



INDUSTRY CASE STUDY

Express checkout

Katja Ullrich-North, global head of knowledge management, and Sarah Houghton, document automation manager, explain how Contract Express from Thomson Reuters has boosted efficiency at Hogan Lovells

When Katja Ullrich-North, global head of knowledge, and Sarah Houghton, document automation manager, joined Hogan Lovells in 2017, document automation wasn't being used to its maximum potential, they say. But, using Contract Express from Thomson Reuters, they were quickly able to get their lawyers up to speed, making more use of automation and seeing some measurable impacts.

"One of our core objectives as a firm is to provide our clients with consistent quality of service, delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner," Ullrich-North says. "With a focus on automation, we knew that we could help deliver on this while also influencing a number of internal efficiency drivers. Sarah joined the firm shortly after me, and we immediately implemented the

structures, processes and systems required for a successful document automation function. We initially concentrated on London, simply because we had lawyers who already understood the value proposition. We then rapidly expanded the offering to our European and US offices."

Auto-mates

Once the duo had decided on a drive to increase document automation, they needed to get the lawyers on board and use the platform. Luckily, the decision around what software to use was a straightforward one.

Ullrich-North says: "Contract Express was already used at the firm to some extent. Given the product's position in the market and our desire to make a rapid impact with automation, we didn't



see a need to select a different provider. It was of limited value to focus our efforts on automating documents that fell outside core legal work, so the first step was to promote automation in the practice groups where it could provide most value.” The uptake of document automation by the lawyers was partly achieved due to the simplicity of the interface, they say. Lawyers only have to fill in details using a questionnaire tool, which then automatically populates documents with the necessary information.

Houghton explains: “Our lawyers find Contract Express intuitive to use. We tell people that if they can shop online, they’ll be able to answer a Contract Express questionnaire. It is important we use tools that don’t require in-depth training so we can increase adoption throughout the firm. Our lawyers are extremely busy and, as we promote the time-saving benefits of automation, it’s essential we have a platform that is easy for them to use.”

Ways of work

Once that initial buy-in has been achieved, responsibility for improving efficiency passes into the hands of the lawyers – they have to really use it. So, has the push for more document automation resulted in tangible benefits?

Ullrich-North says that Contract Express has had a deep impact on how lawyers get work done: “Document automation has contributed to the transformative way in which we work at Hogan Lovells. Adoption rates are high, and our return on investment has been validated.”

But what does this actually look like? Houghton says, “It significantly reduces drafting time, so our lawyers can focus on bespoke drafting and value-added services rather than the administrative elements of their documents. Our lawyers didn’t train to be removing or adding plurals, or changing buyer to seller throughout an agreement. These are elements which can easily be automated for them. We promote document automation by saying that we can take out the boring bits, which helps get buy-in as well.”

And not only does it reduce drafting time, she says. It also addresses the potential risk of inaccurate documents.

“I’ve spoken to partners who have been spending time correcting minor errors and double checking party details in signature blocks. Once

these documents are automated, these issues are no longer a concern, because the partner knows that every first draft will be consistent. So document automation reduces the risk of errors and creates a standardised approach to drafting.”

Documenting change

Of course, it’s not all about the lawyers (this is **Briefing**, after all). Contract Express has also been able to make Houghton’s own team more efficient.

“There’s such an extensive list of author functions that we rarely find something we can’t do. The automation team is always discovering new features. The error-checking functionalities such as ‘usage analysis’ and ‘highlight mark’ are extremely useful. They enable the team to locate errors quickly, which really saves time and allows us to get the questionnaires live to our lawyers in a timely fashion.”

This functionality has led to measurable results, as the team monitors usage and time saved.

Houghton explains: “The time saved per document varies. With our biggest suites of documents, we estimate around 90 minutes per draft; on our smaller documents about 18 minutes. But if they are documents that we produce frequently, 18 minutes can still have a huge impact on the overall time saved.”

Ullrich-North adds: “The automation team are then able to take these results to the practice groups to demonstrate how automation can enhance efficiency. The ability to report on usage means that we can easily understand the value that document automation brings to the firm, which in turn justifies further investment. These types of metrics also help to promote the benefits to those practice areas that we are yet to engage with. However, few lawyers at Hogan Lovells need convincing of the benefits, and demand is high.”

Ullrich-North concludes: “Our journey with automation has evolved as we continue to work closely with our clients in this area and layer different technologies to provide more end-to-end client solutions.”

The team at Hogan Lovells seem to see no end to the opportunities Contract Express offers for more efficient working. With clients soon to join their lawyers and business services alike in seeing the benefits, we at **Briefing** await the day it’s offering to write our articles for us. ▀