““ We’re looking at the overall time and profitability at matter and fee earner level where profitability is lower than where it should be. Then we identify if the cause is a process or a person issue. Often it’s about knowledge and how we’re using existing tool sets.”

(Large law firm)

Some law firms have implemented initiatives, such as ‘Dragon’s Dens’ or ‘Innovation Weeks’ or periodic tech challenges. These programmes are designed to get their fee earners thinking about why they work in a certain way and how processes could be improved (which may not be about technology). Such initiatives were highly praised by the delegates and had various benefits including increased buy-in to change, the development of entrepreneurial thinking and empathy for the client, as well as providing opportunities for more junior fee earners to shine. But crucially, they could also result in proofs of concept to demo in pitches to clients to underpin the firm’s commitment to efficiency.

““ We ran an event where we showcased the tech solutions we had. Some people didn’t even know we had some of the tools like HighQ collaborate and they were like WOW! We didn’t know that could be done.”

(Law firm tech professional)

However, beyond these (often isolated) events, it can be difficult for fee earners to identify problems and speculate on solutions, absent the structures and time to help them develop their thinking and ideas. That means innovative thinking can be confined to those with an interest in technology, rather than part of the firm’s culture.

As a result, solutions can be a distress purchase—*“how do we meet this client request in the week they’re asking for?”*—rather than as part of the firm’s strategy.

Motivation to change

Key discussion point:

- What drives a decision to invest in new technology or ways of working?

A strong consensus emerged that change was being driven from the General Counsel (GC) side, and that pressure, in turn, was coming from their internal clients.

“ We spend millions externally on legal services. So, we try to drive them through common systems so we can use the management information [to compare firm performance].”

(In-house lawyer, large corporate)

The clients' need for management information (MI) is acknowledged but can be challenging for law firms when requirements differ. Clients dictate the content and format of reports—which then allows law firm systems to interoperate with the clients' systems.

A key example cited was the need for billing information in a particular format that enabled the clients' systems to extract the relevant MI. This more sophisticated approach to managing external advisers was not always replicated on the supply-side; one law firm pointed out the anomaly of presenting data to clients through dashboards while providing their own board with paper reports. Lawyers are accustomed to dense text in practice and can take that preference into how they manage the business.

“ We do lots of documents on industry standard forms. This work should be straight-forward but lots of time is spent negotiating schedules. We want standardised forms of wording. We're in a world where there is a lot of bespoke drafting. But we don't want to pay for things that can't be automated. What we want to pay for is where the human mind is making value judgments.”

(In-house lawyer, large corporate)

Law firm delegates largely recognised the need to identify those parts of, even quite complex, transactions that can be better systematised and which can therefore be turned around more quickly and cheaply.

“ GCs tell us they have to justify their legal spend monthly or quarterly. So, we need to give them evidence of that value for money. It's all part of building those relationships so you win big mandates.”

(Law firm)

These insights chime with the findings of the Acritas Sharplegal 2020 Insights survey of corporate counsel, which shows that clients spend a greater percentage of their external legal budget with law firms that are innovative, demonstrate industry expertise, and collaborate effectively.

Aside from increasing spend, clients also score firms that are innovative with technology more highly across a range of metrics including quality, responsiveness, relationships, and value.

“ We need to improve efficiency in our high-volume work. We’re moving away from the billable hour. Clients are looking for price certainty. We need to be sure we can deliver that. How do we systematise high volume activity while retaining quality and managing risk?”

(Law firm)

Sometimes clients demand specific application programme interfaces (APIs) and are ready to talk technology during pitches. So, lawyers should understand the technology they are using, at least to the extent they can confidently communicate the benefits to the client. When discussions get more technical, some firms discussed bringing their technologists to pitches to talk about interoperability and other issues, which was seen as an advantage to the firm in terms of communicating the clients’ needs directly.

“ We got some feedback from clients saying they were fed up with us talking about our tech investment, as they saw it as helping us generate more profits. We need to be clear what’s in it for clients.”

(Large law firm)

“ Clients want to know how we’re using AI or analytics to help them. Otherwise it’s just marketing.”

