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CONTRACT EXPRESS

AUTOMATION CHAMPIONS



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Background

At the beginning of 2018 Shearman & Sterling examined the automation possibilities around its documents and processes, tasking the Global Knowledge & Research (GK&R) team to design a proof of concept for one of our teams in the US. Now, I oversee the use of Contract Express across our 24 offices around the world in addition to taking a hands-on role with some of the automation itself. Having a much greater understanding of how automation works allows me to ascertain when a process or document should be automated, but also crucially where this may not be the case. We have a small team of automation experts who work with lawyers, business services teams and individuals across the globe to investigate where and how automation can assist them.



Getting starting

Showing the benefits was easy as the flexibility of Contract Express has allowed us to provide numerous illustrations of the tool for many differing requirements. The use of the pre-formatted templates (from Practical Law) and the clean and straightforward user interface was pivotal for people to understand Contract Express. We have also benefitted from lawyer-to-lawyer conversations, often receiving questions from other lawyers about how they can achieve similar results with automation. Additionally, lawyers joining Shearman from other firms have been keen to utilise automation and have been useful to us in championing previous successes.



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Streamlining processes

Contract Express is seen as one of the firm's core products that will help us achieve greater efficiency and more streamlined work processes. Things like reverting to previously completed questionnaires, easy access and downloadability of templates and very significantly the 'preview' function to show exactly the impact or context of an answer, all assist at a working level. Being able to show a lawyer how automation is achieved whilst avoiding confusion is essential. For this we relied on our colleagues at Thomson Reuters to learn and understand the possibilities.

Understanding the product, the process and the end goal is essential, as well as understanding the aim and processes of the lawyers and the issues they're currently facing. This resulted in a much more tailored solution. It's important to have regular check-ins with those of whom we have worked on automation to ascertain that all pieces of the project are still working. At Shearman we created a beta environment that enabled us to thoroughly test what we wanted to achieve and also helped to develop ideas based on functionality.

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The outcome

Starting small is good - so rather than beginning with a document of several hundred pages with huge amounts of automation, a much smaller document will allow lawyers to see how Contract Express works. Taking an individual or practice group through the automation process from start to finish is hugely rewarding. The proof is in the product itself and as soon as lawyers see or use Contract Express they instantly want to apply it to other documents or processes.

