

No 'alternatives' anymore

Global legal services demand continuous transformation and collaboration, not divisiveness



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"There is room in the legal market for BigLaw and NewLaw to coexist, complement and collaborate with each other. Legal market positioning and brand definition are also more vital than ever."

own legal experience began with Donahue LLP, which operated from 1997 to 2003 within Ernst & Young (EY) as Canada's first and so far only Big Four multidisciplinary law firm. Many independent legal service enterprises have sprouted since and continue to proliferate in the global marketplace.

So, the acronym ALSP may safely be jettisoned from the legal lexicon for two main reasons: it's more than 20 years out of date, and those who hire legal service providers are increasingly less concerned about a BigLaw or NewLaw distinction, especially when many legal services have become commoditized.

How many traditional law firms claim to do complex work, yet handle rote tasks? Rote work may help junior lawyers to learn, however many clients are refusing to pay for it. Other than for complex matters requiring numerous senior lawyers backed by experienced support teams, clients often don't care who handles their legal work as long as it's done on time and on budget, within a collaborative framework, and supported by clearly scoped plans and communications to manage expectations and deliver without surprises.

That's why there is abundant room in the legal market for BigLaw and NewLaw to coexist, complement and collaborate with each other. It's also why legal market positioning and

brand definition are more vital than ever to enable identification of who does what, especially when legal service provider distinctions become blurred.

There are no "alternative" legal service providers anymore. This is because lawyers and other professionals who provide legal services can be found outside the traditional partnership law firm purview. They reside in corporate-structured law firms, professional services firms, paraprofessional organizations, legal outsourcing operations, legal tech, legal consulting, and various entities that dub themselves NewLaw.

But NewLaw isn't new. US-based Integreon, Inc. was founded in 1998, Axiom in 2000, and in Canada, Cognition LLP (now Caravel Law) and Delegatus Services Juridiques Inc. began in 2005. There are also legal offerings from the Big Four accounting firms, which predate all. My

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Since lawyers tend to be risk-averse, though, it's not surprising that the legal industry has been evolving at a snail's pace. However, with Google launching in the same year as Integreon, access to digital information changed everything. As a result, clients who could do their own research but needed help executing work, and lawyers who bridled at traditional firm structures and methods have been instrumental in NewLaw start-ups and pushing change within BigLaw.

NewLaw and BigLaw can learn from each other. By nature, NewLaw provides a select suite of tightly scoped services that are executed by specially hired talent often aided by technology. A hefty percentage of revenues are reinvested in the business while operations run lean and pivot easily.

BigLaw has the advantages of breadth of expertise and talent, along with infrastructure and financial means. The problem for many traditional law firms is that their pyramid structure is challenging to remodel, and to effect change many are trying to fix their plane while flying it. Some firms are creating streamlined, less expensive versions of themselves as well as operational offshoots, and on-shoring or off-shoring to lower costs in order to protect client relationships and revenues. Meanwhile, their competition may spin off non-core practices to operate as standalones. These firms can then restructure to focus on distinct services that cast them as unique while affording agility to scale if and when needed.

Regardless of strategy and tactics, collaboration between BigNew and NewLaw is a critical factor in securing and retaining client work. Collaboration is successful as long as relationships remain respectful and one doesn't hold dominion over the other, which they don't from the client perspective.

We are all legal services providers now. At a time when the global legal services industry has never been more challenging is when an evolving "new normal" means disruption and innovation become by-products of change.

Providing responsive, solution-oriented, client-first legal services require continual transformation to meet the market's ever-changing demands, while retaining distinctiveness and setting divisiveness aside. 🗨️

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