

# Small Department Stretches to Meet Demand Growth

By Jennifer J. Salopek

Like so many in-house legal departments at successful companies, the one at ZS Associates saw requests for legal work increasing as the company grew, while departmental headcount remained static. Yet, the department was a victim of its own success: “We definitely had that ‘free legal services’ problem,” says Jennifer Billingsley, chief legal counsel at the company. To begin the value journey, the department devised a new mission statement that emphasized the expertise its six attorneys and two paralegals could bring to appropriate legal work — “to provide pragmatic, responsive, value-added and cost-effective legal solutions, while balancing risks and rewards” — then set about finding efficient solutions for everything else. The journey ultimately comprised four phases, and Billingsley took much inspiration from ACC Value Champions who had gone before.

“We have always struggled with not having enough resources,” says Billingsley, who had been with the company for 10 years. “I remember reading about the first ACC Value Champions, such as Rockwell International & Seyfarth Shaw. We were inspired by them.”

“**The ZS team took several steps to transform the way they work, including utilizing RFPs to source outside, less-expensive resources on major matters; implementing new technology to track matters, automate workflow and link to electronic contracts; and using a legal process outsourcer to do first-line markups, research and administrative tasks.**”

The transformation was catalyzed by a major cost-cutting initiative across the company in 2012. At that time, the legal department focused primarily on client contracts and members were assigned to support specific clients.

The new mission statement facilitated a new strategy for the legal department, and was an important first step in visualizing the future. “Everyone agreed that we needed to change, and we knew that we were all going to get help from this process,” Billingsley explains. “We needed to realize the biggest bang for the buck. The new mission got us all on the same page about what we were trying to accomplish. Then we were ruthless in deciding where we would spend our efforts. You don’t need a lawyer to chase down a signed contract.”

The ZS legal department reorganized itself into expertise centers, with senior attorneys managing such areas as compliance, data privacy, human resources, and client contracting. Many tasks were shifted to two Indian attorneys who are based in one of ZS’s Indian offices and who support the senior onshore attorneys, primarily with client contracting.

“The cost was significantly less than adding personnel onshore, and our new team members are able to address Indian legal needs more promptly and efficiently,” says Billingsley. She notes that there were non-financial benefits as well: “Allowing our in-house lawyers to specialize—giving them areas they own, and equipping them with tools and resources—allows them to focus on the things they really enjoy.”

Next, ZS contracted with Exigent Group Limited, an India-based legal process outsourcer, on a fixed-price basis for such routine legal tasks as contracting, forms, HR, and research processes. Playbooks were developed for client contracting, vendor contracting, corporate and research

projects, and form updating. This step greatly enhanced efficiency: “Client contracting is now managed by one and a half US attorneys and one offshore attorney instead of four US attorneys,” Billingsley notes. She says that the success of the RFP also led the team to use RFPs for other chunks of legal work that could be delegated to outside service providers under capped and fixed-fee arrangements.

“This has resulted in more predictable outside legal costs, faster turnaround of work and better communication within ZS about expectations for the cost and timing of legal work,” she says. In 2013, the in-house legal department had a 30 percent increase in legal matters that it was managing, including a 13 percent increase in master service agreements and a 34 percent increase in confidentiality agreements.

As its fourth step, the legal team introduced automation and self-service to client contracting support services. Working with technology partner Onit, a Dallas-based company, ZS designed and implemented a customer service portal and a legal work request submission and tracking tool. This did require some internal change management.

“There was some internal resistance, and certain pieces continue to require high touch,” says Billingsley. “But our internal clients have new insight at their fingertips through the dashboard; and for people who were never going to use the tool, we found ways around it.”

The transformation was really complete, she says.

“**All of this has resulted in a fundamental change in how our legal team thinks about accomplishing their work. As we manage the flood of work more effectively, we realize that transformation and reinvention can be an ongoing experience.**”

So now that Billingsley is a Value Champion herself, what advice does she have for readers seeking inspiration? “Just go live,” she says. “The data was not beautifully matched, but I was supportive of my team in the belief that this could happen; we just had to realize that it was okay to make the change.”