

Why standardizing legal document production is crucial in the current climate



What impact has remote working had on document production and productivity levels? Are lawyers spending more time editing documents? Has the quality of documents decreased? Will law firms use this as an opportunity to modernize their processes for longer-term success?

These are just some of the questions set out in a recent whitepaper from BigHand looking at legal document creation in the post-pandemic age and featuring commentary from key law firm professionals and industry experts.

The main findings are around the increased need for firms to standardize document creation as a direct result of the global pandemic and remote working.

As a spokesperson and organizing member of the Document Excellence Group commented, "Lawyers sometimes underestimate the value of a well-presented document, and law firms should ensure that complex editing is done by document specialists with access to the right technology to ensure branding and house styles are consistent. Standardizing the document process is especially important while everyone is working remotely to ensure that the quality of documents doesn't go downhill."

This view was echoed by Jeanne Kowalski, Document Specialist at Gould & Ratner, "While there has been a rise of lawyers doing more for themselves, things like numbering and styling will always require expert help. I tell the lawyers to worry about the document content only – and to send it to me to format as I know I can turn it around in minutes with our styling tools, rather than them spending hours on it manually."

With remote working set to become standard process for many firms, addressing document production efficiency will be paramount. A recent ALA webinar poll revealed that 91% of respondents believed that changes in working practices, including more remote working, are permanent, along with 75% believing the current situation will accelerate firms' plans to change their back-office services structure.

Similar results were found in a recent BigHand webinar poll, where a resounding 100% of participants said that they expect to see more home working flexibility for support staff post pandemic. Furthermore, 56% said they were planning to change document production processes, or are already doing so.

It's clear that if structures change, and remote working is set to stay, then standardization of document creation needs to improve. The right processes and technology need to be in place to enable any support staff members to pick up work from any lawyer and complete it from any location.

As senior secretarial staff come up for retirement age, this standardization will also ensure that document production is still efficient, and of high quality. Research conducted by BigHand and ALA earlier this year revealed that North American law firms expect to lose 58% of their legal secretaries by 2024, a sentiment echoed in Europe.

Advice was also given in the BigHand webinar for law firms to start by completing a skills audit of their current staff, and to focus on knowledge transfer and training to address any gaps. Once the areas of focus are identified, firms must act to ensure they have easy-to-use, robust technology in place for document creation.

Choosing technology partners that offer ongoing help and training beyond the initial technology roll-out will also be key to achieving the desired document creation efficiency and standardization.

Download BigHand's full whitepaper '[Legal Document Creation in the Post-Pandemic Age](#)'

