

The Law Firm Disrupted: A New Client Service Model at Perkins Coie

A new program being used by the Am Law 100 firm and Adobe Systems Inc. could be a template for future relationships between Big Law and corporate clients.

By Roy Strom

About three years ago, Adobe Systems Inc.'s legal department put out a bid to select new preferred law firm partners.

Lisa Konie, senior director of legal operations at Adobe and a board member at the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC), said the company gave firms specific amounts it had spent in past years in a number of practice areas and regions.

Konie's team approached Perkins Coie, which had submitted a bid and spent about a half day interviewing with Adobe's in-house legal leaders, about the prospect of a single flat fee to govern the entire relationship. Perkins Coie would provide the legal services Adobe needed, and Adobe would send the firm a check at the end of every month. If they could do that, it would be a "nirvana" scenario, Konie said.

To Konie's surprise, that blissful situation has been playing out ever since.

On the pricing side, Perkins Coie provides Adobe with a dashboard that shows the work it has done on the company's behalf. If legal spending is too high one month, it will adjust down the next, or vice versa. The key to



the billing agreement, said Konie and Perkins Coie patent litigation partner James Valentine, is trust.

“This is us truly working together as if they were an extension of our legal team.”

(Lisa Konie, Senior Director of Legal Operations, Adobe Systems Inc.)

From that trust, the two organizations operate much more seamlessly than a typical law firm-client relationship. The

two sides have a quarterly call to discuss high-level legal issues and business strategy at Adobe. Lawyers and other support professionals from both organizations often work as an extension of one another.

Perkins Coie helps Adobe lawyers find pro bono opportunities. Adobe invites Perkins Coie lawyers to training sessions at its offices. And vice versa. The two organizations created a summer internship program where a diverse law student spends half the summer at Perkins Coie and half the summer in Adobe's legal department.

Konie, who has been working in legal operations at Adobe since 2004, said

she has never had a relationship with a law firm like the one she has with Perkins Coie.

"This is no longer an us-versus-them scenario," Konie said. "This is us truly working together as if they were an extension of our legal team."

For his part, Valentine, a key Adobe relationship partner at Perkins Coie in Silicon Valley, said he feels the same way.

"When I first started out at a large New York law firm, I had a clock in my brain telling me this is billable [or] this isn't billable," Valentine said. "That clock, I'm happy to say, is no longer in my brain. When Adobe needs something done, I'm happy to do it."

In conjunction with the CLOC conference last month in Las Vegas, Perkins Coie announced a marketing effort aimed at creating more client relationships that are similar to the one it has forged with Adobe. Called Perkins Coie Client Advantage, it gives clients access to the professional staff that Perkins Coie has hired over the years in an effort to help corporate legal departments become more efficient.

Clients can gain access to people at the firm who have a deep understanding of financial reporting, pricing, electronic billing, professional training and development, as well as diversity efforts, pro bono opportunities and community involvement.

"We are seeing a meaningful change in how law firms interact with their clients," said Perkins Coie managing partner John Devaney. "There is an increasing

expectation on the part of clients that their law firm partners are going to provide support that goes beyond just the delivery of legal services."

Perkins Coie said the services of its professional staff would not typically be billed to clients. Devaney said the firm had been providing these services to a number of large clients and the Client Advantage program is a way to market those services to more clients.

Another client that has benefited informally from the program is Microsoft Corp., which Perkins Coie has worked with

"There is an increasing expectation on the part of clients that their law firm partners are going to provide support that goes beyond just the delivery of legal services."

(John Devaney, Firmwide Managing Partner, Perkins Coie.)

for about the past year under a flat fee agreement as part of Microsoft's broader push to eliminate the billable hour.

Judy Jennison, the Microsoft relationship partner at Perkins Coie and a former in-house lawyer at the company, said the flat fee model has been a "game-changer" in creating a stronger relationship between the lawyers at Perkins Coie and Microsoft.

"The world is changing so rapidly, and we really have to start thinking about the way we practice law much differently,"

said Jennison, an intellectual property litigator. "The more creative law firms are, the better off we'll all be. We need to change and grow. The profession is not going to look the way it used to look in 10 years."

Adobe's Konie said she hopes what might be called her "nirvana story" would inspire other law firms and corporate legal departments to try something new.

"The more we can get out there saying, 'It is possible to do things differently,' I really am hopeful that people will start actually asking questions like, 'Why do we have to do things the way we always have done them?'" Konie said.

Based in Chicago, Roy Strom has been reporting on the legal world since 2011. He covers law firms with a focus on how the Big Law business model is changing. He writes a weekly column for Law.com called "The Law Firm Disrupted," covering changes in the legal services market. He can be reached at rstrom@alm.com. On Twitter: [@RoyWStrom](https://twitter.com/RoyWStrom)

PERKINS coie
COUNSEL TO GREAT COMPANIES