(Law firm)

Some clients are clear about the actions it expects its firms to take to facilitate efficient and cost-effective working. However, other clients are less prescriptive, leaving it up to the firms to determine how to demonstrate that efficiency. Indeed, several law firm delegates spoke of the trend for in-house legal teams to use the law firm in a consultancy capacity to review the efficiency of their own legal operations.

“ Clients ask us for our advice on business process optimisation, purchasing solutions, etc. Clients want to know what other clients are doing.”

(Large law firm)

“ We ask law firms for feedback on what tech they have used and ask for their experience. They will often tell us if a product isn’t worth investing in.”

(In-house lawyer)

One other motivating factor may be how firms expect demand to change. According to the pulse survey, for larger firms who see demand for their business to increase, the option to implement new tools or technology solutions was in the top three of their anticipated responses—indicating a desire to introduce efficiencies to cope with additional demand.

Alternatively, if they begin to see demand softening, large firms indicate they would most likely respond with furloughs, reducing working hours, and reducing headcounts. Those actions would likely put a premium on the firm operating as efficiently as possible and force the organisation to rely more heavily on technology.

The technology that law firms can't live without

Key discussion points:

- What technology solutions do lawyers rely on most and how is this changing?

While the law technology media focusses on artificial intelligence (AI) and analytics, the most used technologies for lawyers and their clients improve communications and document management. Lawyers are heavily reliant on Outlook and products such as iManage for document storage. Increasingly, the reliance on email is diversifying into other communications channels—such as Microsoft Teams.

While law firms continue to structure their businesses on units of time, time recording systems remain key—as they have done for decades. However, pressure from the buy-side for more granular information, has led to these systems becoming increasingly sophisticated, with automation, app functionality and integration with other technologies that capture more detailed narratives.

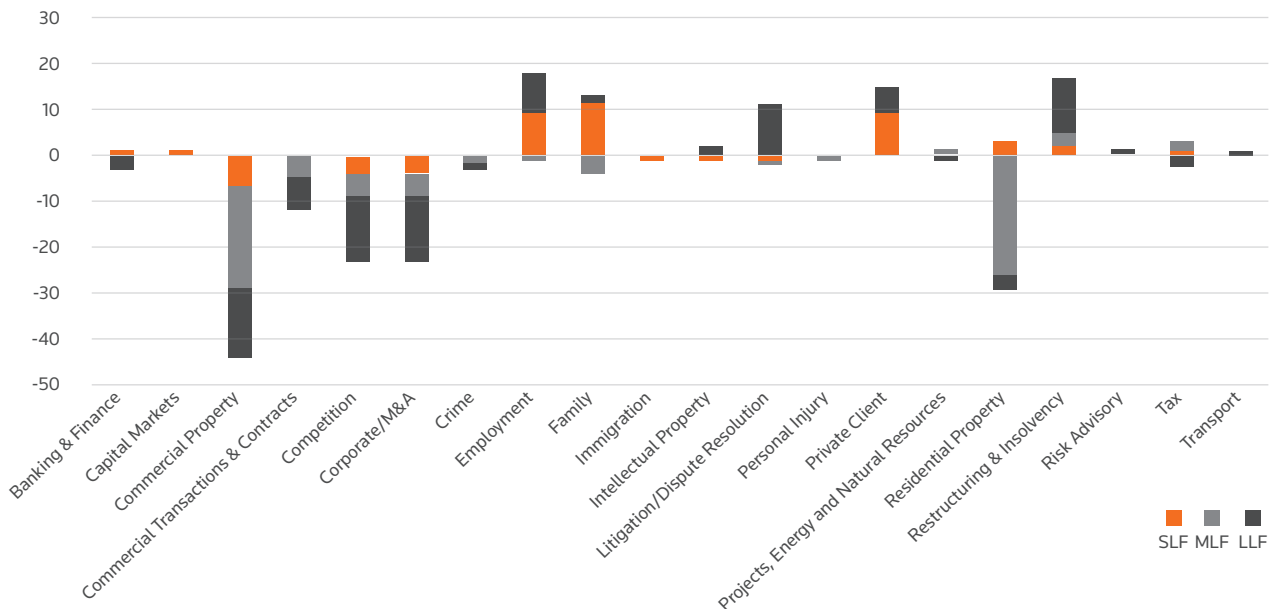
Most law firms agreed they do a lot more fixed fee work—and use hourly rates for out of scope work. They agreed that many clients want to know how law firms could ensure efficiency within that model.

