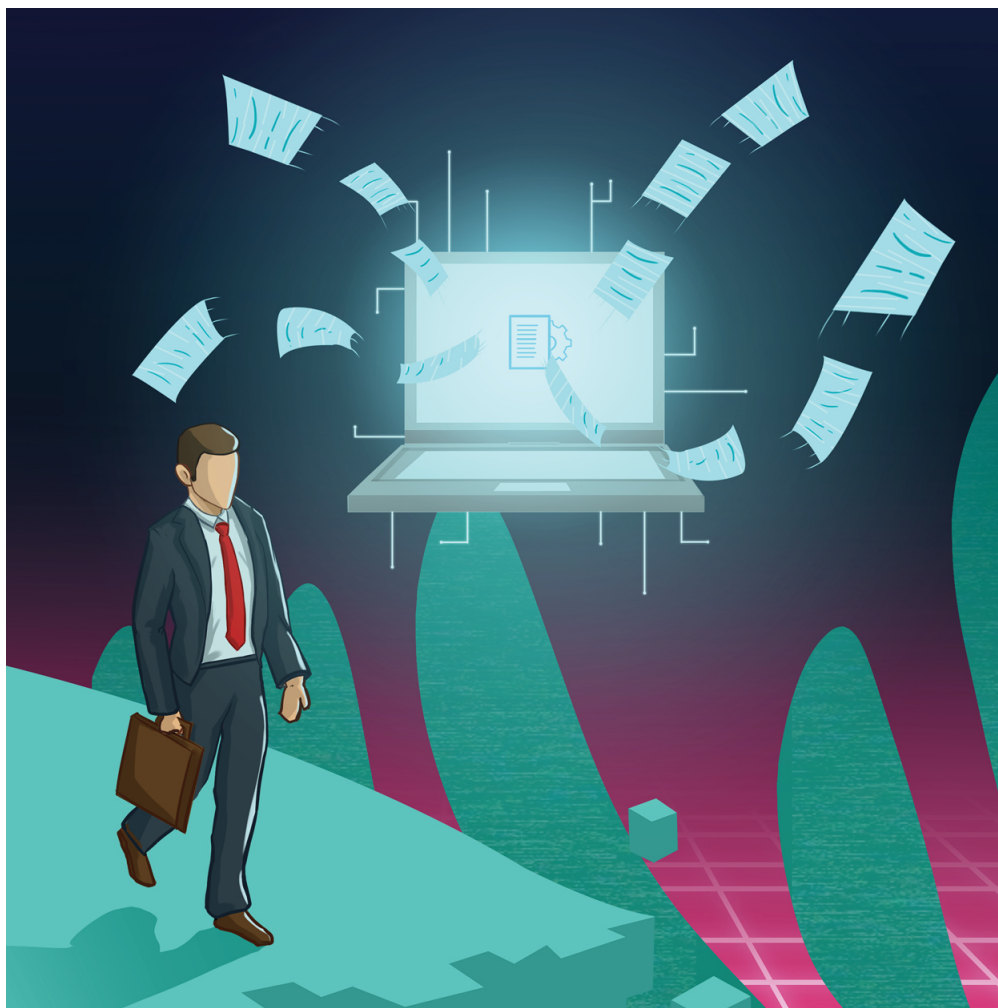


Document automation: a key part of an organisation's digital transformation journey

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The transformation of the legal sector from one of dusty books, paper files and time-intensive processes to new, automated and innovative ways of delivering legal services has been at a rapid pace over the past few years. This digital shift is impacting all sectors and we continue to see how our clients are disrupting their industries, and being disrupted by their competitors. Our clients are on an innovation journey and expect us to understand its opportunities and challenges and support them on it. One of the ways we have been doing this is through our document automation offering.

