



Back in 2010 I wrote an article. It compared the creation of a well-constructed document to the equivalent of a factory producing a carefully crafted and assembled 'widget'.

The reason I wrote this article was to highlight document production efficiency (or inefficiency) in law firms.

The article was not to offend document production specialists, insinuating they were a 'production line' but to highlight they may be producing different end products, but the efficiency of production and the quality of the final product is fundamental to both businesses.

Having invested hundreds of thousands of pounds on the implementation of Document Management Systems to store and retrieve information, there are still very few firms which have defined processes surrounding the production of documents, even though this is absolutely fundamental to their businesses.

While the production of documents is essential to the business of law and any professional services firms, there has been relatively little attention paid to the processes that lead to the finished output.

However, we pose the question of whether process efficiencies relating to core business functions, like document creation, brand consistency and house style have been neglected and now we need to add to this list, risk and compliance. The document production processes need to be quick, efficient, reliable and robust, with the core 'container', ensuring the correct data and content and a consistently styled output.

Transactional documents, and sharing of any documents between parties, for comments and amendments, is still extremely challenging. Whether sharing via extranets, sending PDFs, comparing versions, managing versions, restyling of house styles from one firm to another – all the challenges are still there. We all need to raise awareness and 'bang the drum' about these problems, to ensure technology firms and management boards, understand the issues. They so often, get lost in all the other IT discussions.

Document automation is fantastic, we see real value every day in the projects we implement. However, the same old challenges are still there – firms MUST tackle the topic of house style, it's amazing that this is still an issue in so many firms. We need to ask ourselves why? Is it because of the 'we've always done it that way' naysayers or is it because it's perceived as "too hard to change". One for a poll maybe? Whatever the reasons, we need to sell the benefits internally to all firms.

If you asked your lawyers the three most important pieces of software they use in their business, the list would probably contain "email", "time recording", "financial reporting", "Document Management" and others but how many would say Microsoft Word?

Attitudes are changing.....and we all expect the ways in which documents are produced over the next five years to be considerably more efficient and with much greater accuracy. It will also help firms meet that mounting demand for doing 'more for less'. The way Companies transact their business has changed dramatically over the last ten years and most recently the rapid changes brought upon companies, because of the pandemic.

The importance of Document Creation, Automation, Styling and all of the other challenges mentioned above must be on that list of top 5, let's help get in on the Management Boards as agenda items, let's raise awareness of how efficiency gains can be made so simply.

In a briefing on legal efficiency back in June 2010, Richard Susskind, a legal technology specialist said: "Lawyers are in the business of generating documents, and for over 30 years we have had technologies that will help support this process, make it more reliable and quicker – and somehow we just haven't embraced that." Do you still think in 2022 this is still relevant?

So what about the "widget" analogy? In a factory, every part of the production line process is reviewed and honed to make it the most efficient possible. It ensures that the end product, "the widget", is produced consistently, in the most cost-effective way, and to the highest quality.

So how about the legal world learning from this in relation to their own widgets (documents)?

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