“ Clients want to know how time recording works, and firms need accuracy. For example, when calls interrupt work, we need to make sure that time will be logged.”

(Large law firm)

Another emerging area where technology can play a critical role is in how firms stay ahead of changes to the law. From the pulse survey, because of COVID-19, firms anticipate certain practices areas to rise or fall in demand including employment law, restructuring, insolvency, and commercial property. In this tumultuous environment, the technology that firms may come to rely more heavily upon are tools that offer know-how guidance and legal research.

Practice areas impact



Selecting new technology

Key discussion point:

- What metrics would resonate with partners?

“The biggest barrier [to change] by a long way is the billable hour. Why would they do something quicker?”

(Large law firm)

Whilst the risk of inefficiency is borne by the client through the billable hour, which to some extent include fixed fees based on the billable hour—law firms will not feel the pressure to change. But the shift of power to the buy-side and better data enabling clients to compare services means inefficiency is easier to call out. Getting to the root cause of inefficiency—and identifying and implementing solutions is more challenging.

Barriers to selecting the right solution

“Tech doesn’t have the status of a practice area. Everyone thinks they know about it. If you ask most lawyers a real estate question, they’ll say ‘I don’t know, ask a real estate lawyer’. If you ask them a tech question, they’ll probably just have a go!”

(Large law firm)

Key barriers to selecting the right solutions were identified as:

- A lack of technological knowledge: *“Most people think they understand how tech works or won’t admit they don’t.”*
- A lack of time, both in terms of getting through the work (*“Change slows you down”*), and a lack of allocated time to learn and explore that counts as (or is offset against) billable time.
- The feeling that technology is threatening job security (*“It is not about replacing lawyers. It’s freeing up their time.”*)
- Unrealistic expectations: *“We [legal innovation people] have to be realistic on what tech can actually do. We are not claiming it will provide 100 percent accuracy.”*
- Departmental siloes, which oblige the project owners to re-sell the aims of the project to each department.

However, while solutions are generally designed to free up time, the benefits to the lawyer are less clear. More time will just be filled with more work while the culture of *“presenteeism is still rife”*.

One issue that came up at every round table was how to get lawyers, compared with other professionals, bought in to new ways of working.

“Lawyers are autonomous. That fundamentally contradicts the idea that we’re telling them they have to do something a certain way.”

(Law firm)

“Change is hard. Lawyers are traditionally risk averse. They want risk averse ways of doing things. They need to understand the benefit and how it will make life easier.”

(Law firm)

Success factors for achieving buy-in to a purchasing decision

Some delegates had some good tips on winning lawyers’ hearts and minds, including:

- Positioning the technology as altering time spent to favour tasks that are perceived as more valuable to the individual, such as client-facing time, or even going home half an hour earlier.
- Showing how peers are using the technology to improve their clients’ experience or the firms’ bottom line. *“There’s a big pressure to have the same tech that peers have. Clients want firms to sit down together to use the same systems.” “Mergers often drive innovation or adoption as staff in one firm learn about tools used in the other.”*
- Demonstrating how the technology supports mobility, connecting from home, on home devices, and on the move. Most firms represented at the round tables offered home-working, at least to some extent, pre COVID-19. Most now think home-working is embedded and employees will expect to be able to continue to work from home going forward—for at least part of the week.

“ If there are lawyers on the board, they look at it from a lawyer’s perspective, not a business owner’s perspective so they’re looking at what would make their life more fun, how will this get me more clients?”

(Law firm)

“ Firms aren’t going for tech to get a competitive edge; they feel they have to be on the same playing field as everyone else.”

(In-house lawyer, large corporate)

How important is cost?

Delegates agreed that for some firms the main hurdle to making a purchase wasn’t the cost of the new product. Rather, it was securing agreement in principle to invest at all.

“ Make sure you know what technology you have. You can reuse what technology you have. You get higher ROI as it’s already being used.”