With a plethora of legal technology available to help with all aspects of a lawyer's role, long gone are the days where lawyers could spend hours creating first drafts of documents and expect to be paid for the time spent doing so. Today we operate in an environment where it is the norm for law firms to be continuously challenged on fees, turnaround times and quality thus equipping people to be able to move through the more mundane and repetitive tasks to the more complex aspects of their trusted advisor roles. This is where being able to produce first drafts of documents through automation comes into its own.

What is document automation?

'Document automation is to lawyers what Excel is to accountants' is a comment which resonates loudly in the legal sector: 'you would not expect your accountant to use an abacus when preparing your financial accounts, so why would clients expect their lawyers to be manually drafting their documents?'. This is a fair question to ask and answer. So what is document automation?

Document automation is the process of automatically generating first drafts of Word documents or forms through answering an online questionnaire. This streamlining of document production results in consistent, uniform and personalised first drafts being produced in a fraction of the time it would have taken previously to create when doing it manually.

The automation of documents is not new to the legal sector. On the contrary, automation solutions have been around for over 20 years. That said, adoption has only really taken off in the past few years as law firms outside the large international ones realise that they simply cannot afford not to adopt the technology. It is a simple case of 'ignore at your peril'.

By automating their documents, one of our clients cut the production of a NDA from 35-45 minutes to 2-5 minutes. A further example is an HR offer letter which previously took 25-30 minutes to produce and now, by being automated, can be created in less than two minutes.

Benefits of document automation

There are numerous benefits which come with automating documents. Directing lawyers to an automation platform ensures that there is consistency with document creation in terms of the look and feel and how documents are structured.

Using automated templates also increases quality and reduces risk as potential inaccuracies and mistakes are removed:

Automation also removes from the user the requirement to remember every key issue as these will have been considered during the process of deciding the extent to which a document should be automated by its original creator.

Increasing efficiency and lowering costs are key benefits. The ability to generate documents quickly and accurately using fewer resources is essential to a busy legal department:

What can be automated?

We have automated documents for both internal and client use in a range of sectors and industries including healthcare, real estate, employment, banking, media and telecommunications. Documents which have been automated (in English, Arabic or both), include: NDAs, employment contracts, legal opinions, settlement agreements, IP documents, powers of attorney, corporate documents, lease agreements; and a range of HR letters. Both individual as well as suites of documents can be created.

What is the document automation strategy at Al Tamimi?

Our clients are at the heart of everything we do. We use our knowledge, experience and intellectual rigour to find innovative solutions to overcome complex business challenges for our clients. A key part of this approach is ensuring that our people have the right tools to deliver the best quality advice. This includes the ability to be able to quickly and accurately produce documents through automation.

Within the firm we have a team of six document automators, including one full time legal engineer. Three of the team are bilingual. This is a clear strength of the firm and unique in the region:

In addition to automating in and around the demands of their day jobs, the automation team meets every week for 'Coding Club'. Taking people away from their desks for a set period of time to code, learn and share knowledge and experience with each other is invaluable and ensures that we are able to realise our document automation strategy both internally and with our clients.

How are we supporting clients?

At Al Tamimi we see quality as a key differentiator, but also recognise the need to respond to commercial pressures by providing premium legal services that represent excellent value for money. Efficiency is part of our culture and way of working. We are constantly looking for ways to create further efficiencies without compromising the quality of the service we deliver.

One way we have increased our efficiency with our service delivery is with our document automation offering. Having had numerous conversations with in-house legal teams, it is apparent that our clients face a range of pressures which include time, responsiveness, multiple 'internal' client demands and high volumes of work. We have helped ease some of these competing exigencies for our clients by automating some of their most frequently used documents such as NDAs, board minutes and supplier agreements. The result has been positive:

Conclusion

Enabling lawyers to increase efficiency, maximise accuracy and minimise risk in the production of first drafts of documents is a 'must have' rather than a 'nice to have' in today's legal sector. As stated at the start of this article, manually producing documents is now a yesteryear and outdated practice. Document automation at Al Tamimi is a key tenet of our internal efficiency strategy and we continue to look for ways to make improvements to how we work in order to deliver the best quality advice to our clients.

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