



From the Outside Looking In

Should your firm utilize an internal IT team or outsource its IT management function? Combining the benefits of both can boost firm-wide productivity – and the organization's bottom line.

BY HEINAN LANDA

For any business, having a solid IT team will undoubtedly accelerate the organization's success.

Having confidence in the scope of the team's capabilities and knowledge is critical, but how can you be sure that all of your IT bases are covered? After all, your IT team undoubtedly has a strong knowledge base of your organization's technology needs, but the spectrum of technology management has multiple, ever-evolving components that can be hard to stay on top of.

In other words, no one person can handle all the elements for any given organization – especially a law firm, where technology plays such an integral role in daily operations. There are simply too many pieces to the puzzle, and with technological advances continuing to adapt and improve at an alarming pace, businesses should continue to look for ways to expand and strengthen their IT team's knowledge base and toolkit. One of the best ways to do this is through outsourcing.



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GETTING STARTED

You don't have to choose between an internal team and outsourced IT management for your firm. If you want to combine the benefits of both, though, how do you decide what to outsource?

First, assess and evaluate your internal IT team. Audit what talents you have in your current team and what tools the team members are competent to work with. This audit can also showcase your team's talents and weaknesses, and from that point onward, you can decide who, or what, to bring in from the outside. A technologically capable, specialized and computer-savvy external team can complement and enhance the skills that your internal IT team already brings to the firm.

BENEFITS OF OUTSOURCING

What can an outside technology company bring to the table?

- **A broader industry perspective.** An internal IT team usually has a solid understanding of technologies already in use in your firm. However, an outside team will usually have broad exposure to many different technologies. An external source can use this knowledge to provide consulting, planning and budgeting improvements when it comes time to set an IT direction for your organization. For example, what are the best disaster recovery technologies for law firms? A firm that has experience with several of them might be able to point the way.
- **Project expertise.** Because an internal IT team's focus is usually on the day-to-day support and management of firm-wide technology, team members often bring in consultants with project management expertise when it comes to major technology upgrades or the implementation of new, unfamiliar technologies. Pursuing

specific external technology expertise and, more importantly, project management experience can make upgrades and implementations in your firm nearly trouble free.

- **Specific management tool technologies.** Many technology companies have spent tremendous resources in developing and implementing system monitoring and management tools for their clients. Internal IT teams can use this specialized expertise and the associated software and hardware systems to further organizational goals and to efficiently cut the difficulty, cost and time it would take to develop these management tools in-house.

COST ANALYSIS

According to Accenture, outsourcing related to technology services can save some businesses up to 30 percent. Plus, some of the more important long-term business benefits include increasing efficiency, reducing risks and lowering the cost of labor and training. Companies with internal teams that try to juggle everything themselves often find themselves paying more. After all, training can be a costly investment for most firm – even more so when there is a need to hire and train staff for short-term projects. Outsourcing can save money in this area by providing a ready cadre of resources in a specific area. It can also boost productivity levels, freeing the internal team to handle the day-to-day management of the firm's systems.

In addition, as technological advances continue to change the face of the legal profession, investments in such technologies create more risks. An outside provider can manage these risks and employ its experience and expertise to help a firm avoid costly mistakes.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If you decide to bring in an outside team, especially if you already have an internal IT team in place in your firm, there are a few items to consider.

- **Transparency.** Will the external company make its documentation and practices transparent to your internal team? Can it use the same type of issue ticket system so that the additional IT support doesn't disrupt users? These are important questions to ask when combining the two teams.
- **Complementary tools and talent.** You've done the initial analysis, so you know what technology tools or talents you are looking to supplement with the external company. If you are planning to use its tools, get a demonstration (and have your internal IT team members sit in and evaluate). If you are planning to benefit from the company expertise, ask comprehensive questions about the specific skill set you are hoping to augment (and have your internal IT team sit in to determine if its knowledge really is complementary in nature).
- **Personality.** As with every new hire, personality is important. Be sure to assess whether the external company's employees and processes will work well with your internal IT team and firm culture.

GOOD TIMING

With law firms worldwide scrutinizing their bottom lines during the economic downturn, now is the perfect time for you to consider the most efficient and cost-effective ways to accomplish your firm's goals – especially when it comes to technology. Take the time to evaluate your internal IT team and to decide what weak areas of expertise need to be strengthened. Don't reinvent the wheel; instead, know when and how to outsource prudently to ensure that your technology is working optimally for your firm. ✱

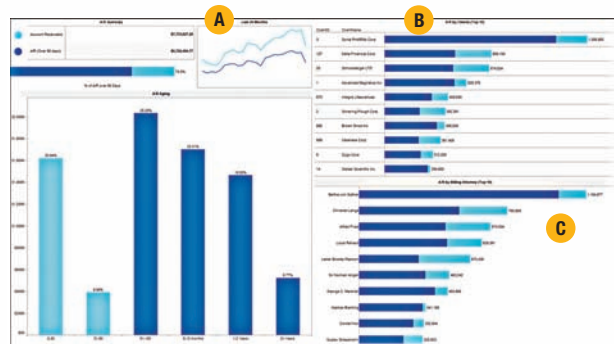
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