(Mid-sized law firm)

For firms dealing with high volume transactions, it is difficult to put aside budget to invest. However, some high-volume firms with central delivery hubs take a more strategic approach, and the ability to leverage external funding is changing the dynamic.

In general, delegates said that boards were more likely to invest in external products than internal solutions:

“Law firms would rather waste internal costs than external. It’s as if internal costs are invisible.”

The delegates also perceived greater impatience with leveraging internal capabilities. Expectations were higher that internal solutions should work straight out of the box, rather than develop iteratively.

Getting buy-in to purchasing new technology—what works?

- External expertise at board level.
- Show what’s in it for them? *“Come up with a use case that plays exactly to their practice area and their clients.”*
- Provide crib sheets for the technology as well as case studies on value, ROI.
- Manage expectations: *“Educating and energising lawyers and leaders is a fine balance between engagement and overpromising.”*
- Ensure there is someone who can interface between technologists and the lawyers.
- Don’t patronise or disempower: *“Lose the jargon.”*

Ensuring successful adoption of a solution

Key discussion points:

- What challenges do you face when adopting a solution?
- How do you ensure buy in from the prospective end users?
- What skill sets do you have within the organisation to help manage the change?
- How do you leverage stakeholder sponsorship to drive an initiative?

The key challenges to effective adoption mirrored those above in securing buy-in to making a purchase but included more practical issues such as:

- Defining clear acceptance criteria and who to involve.
- Ensuring usability. Training is important, but lawyers are time poor. *"Tools have to become more user friendly to gain acceptance. It needs to be pick up and play."*
- Recognising *"the fee earner's dilemma—balancing short-term cost versus long term aims. Am I hitting my target? Is it worth me spending my time on learning this? Will it save me time long-term if I front-load the effort to learn this now?"*
- A mis-diagnosed problem, that is, where the solution addresses a problem which turns out to be peripheral to the main issue.
- Understanding that for most lawyers *"computers are still seen as an ancillary part of the job"* and the benefits technology has brought to legal practice are often taken for granted.
- Lack of communication to build consensus for change and maintain momentum.
- Time from investigation of a solution to implementation. Delay leads to disengagement.

“ Lawyers don't mind change if it's saving time. But one must be able to demonstrate that it is cutting down on duplication, etc. Hence it is crucial that it can interface with existing solutions.”

(Law firm)

Delegates cited the following as key factors supporting adoption:

- *"Land and expand"* is easier than enterprise adoption as you can learn and improve with minimal disruption, as well as demonstrating concrete benefits to other teams. *"Then people hear about it and everyone wants in."* *"We use a tech solution in our real estate department, and it worked well. Endorsements then flew round the firm because it was understandable to lawyers."*
- *"A learning team with change management expertise. They use psychology to understand effective implementation."*
- *"Firms like a certification!"* If it demonstrates something to the outside world then this can aid adoption.
- Recruiting evangelists from within a specific practice area. It can help if that person has come from another firm that used the new solution.
- Involve clients: Solutions are often internal and external facing. Consider the client's perspective.
- Continuously improve.

Key discussion point:

- When it comes to adoption, how important are key factors like user experience (UX) and simple interfaces in your selection criteria?

“ Very high. We’ve been known to choose products with less functionality if we get more adoption. If the interface too busy, it will turn lawyers off.”

(Law firm)

“ Partners are very keen on how things look—a wow factor. Partners want everything accessible from one place. How it looks is key. We can link to external sources, but we don’t have a single sign-on.”

(Law firm tech professional)

Aside from a clean and appealing UX, many delegates noted the importance of integrating with existing solutions and being able to capture data from different solutions at different points.

“ We want to reduce the amount of time lawyers are spending on stuff that doesn’t add value. We want one user interface experience where they don’t even know what products sit behind that interface, because they don’t need to know. And we need to delight our clients. That’s where we need to get to.”

(Law firm)

“ I want to know what a product does for me. CRM should be labelled ‘my clients’. Lawyers will turn off very quickly if they can’t see what it does or if it doesn’t work well the first time.”

