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Rejecting 'One-Stop Shops,' Firms See Legal Tech Interoperability as Key to Innovation

While 'one-stop-shop' platforms offer a common interface and the convenience of dealing with one vendor, law firms argue that integrating a variety of legal tech tools is the only realistic way to meet clients' needs.

By Victoria Hudgins | March 08, 2021

Despite some claims to the contrary, not all law firms want a "one-stop shop" legal tech platform. For one thing, they see it as nearly impossible for any one platform to meet the needs of every practice group or client. Instead, they expect and prefer vendors to provide third-party interoperability that expands a platform's capabilities.

While legal market trends do fluctuate, more vendors are embracing open platforms as an "access gateway" for various software in a platform, said Benesch chief information officer Jerry Justice.

Such integrations and interoperability are necessary because one-stop-shop legal tech platforms typically don't meet the needs of law firms, added Parker Poe Adams & Bernstein CIO Skip Lohmeyer.

"Larger firms usually will not leverage a single [platform] as they don't offer the flexibility or best-in-class functionally for some of the specific modules," Lohmeyer wrote in an email. "For example, a large firm will generally want a very robust document management system (DMS); but, the one-stop-shop solutions with built-in DMS modules don't always have the ability to meet all the large firm's requirements."

Instead, firms turn to platforms they can enhance with additional third-party technologies, Justice said. "The reality is you want to have an open standards platform so maybe it provides 80% and you need 20% [from another vendor]. They need to take a modern platform approach no matter what it is," he noted.

Taft Stettinius & Hollister CIO Andrea Markstrom agreed, arguing that leveraging point solutions allow firms to better meet their clients' needs and promotes innovation.

"A one-stop shop for certain capabilities is good, [but] I also think mixing in other providers is the right thing to do when it comes to healthy [vendor] competition and making sure you've got a full range of capabilities that are being offered," Markstrom said. "I think sometimes if you limit yourself to one provider you might not have access to other capabilities that are available in the market."

Despite some legal tech companies jockeying for a position as legal's "one-stop shop" in recent years, firms have commonly preferred leveraging various vendors to meet their operational or practice needs, said Norm Mullock, strategy vice president of law firm software and strategy consultant Wilson Allen. He explained that while firms seek a common user interface and want the ease of managing fewer software tools, they also want technology that can stay head of the curve.

"There's been a general preference for a standard platform for applications that work well with one another … [but] the challenge with a platform is: Can they pivot quickly when there's new functionality and compliance rules or new innovations? Can they move their technology forward that keeps up with tech standards and are their specific instances of functionality they are able to offer the market quickly enough?"