15 QUESTIONS
FOR LEGAL OPERATIONS TO ASK WHEN EVALUATING A DMS

iManage
Making knowledge work

Legal Operations professionals are continually evaluating new processes and technologies to help their legal departments be more efficient, productive, and secure. One important area of focus is document management – enabling users to save, search, and work effectively with the documents, emails, and messages that flow through the legal department every day.

Increasingly, organizations have found that traditional enterprise approaches to document management do not meet the specific requirements of legal departments. So, it's no surprise that **57% of Legal Operators plan to update, evaluate, or implement new document management systems (DMS) in the next 12 months.**[1]

Before making an investment in a dedicated secure DMS over standard enterprise solutions, it's important to distinguish the unique functional DMS requirements of legal departments from those of more general enterprise users. It's equally important to understand how modern document management has developed to meet these needs, and enable the legal department to be more secure, agile, and productive.

But where do Legal Operations professionals start in determining if a DMS has the functionality, people and processes required to support their corporate legal needs?

HERE ARE 15 QUESTIONS LEGAL OPERATIONS SHOULD ASK WHEN EVALUATING DMS VENDORS:

1. **How can your DMS help make my legal department more organized and productive?** A DMS vendor should understand your department's organizational needs. Its solution should offer flexible suggested filing locations and document history for documents as well as emails. It should provide intuitive version control to enable collaboration across the enterprise and with outside counsel. And it should display timelines and dashboards to improve productivity across your department.

2. **How does your DMS differ from enterprise solutions in overcoming documentation issues specific to legal professionals?** The capabilities of the vendor's solution should reflect the workflow, collaboration, and security requirements that legal departments require. A legal DMS also differs from other enterprise tools in its ability to organize information in a matter-centric fashion, with metadata and security inheritance so that information can be tagged appropriately based on the type of matter.

3. **Can your solution help me manage all my emails as well as my documents?** A modern DMS must enable legal professionals to manage their emails as effectively as their documents in the same folder structures. By having a single repository for all communications and documents relating to a matter, your organization can be better prepared for compliance with industry and government regulations.

---

4. **How does your DMS help improve my ability to search documents? Can I search the full text of the document?** An IDC study found that knowledge workers spend about 2.5 hours per day, or roughly 30% of the workday, searching for the right information. Modern document management includes more powerful search capabilities that saves valuable time, helps leverage precedent more effectively, and makes more efficient use of information resources. Leading solutions integrate with common applications you use to create documents, including Microsoft Office®, SharePoint®, Gmail®, Adobe®, and Apple iWork®. Also, when dealing with executed contracts, PDFs, and paper documents that are not full-text searchable, some DMS providers offer the capability to effectively process this information, which can save legal departments countless hours of manual searching.

5. **Can your DMS help me manage my paper documents too?** Regulations often require physical documents to remain stored as paper records for varying amounts of time depending on the region or type of document. A modern DMS includes capabilities that allow your legal department to manage both paper and electronic records centrally from a single solution, enabling enforcement of compliance and governance policies, including trigger events, retention periods, and disposition rules.

6. **We have a legacy DM but it's clunky and no one uses it. How easy/intuitive is your solution to use?** The most successful deployments include user adoption as a vital metric. The DMS needs to deliver an intuitive and easy-to-use experience, modeled after the consumer tools that professionals use every day. Ideally the solution will require minimal training and provide embedded learning tools to optimize performance. Some DMS providers will even help convert your team's information from legacy systems and import it into the new DMS. They should utilize a mature partner network that can help with this.

7. **Are all documents in the system accessible on a mobile device?** If I lose my internet connection, do I lose access to saving, searching, and accessing documents? Legal professionals expect the same experience with their DMS from their office desktop to their mobile devices no matter where they are working. Modern document management enables users to work from anywhere on any device, with a consistent interface, so legal departments can be more agile and responsive to business demands. Some DMS platforms even allow for working offline and syncing changes when the device connects to the internet again.

8. **Can your DMS be integrated with our current legal technologies?** Legal teams typically work with several different legal technologies, including matter management, e-billing, e-signature, case management, and contract management. The DMS should integrate seamlessly in this environment, and your technology partner should be able to demonstrate which integrations are available out of the box. And they should also have the technical expertise and experience to implement these solutions through their partner network.

9. **How secure will my documents be?** Legal departments need the highest levels of security protections for proprietary work product, but the security threat landscape is continuously changing. Your DMS needs to deliver a multi-layered approach to security, that's both comprehensive and unobtrusive to the end user. Documents and emails should be automatically encrypted, with need-to-know access set at the document and matter level, as well as behavioral analytics to monitor and flag abnormal user activity. Security protections should also include support for defined regulatory policies, like GDPR and CCPA, while being fully tracked and auditable.

10. **Our legal department wants to implement your DMS in the cloud but IT is concerned about stability and security. What's your DMS cloud strategy?** Modern document management must have a cloud storage capability to enhance organizational agility with rapid deployment, guaranteed reliability, and uptime. To determine superior performance, cloud comparison tests can and should be requested between final DMS contenders. And most importantly, your cloud DMS vendor needs to deliver a multi-layered approach to security starting with Zero Trust, built on trusted cloud standards and certifications (most importantly ISO 27001 series and SOC 2 Type 2),

as well as offer customer-managed encryption key control. Zero trust is built into some Cloud infrastructures from day one. If it is bolted on after the fact, it can introduce additional complexity and risk.

11. What's your strategy for transitioning/ onboarding? What kind of support do you offer? Legal departments often use various enterprise systems for their existing document management and need direction when implementing a legal DMS. Vendors must offer comprehensive support during this transition time, including project management, risk assessment, data migration, recommended design, and additional assistance to ensure change management, user enablement, and user adoption.

12. Will my IT department have an additional burden because of this solution? The modern approach to document management incorporates cloud service delivery, which actually decreases the burden to your IT staff. It enhances organizational agility with rapid deployment, automated updates, and the ability to quickly add new functionality, while your IT resources stay focused on the business. And during implementation, IT should only have minimal involvement with setting up desktops.

13. Who is using your solution today and what do they say about it? Any corporate technology vendor should be able to provide customer references for each of the different industry segments in which they serve. Also, you should do research on legal technology user forums and review sites to ensure you are choosing a vendor that has a strong technological offering and has solved similar business problems to the ones your team is facing.

14. What is the cost of the software? Pricing for legal document management systems usually involves a one-time onboarding fee and then a per-user monthly subscription. Lawyers, as well as admin users, will need licenses to be able to access the full capabilities of the DMS. Ensure that you fully understand all aspects of the pricing quoted to you so you are not surprised by any unexpected costs after implementation. And ask about pricing for any add-on services offered that your team might need.

15. Can you tell me why I should choose your DMS over your competitors? In the crowded legal technology marketplace, it's important to carefully evaluate any potential partner's business viability, customer base, and points of differentiation from competitors. Look for vendors that can provide strong customer references with similar use cases to your own in parallel industries. Conduct research on legal technology user forums and review sites to gauge end users' opinions of their offering. Look for a provider that demonstrates a commitment to partner with you through implementation and beyond to ensure you meet your business goals. And, the DMS vendor should offer a platform solution that provides additional capabilities that your team might need in the future like additional security or artificial intelligence. They should have a reputation for being a leader in the industry for innovation and enhancing solutions for the legal industry. Also, onboarding legal department users to the new DMS is often the biggest challenge for Legal Operations, so you should ask vendors about how they help in-house teams achieve optimal adoption across the department.