(Associate)

“ If you’re marketing it to clients, you do make that visual impact. It needs to be user-friendly. That’s the priority. It should look nice, help with work, and improve my life.”

(Law firm)

“Aesthetics are essential for buy-in.”

(Law firm)

“Anything we bring in for clients would have to tie in with our branding. Colours, fonts, etc, so any tech that produces reports would have to align.”

(Law firm)

Implementing new solutions is often difficult, for organisational and cultural reasons. Effective change management strategies are key. Some of our delegates had built up extensive experience in this area and often start by running a proof of concept in one practice area and then testing results. In some cases, the problem solved by the technology is found to be less acute than previously understood, but it might throw light on other problem areas. Incremental improvement is important, rather than large-scale changes. *“Regular updates work well. Microsoft constantly changes but the changes are so subtle, it's ok [for users].”*

For some firms, the pain of implementing new processes isn't worth it and they would rather outsource certain work packages to external software service providers.



Collaboration

Key discussion points:

- To what extent is the drive to collaborate with clients and with peer firms driving investment in tech solutions?

“ We require all our panel firms to use a common e-billing system. We can get much more accurate MI. That way, we can start setting up budgets for large projects. For example, re-papering projects. One system facilitates this planning.”

(In-house lawyer, large corporate)

Our delegates were used to creating, hosting and interacting with client portals. Collaboration between firms is usually limited to large mandates. It is usual for the firm acting for the seller in a transaction to host but it can depend on who has the software and is best able to manage the portal. Other firms log in and can post time, enabling the client to see time billed across its firms.



Education and market awareness

Key discussion points:

- How does your firm keep apprised of what new legal technology is out there?

How does your firm keep abreast of new developments in the market?

Our delegates from large law firms were generally very well-informed about developments in legal technology.

“ Innovation teams in law firms who use instant messaging / Yammer, etc, to spread the news—within minutes everyone will hear about new products.”

(Law firm)

Smaller firms without dedicated technology or innovation teams felt less confident in sifting through the fire hose of information to find products that would genuinely make a difference to their practices. A lot of solutions were perceived to be aimed at larger firms only and beyond the reach of smaller firms.

Many agreed that it was easy to be influenced by marketing, but that it was important to keep the business needs front and centre of any search.

However, the landscape was perceived to be very fast-moving, and most delegates were wary of being a first-mover or of tying themselves to a solution long-term.

“ You’re never ahead of the game with tech. You’ll never beat innovation.”

(Law firm)

“ There is nothing that does everything. In-house developers have to link it all together.”

(Law firm)

Are start-ups viable legaltech providers?

Many confirmed they were generally reluctant to buy from start-ups, though they might be used to help maximise the solutions the firm already has in place.

“ There are so many start-ups. You could spend all day watching demos. But will they be around in two years?”

(Law firm)

“ It’s harder for smaller vendors to do interoperability.”

(Law firm)

“ It is difficult to work with start-ups. They don’t have the right structures. It’s usually just a lawyer with a good idea. It requires too much for us to maintain or engage with.”

(Law firm)

“ We don’t touch any supplier less than three years old. That takes out a lot of start-ups.”

(Law firm)

Some firms expressed frustration about the time invested in helping start-ups refine their propositions, without benefitting from sales that company then makes to other firms. Other firms were more open to exploring what start-ups had to offer.

“ The bigger hurdle is the attitude some in our firm have to following what larger firms do. We need to show it doesn’t matter what they are doing. We should trust our own due diligence.”

(Law firm)

“ It can be advantageous to work with smaller suppliers. But the board will ask us about which big firms are using that product. They are nervous. Unless the established entity is much more expensive—then they are more open to considering other vendors.”

(Law firm)

“ We are supporting an innovation lab and we do take some of that tech, so start-ups can test the concepts with a large company. Sometimes the concept won’t stand up to reality, but it also gives them the opportunity to test their ideas in a real-world environment quickly.”

(In-house lawyer)

What qualities do you look for in a legaltech provider?

Key discussion points:

- What qualities do you look for in the legaltech provider, beyond the service itself? What factors might put you off choosing a provider?

Delegates cited a move away from bespoke solutions, as law firms want proven solutions where teething issues have already been addressed.

