



BY HEATHER SUTTIE

# The Evolutionary Long Game

How legal innovation may yet beget industry transformation



**THE BLURRING** of lines between Big Law and New Law is getting blurrier, and it's about time — even though the blur is still years away from being a blend.

Lately, there has been a flurry of hook-ups between traditional Big Law firms and the innovative entities of New Law. This may look good, but some questions remain. Is all this teaming up a true desire for change? A long-awaited accelerant? A desire to be seen as progressive with clients? Or, red herring marketing schemes?

## TEAMING UP

It wasn't long ago, 2013 in fact, that McCarthy Tétrault LLP teamed up with Cognition LLP (now Caravel Law) on a major litigation matter. Since then, Cognition has sold the embedded corporate counsel side of its business to US-based Axiom Global Inc. Described as a provider of tech-enabled legal services, Axiom has set something of a global gold standard when it comes to a non-law firm entity that, as of January 2016, has a presence in Canada.

McCarthy has partnered with Toronto-based MaRS LegalX, a legal incubator in the MaRS Discovery District. As part of the alliance, they co-created #LexTech16, a one-day conference held in April to explore the changing legal industry.

Earlier this year, Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP and Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt

LLP announced legal technology initiatives with outside entities. Blakes has a partnering relationship with MaRS LegalX, while Osler has a tie-up with Toronto's Legal Innovation Zone (LIZ), a co-working space and incubator out of Ryerson University.

From a public-relations standpoint, Osler's Innovation Month (February 2016) was, in part, designed to raise awareness about the transformational change sweeping the legal industry. Mara Nickerson, Osler's Chief Knowledge Officer says, "Our involvement with LIZ is an extension of what we're doing on the practice side of things." LIZ's Executive Director, Chris Bentley, is happy to have Osler on board. "This sends a broader signal to the community that innovation is important, Osler is committed to innovation, and LIZ is a place that can support and achieve innovation."

As frenetic as all this partnering may seem, alliances between innovators, incubators, educators and law firms is nothing new. Tech incubators, such as Communitech in Ontario's Waterloo Region, has had law firm involvement almost since the day it started in 1997. Bereskin & Parr LLP, Gowling WLG, Miller Thomson LLP, PCK Perry + Currier Inc. and Buffalo, NY-based Phillips Lytle LLP are on the current roster. Dentons supports Alberta's Startup Edmonton, while Gowling WLG and Pushor Mitchell LLP are partnered with British Columbia's Accelerate Okanagan, and Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP sponsors Vancouver Enterprise Forum and Vantec Angel Network.

In 2005, the late Heenan Blaikie LLP opened a satellite office at MaRS, and six months later, the former Ogilvy Renault LLP hatched a MaRS office right next door. Ogilvy Renault continued to operate at MaRS sharing office space with Cognition in 2010. Now as Norton Rose

Fulbright, this global goliath is the only law firm tenant on MaRS's premises.


In these instances, the sponsor firms offer legal services to innovative technology clients at no or low cost. Alternatively, the firms partnering with MaRS and LIZ are seeking counsel to help them innovate. However, as Nickerson quips, "Innovation is a relative term."

## TRANSFORMING

Innovation is to transformation what metamorphosis is to a butterfly. When it comes to law firm metamorphosis, US-based Seyfarth Shaw LLP and Cooley LLP are fully formed.

Almost 10 years ago, Seyfarth Shaw tailored some of the most appropriate aspects of Lean Six Sigma to devise a process of legal service delivery known as SeyfarthLean. Among the benefits are better communication, increased efficiency, transparent pricing and reduced overall cost.

And then there's Cooley LLP, which launched Cooley GO in June 2014 as a resource for entrepreneurs with businesses at all stages of the growth cycle. It offers legal and business content covering formation, financing, team building, etc., and provides tips, tools, guides and documents for free. By providing free advice and tools, the unspoken message is that the firm is standing by, ready to help if and when need be.

While winning deeper client trust through innovation is an obvious short-game goal, legal industry transformation is the long game. In the meantime, as Nickerson observes, thinking about innovation and doing something about is "a lot more interesting than sitting at your desk marking up documents." 

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