

Thomson Reuters Contract Express



Simmons & Simmons Customer Success Story

The goal

In 2010, Simmons & Simmons decided to introduce document automation in order to streamline their entire document production process. Chris Lewis, their current Practice Productivity Manager, describes their motivation; *“it was about looking at the market place, seeing what people were doing, how we compared to them in our use of technology, and realising that document automation was something that as a forward-thinking firm we should be looking at more closely.”* According to Chris, in a post-2008 world, all organisations need to think about how they can change and project themselves forward in order to be perceived as forward thinking market leaders; *“firms have come to a realisation that they can’t sit on their laurels anymore”*, Chris. Particularly for law firms, it’s not just about the quality of the advice that they give, it’s also about how they deliver that advice and manage the costs for their clients.

“We are going to automate it, and give our fee earners the ability to produce documents more quickly and efficiently, and be able to pass on those savings to our clients.”

Chris Lewis, Practice Productivity Manager



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Chris believes these were the two main reasons why Contract Express was chosen. *“Mainly, Contract Express was the choice of our peer group, so whilst other providers were available in the marketplace, they weren’t necessarily used by law firms of a similar standing to ourselves.”* The Contract Express team put in the effort to really understand what they were looking for and had a clear roadmap which laid out how they wanted to develop the product in subsequent years, something which apparently the other vendors had failed to do. This was essential for future-proofing their investment. *“We are not thinking about what is going to happen over the next few months, we are thinking about the next three to five years. In large business such as this, three years is no time at all,”* Chris explains.

The solution

There were a couple of things that Chris thought particularly helpful in pushing the document automation forward. *“If you’ve got a few partners that are technically minded and embrace change and can champion it, and if you can also prove that there is a clear time saving, and other benefits, it makes things a lot easier.”* Simmons & Simmons is a firm that is constantly looking at all aspects of technology, how it can be more efficient and how it can offer its clients more value for money: *“This is the reason our Managing Partner said ‘we are not going to use the old-fashioned way of using standard documents. Instead, we are going to automate it, and give our fee earners the ability to produce documents more quickly and efficiently, and be able to pass on those savings to our clients.’”* Getting the initial buy-in is facilitated by picking the right documents for automation. *“When you look at automating documents, you need to be as analytical of the use of the document, as you are of the content. It can take three weeks for someone to mark up a document, and one week to automate it, and then you realise in 12 months that it’s only been used once,”* Chris explains.

The risk management department were the first to dive in. *“We started automating our engagement letters, so it was actually a non-fee earning department. All our engagement letters are now automated. There were several reasons behind that. One was that there were far too many different engagement letters flying around.”* It saves them about 30 minutes per engagement letter, and with about 200 letters created a month, that can equate to a 100-hour time saving each month. This can equate to two weeks of secretarial time a month in a large firm like Simmons & Simmons.

Next up was the banking practice. *“One of the partners in Banking was very keen to get this security document automated,”* Chris says. Because of the way it’s now been drafted and automated, people are less likely to keep errant clauses and the lawyers report that it saves them five drafting hours every time they use it, making a total of 85 hours of partner time. *“Again, yes, it does save valuable time, but the business sees a greater benefit in a clean document with no underlying metadata, so it’s far less likely to corrupt, making life easier for everybody,”* Chris says. The standard way of producing a document would involve printing it out and marking it up before giving it to a secretary. Avoiding this can total a saving of a several thousand pounds a year, and another added benefit is the reduction in the firm’s carbon footprint.

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The result

There is an agreement across the firm that the main benefits of document automation are cost savings, improved risk management and the increased quality of documents. However the benefits don't end there, Simmons & Simmons also discovered that Contract Express can be used as a knowledge sharing tool. *"Document automation allows you to give someone who perhaps isn't as legally trained the answers to the questionnaire,"* Chris explains. Because of the way it is structured, and the guidance in the questionnaire, it forces you to think. *"It forces trainees and qualified lawyers to think about their choice and how it impacts their document, especially now with Preview View, where the user can see the document change before their eyes."* Because of the content that has typically been built into the questionnaire by a lawyer with more knowledge than the user, Contract Express allows more experienced lawyers to share knowledge and to contribute to a junior's development.

Chris believes the biggest support from the Contract Express team has been providing them with expert advice, *"allowing us to tap their knowledge of the different approaches possible based on their experience."* This is facilitated through events such as the Customer Forums where customers are invited to share knowledge, best practice, experience, and learn about the product roadmap.

The future

In terms of the impact document automation is having on legal services in general, Chris believes it makes firms more competitive; *"It's going back to the previous comparison between creating a document on a type writer and producing it on a Word processor. There are no firms that still produce documents on a type writer."* He believes there will come a point when there are very few firms, of their size at least, that create documents without some form of automation.

Whether it's within the firm's online offerings or their technology bundle; *"They've got to do it or they get left behind."* He believes that where firms used to have typing pools there will be automation teams instead. *"Firms will need to be able to say 'we can produce these documents for you quicker, or we can let you make your own documents, but we will look after the templates for you.'" Chris. This in turn will open up legal access to clients who want transparency and to know how their money is being spent. "A firm will need to be able to provide these services faster than they used to be able to do, without cutting back on legal knowledge, and the only way to do that is through things like document automation,"* Chris concludes.

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