“ We don’t necessarily want to be an early adopter. We’re not interested in being at the bleeding edge of tech. We don’t want to increase risk to ourselves and customers.”

(Law firm)

“ Even on upgrades, we wait to see what other people’s experience is first before we roll it out.”

(Law firm)

Problems with legaltech providers included:

- Pre-conceived ideas. Not listening. Assuming one size fits all.
- Not acting on feedback. Providers should find ways to prioritise certain developments for clients.
- Lack of clarity around feedback. Will this discussion go anywhere or not? If not, tell us.
- Transparency around what other people are asking for. *“It’s not good enough to say that no one else is asking for it”.*
- No named people customers can contact.
- Not sticking to timelines for delivery.
- Phoning round the users direct rather than dealing with the purchaser.
- Hard sell, over-promising: *“I would prefer ‘we’re not sure it will work, but you are welcome to give it a go’”*

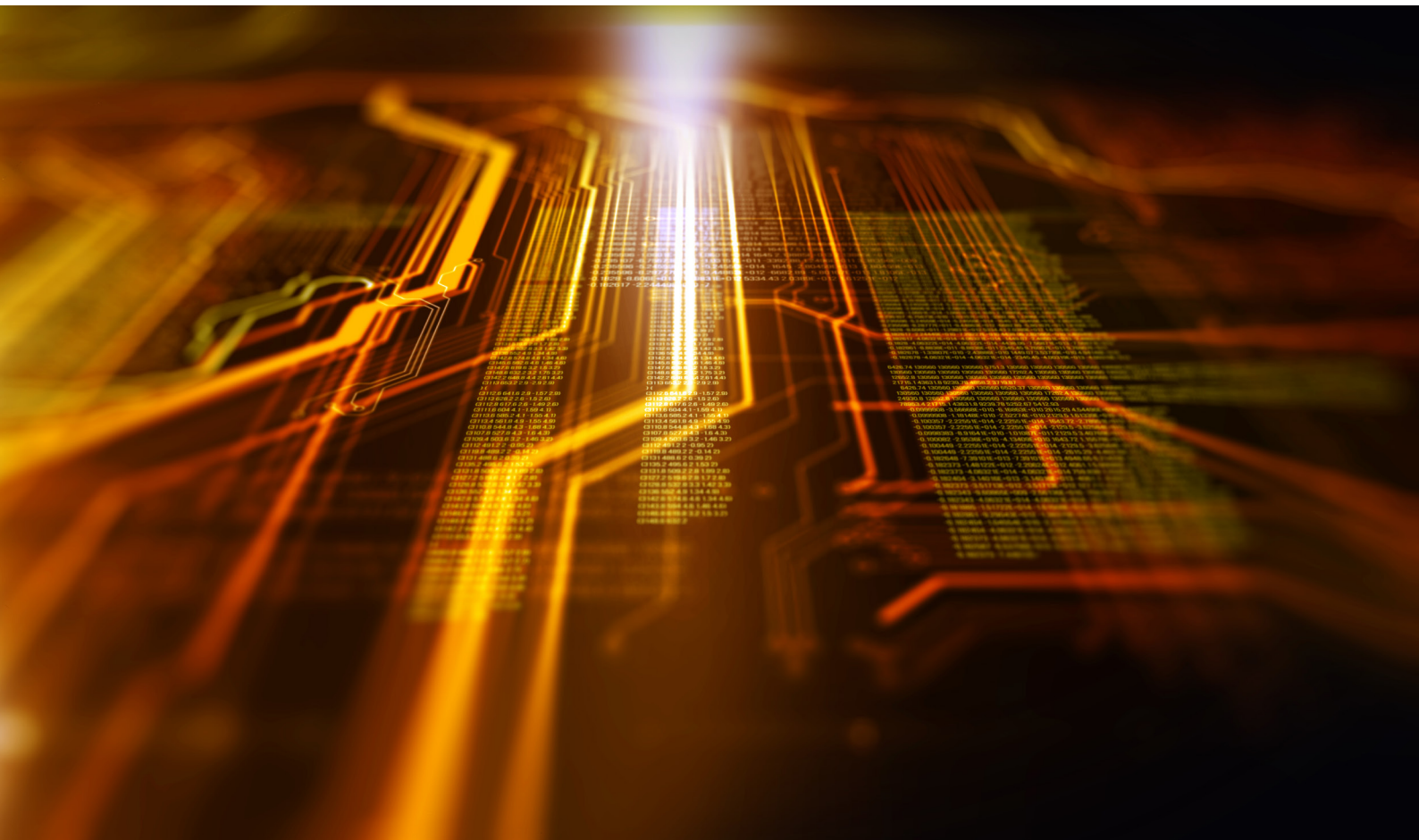
The following activities and practices by tech providers were welcomed:

