Liberating in-house legal services through automation

Richard Seabrook, managing director at Neota Logic, explains how automation offers exciting new ways to deliver traditional legal services inside corporations.

Advances in internet connectivity, automation software and the continued pervasiveness of consumer technologies, has created heightened expectations in the speed of response, value for money and service quality inside organisations. There is also the realisation that access to services requires a strategic and scalable response that is not limited by the capacity of the service provider.

Legal services are not immune to these issues of raised expectations and access. Having to manage an exponential increase in demand for legal expertise with scarce experts and limited budgets is becoming an impossible task for many in-house lawyers. There is a fundamental need to make legal expertise more accessible to the business and to deliver that expertise securely and effectively directly at the point of need. But how can in-house legal departments deliver accurate, consistent and swift legal services to their business customers with traditional methods?

Transformative technologies now exist that allow for a great deal of legal expertise to be automated and transformed into affordable, scalable and convenient online services that can be accessed directly by the business.

At Neota Logic, this is what we do. Our vision is to liberate legal expertise to the wider business through automation. And we do this by providing a powerful automation platform for building and deploying legal applications.

And we're not alone in this view: according to CLOC's 2018 State of Corporate Legal Departments, 41% of legal departments interviewed stated 'Using technology to simplify workflow and manual processes' was their top priority.

Liberating expertise

The Neota Logic platform puts the legal team in control, by allowing them to build, or have built for them, bespoke applications that automate end to end legal services and turn their in-house legal expertise into efficient online services. Online services such as new legal request portals, case intake and assessment tools, fact analysis and self-service advice systems, case routing and document automation can all be built, without the need for programmers, to reduce cost and improve the accuracy and speed of business decisions.

These systems increase the coverage of the legal function in the business, release expensive resources from the requirement to provide expertise to routine matters and ensure that the services provided are always of the highest calibre to meet the expectations and needs of the business user.

Unlike 'black box' machine learning technologies that cannot explain their actions, applications created with Neota Logic replicate the thinking and actions of legal experts and in doing so, create a clear audit trail in digital form, for future reporting purposes.

Where to begin?

It can often be difficult for organisations to know where to begin when deciding which legal services to automate first. Our advice is

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>
> Richard Seabrook,
> Neota Logic

to perform an initial analysis of the frequency and type of requests the legal team are currently receiving. Often, organisations will be surprised to learn that many requests they receive will be of the same nature, albeit with variations by product line, department or jurisdiction, but essentially, needing the same type of service in response.

Once these requests have been identified it's time to start thinking about designing solutions to address these requests, bearing in mind that solutions may require a combination of technology and humans in the loop and should always be designed from the client perspective backwards.

It's important to note that not all legal tasks should be automated initially. There is typically a 'sweet spot' for frequent and low-risk or complexity tasks such as document drafting, online question and answer portals and routine compliance advice.

How does it work?

Most self-service applications use codified rules to carry out tasks, often based on simple decision trees with flowcharts of questions generated from internal policies and procedures. The answer a user gives to a question might determine which branch the system follows until it is able to reach a conclusion such as generating an advice note, a contract or a compliance check.

One of the long-term benefits of systems such as Neota, is that once deployed, they actually give you data about how the business is accessing the legal function and where issues or blockages lie. This insight is hugely powerful and can help improve the business as a whole. For example, where the same set of clauses are being negotiated repeatedly with trading partners leading to delays in time to contract, the system data will flag these delays and the root causes can be proactively examined and addressed.

Examples of applications powered by Neota Logic utilised by corporate legal departments around the world today include: new legal case intake and assessment tools, automation of legal playbooks, self-service compliance advisors and document lifecycle automation such as confidentiality agreements, commercial contracts and contract review.

So, what does this mean for the legal department? Automation platforms allow the legal department to perform their duties at scale, in the best possible manner, with the least amount of resource to meet the ever-increasing demands they face. By embracing automation tools in-house teams can widen the businesses' access to their legal expertise, reduce the reliance on expensive outside counsel, and reinvent how these services are built, delivered and consumed. Embracing these technologies can provide substantial and game-changing cost-saving gains and help the business in making better commercial decisions. Legal departments will then be able to focus their resources on the most critical matters, knowing that they are delivering routine guidance to the business cost-effectively and securely. ■