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Matter Management Systems: The Complete Guide to What You Need to Know

Matter management solutions give you the ability to compile a complete knowledge base of the relationships between costs, risks, legal department work load, matter status and strategies.

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Welcome to today's corporate legal department. In a heightened legislative and regulatory environment with strengthened laws relating to corporate governance, legal departments have been thrust into the spotlight. This has led to a higher profile within the corporations that they advise, resulting in increasing pressure to be accountable for performance and spend. Today's in-house lawyers are expected to be half attorney and half business analyst.

Fortunately, technology exists that allows lawyers to be lawyers while centralising, standardising and providing controlled access to the information associated with the work they do. Matter management solutions, widely adopted throughout the United States, produce a valuable business edge by providing comprehensive coverage of all aspects of your legal department operations.

What is matter management?

A matter management solution is a fully integrated tool that allows a legal department to manage a matter from beginning to end. It enables in-house counsel to monitor the overall performance of a legal department, its individual matters and the efficiency of its outside counsel. It also provides information and analytical tools that support both the working attorney as well as executive management.

Matter management features include:

- **Docket and calendar:** the ability to record important events during a matter's life cycle, set up deadline reminders for attorneys and legal assistants and automate associated document creation and tasks.
- **Time keeping:** if desired, the ability to charge the time of each law department staff member or outside counsel to specific matters.
- **Budgeting:** the facility to create detailed and effective budgets and accruals for major litigation and complex transactions.

- **Matter identification and tracking:** the ability to capture detailed information about matters, including status issues and notes and any other relevant information associated with specific work types.

- **Outside counsel and vendor information tracking:** the ability to save information about law firms and service providers within the system at as detailed a level as required, including the ability to track individual fee earner rates.

- **Fee or invoice tracking:** the means of tracking and providing valuable information on trends and billing guideline compliance related to fees and other expenses.

Outside counsel billing guidelines are routinely enforced with these systems allowing in-house lawyers to focus on substantive relationship issues and invoice content.

- **Reporting:** the ability to produce real-time queries and detailed management reports that allow you to develop better insight into the operations of your legal department. The type of report is limited only by the creativity of the user and the department.

- **Integration capabilities:** the capacity to integrate with other in-house and general corporate technology solutions such as intellectual property, accounts payable or e-invoicing systems to streamline processes and provide a more detailed picture of overall legal department performance and mesh legal department data with other corporate data.

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Benefits of matter management systems

A properly configured and integrated matter management solution enhances and optimises the overall performance of a corporate legal department at many levels.

Matter management solutions centralise all matter information. You can easily locate and manage data for any kind of matter type, including intellectual property, litigation, claims, transactions and regulatory. It is also simple to locate similar matters, aggregate matter information and compare it by geography, business unit, product, issues and category.

Matter management solutions allow you to manage your internal resources. With one click, you can access information that indicates which lawyer is working on which matter, which one has extra bandwidth and when activities associated with each matter will be completed. Everything is tracked, from what you are working on to what those who report to you are working on. This ability to audit the internal workload produces an insight into how to better manage internal resources.

Matter management solutions let in-house counsel work more efficiently with outside counsel and vendors. A smartly deployed matter management solution gives you the power to establish case plans and budgets, forecast matter costs, negotiate matter rates, conduct comparative analysis and intelligently outsource work to the best provider at the most advantageous terms – all based on the historical data collected by the system.

Matter management solutions help in-house counsel take control of legal spend. Gone are the days when outside counsel spend was barely a blip on the corporate radar. Legal department managers achieve true business insight when they can correlate the cost information with the matter facts and outcomes. Business intelligence and reporting tools provide extraordinary visibility into the performance of a legal department and its relationships with outside providers.

Matter management solutions ultimately deliver better service to internal clients. With this solution responsiveness is improved significantly. This allows for a faster turnaround, greater accessibility and better quality. Additionally, process and procedure are standardised while controlling quality of service. Routine tasks can be automated and standard work simplified.

Matter management solutions allow in-house counsel to manage risk more effectively and make outcomes more predictable. Risk and matter portfolio analysis, including case assessments and outcome analysis, are easy to access, compile and review. Over time, as information on representative cases is collected, these systems can identify patterns and alert managers and users to elevated risks.

Research, research, research

Remember - one size does not fit all. In your quest for a matter management solution, do not forget to do your homework.

- Define your requirements by surveying users and peers to determine overall feedback on matter management features and vendors. Use their information to help build a list of priorities.
- Survey potential vendors through requests for more information and proposals. This will provide a list of differentiators that will help in the information-gathering and the decision-making process. Focus on vendors with an established presence in Europe, including sales, implementation and support.

Top Tips for Selecting a Matter Management System

As with any technology implementation, preparation is half the work. Before you select a vendor, remember that the following steps are critical for successful matter management implementations:

Set clearly defined goals.

Determine if the system and its features will support your company's organisational strategy and objectives. Create realistic goals and measure the attainment of these goals to verify results.

Get complete commitment from top to bottom.

Widespread participation by a cross-section of staff guarantees a smoother implementation and adoption process.

Employ sound methodologies.

Make sure the basic steps in technology selection and implementation are followed.

Ensure that the implementation has adequate resources.

Appropriate staffing and skills must be provided for the selection, implementation and ongoing support of the implementation.

Train and document.

Provide adequate and tailored user training, manuals and other means of support.

Explore integrations.

Determine how the matter management system can optimise its performance by integrating with the legal department's current technology.

Go local.

Finding a provider with a local office isn't enough. The provider should also have local support – complete with sales personnel, consultants and implementation and support experts. This ensures a high-level quality of service and the ability to truly benefit from best practices knowledge.

- Define your plan by determining what needs to be done, which person will be tasked with championing this implementation, when he/she will be tasked and how the project will be funded. Evaluate your risks and proactively plan for them. Write a plan to identify a reasonable completion date. On average, a matter management implementation takes 13-36 weeks depending on customisation and technology. Also, outline major project tasks, set reasonable completion dates for the tasks and assign resources to each task.

Above all, do not rush the process. Leaping ahead without adequate research results in a system that is poorly implemented and integrated. In the end, it defeats the purpose of the implementation.

The long-term vision

There is no doubt that in order to drive the superior performance demanded by management today, business knowledge must be complete. Matter management solutions give you the ability to compile a complete knowledge base of the relationships between costs, financial and reputation risks, legal department workload, matter status and beneficial plans and strategies.

By implementing this technology, you will not only improve legal department performance and efficiency, but also be able to provide quantitative and qualitative proof of your department's value within the corporation.

About the Author

Jeff Hodge, DataCert's vice president and senior director of Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), has more than 15 years of experience working with clients to implement and utilise advanced technologies to improve processes and decrease costs.

As a champion of U.S. and European e-business and standards and a pioneer of the legal electronic invoicing industry, Hodge often writes and speaks on corporate legal strategies and the use of legal technology.

He is a member of the United Nation's Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business and a key player in the initial launch of the Uniform Task Based Management System (UTBMS) to facilitate the upgrade and expansion of industry standard task codes. He is the founder of the UTBMS Initiative, a worldwide effort to update, internationalize and supplement UTBMS for global use.