- Use cases, case studies, and being put in touch with current customers. *“This should be automatic. Instead, some suppliers seem surprised to be asked.”* phase, with different approaches for different firms.
- Responsiveness!
- Support through implementation and post-delivery

A tension arose between those who were irritated at repeated requests from suppliers to sit down with the lawyers and work through pain points. This is *“too onerous”*. While others said suppliers failed to listen and understand the firm’s real pain points.

“ We have to do a lot of evaluation ourselves. I don’t know if we see the whole picture, and how good or bad it is. It’s a maze to find what’s out there.”

(Mid-sized law firm)



What isn't technology addressing at the moment for lawyers?

Delegates cited poor integrations as a key pain point, expressing a desire for tools with a great UX that make work more enjoyable for the end user. Tools that address key pain points with a seamless user experience will be adopted more quickly.

“ Tools are not necessarily joined up. Law firms are having to take a gamble and commit to one [solution] and hope it gains traction.”

(Law firm)

“ We're not raising awareness of what's there, for example, how to use tech properly as they're using it the long way. Trainees arrive pretty well-prepared. But the hierarchy of law firms takes the tech skills out of them. The trainee might see the partner doing something long hand and start to emulate that slow way of doing things. We're trying to introduce reverse mentoring between juniors and KM teams.”

(Law firm)

“ I'd like people to go home at 6pm.”

(Law firm)

Messages to suppliers?

Key discussion points:

- How do law firms want to work with suppliers?
- What should suppliers do more or less of to support customers?

The delegates stressed the importance of integration:

“ Email and document management systems have changed everything in the last 20 years. Unless things integrate with those, it's difficult.”

(Law firm)

“ Cut out the guff. I watched a cartoon about a product but it didn't explain what it actually did. As a result, I distrust it. Please translate the marketing guff into practical information about products.”

(Law firm)

Training should be balanced. In some cases, it was felt training was far too detailed and not tailored enough to the audience so that some people received training that was too time-consuming and complex for their needs.

Evangelists or advocates for the product need enough information to be able to speak about the product to their key stakeholders. This information needs to be simple enough to convey what the product does and provide some technical information about the vendor.

“ We're looking for a partnership. People who take a genuine interest in your business and that's where we see the benefits of working with a hungry small business.”

(Law firm)

Delegates cited examples of products being over-sold and under-supported, including CRM systems and business process management products. But many felt that procurement processes had improved—at least in larger firms that could afford to develop or acquire the expertise. These firms are savvier and are demanding of their suppliers—whereas small firms are still struggling with selection and implementation of some fairly basic solutions. Several firms of varying sizes had experimented with building solutions in-house with mixed results.

“ We tried to create our own practice management software. It would have been better to buy point solutions and integrate.”

(Law firm)

From the supplier’s perspective, procurement processes can be long and difficult. The burden is even greater on small start-ups. However, firms are likely to be less demanding (around the business’s stability, longevity, etc) for low-risk and low-value purchases, rather than firmwide replacements.

“ Firms will find ways to work with a supplier they want to do business with (for example, sharing their own policies).”

(Law firm)

One way of supporting smaller providers is to pay for a proof of concept.

“ Larger suppliers also like it because they think it shows the firm has skin in the game, but it is difficult for the change champion given that budgets are tight for proof of concepts. It could be better to just do the first three months or year at a reduced rate, with a commitment to trial feedback over the year.”

(Law firm)

“ It is hard to get GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) sets of data to train your system in. It would be great if suppliers could provide free dummy redacted data, such as a set of corporate documents. Just taking out the personal information isn’t enough. It needs to be replaced with something meaningful but fake. A training set.”

(Law firm)

“ We have a learning team with change management. They use psychology to understand implementation. We don’t usually bring in the provider.”

(Law firm)

How can UKLTA help?

Key discussion points:

- How can we move more law firms out of the traditionalist zone and into a space where they are looking to innovate? Is there a role the UKLTA could play in helping firms understand how legaltech could support innovation?
- Once we have firms looking to innovate, what support do they need in order to become true innovators?

The delegates felt there was a lot of information in the market for larger law firms, for example from the ILTA (International Legal Technology Association), and from various conferences and events. The legaltech community is generally collegiate and good at sharing experiences.

However, certain information would be helpful in navigating solutions and helping with adoption, such as a *“simple guide for everything that’s out there, what it does and how we can implement.”*

“ We want an independent review. You can get information on what the top 200 are using in product terms which is a guide but might not tell you all you need. It’s difficult to get unbiased views—for example—a ‘which’ view. The good the bad and the ugly. It doesn’t need bells and whistles but if it gets 80 percent of lawyers using it on ‘Day one’ you can focus your resources on the remaining 20 percent.”

(Law firm)

“ Lots of firms like to make a big splash about using tech but what’s the reality? They might only have used it on one transaction. We might not need to buy the market leading product. Lots of solutions might not meet our needs. At demo and sales-stage it’s hard to evaluate that. There is the risk of following the crowd up a blind alley.”

(Law firm)

“ Firms feel they must be doing AI but we need to understand the problem first. Otherwise you end up trying to fix a problem that isn’t the key problem.”

(Law firm)

The delegates speculated on the knowledge or competencies that lawyers might benefit from acquiring to enable them to evaluate solutions better, such as basic guides to hosting or blockchain, and whether there was a role for the UKLTA in providing this sort of content. However, lawyers are already saturated with information in the day job. Anything more would have to be concise, targeted and highly relevant.

“ Adopt the lean model. Give them what they need to know to do the job. We don't need to be overloaded. Lawyers get over-whelmed which creates problems with adoption. Take it back to basics.”

(Law firm)

“ You also need just in time information, less just in case information. If you want to find out more...click here.”

(Law firm)

“ We train lawyers too much. What I want is for them to come to me with real world problems. We probably have a solution already. Not enough of a feedback loop on that.”

(Law firm)

Conclusion

The first lockdown that took place in the UK earlier this year was a watershed moment for some firms, bringing about a realisation that they need to be much more in touch with how both the business and practice of law can be improved through greater use of technology—especially when it comes to communicating with their clients.

Through our roundtables the UKLTA gained a deeper understanding of the relationship between law firms and technology providers, the barriers to adoption they are facing, and how the UKLTA can help.

Our snapshot reveals that firms are at very different stages of their technology journey—some firms are a long way down the path while others are taking their first steps. Progression is not always related to the size of the firm. Whilst dedicated innovation and legaltech teams are prevalent in larger firms, other firms relying on team members taking an interest in legaltech as more of a ‘side project’ are also successfully leveraging technology within their business.

Furthermore, some areas of law are more open and better suited to new technology and service delivery models than others. For some areas of law, external pressures are driving firms to reassess how services are delivered and thus accelerating technology adoption.

Of course, technology for technology’s sake is not the solution—firms need to have invested time in mapping workflows and processes to identify where bottlenecks or pain points exist. Only then should they seek to identify if technology can provide the solution. When a firm reaches that point, the UKLTA needs to be able to assist them in identifying suitable tech solutions.

Although the term ‘legaltech’ groups together technologies that are designed to solve challenges in the legal problem space, the UKLTA considers any technology that can improve the business or practice of law to be of benefit to its members. Specific problems may have already been solved in another sector but technology vendors have not yet considered the suitability of their product for use within the legal sector.

Through our community, the UKLTA will help law firms identify what technology is already out there, what it can be used for, and how it will benefit firms and their clients. This will be supported by case studies from technology providers to make it easier for firms to see the practical applications of the technology available.



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