

Foodstuffs eats up legal documentation with smart approach to automation



Client

Foodstuffs North Island (Foodies)

Problem

Because the Foodies legal team work on such a wide and varied range of activities, and because demands on their time are so high, they began looking into how automation technology could free up their time, allowing them to focus on more high-value, complex and strategic tasks.

Solution

Legal automation in the form of the LawHawk solution saw them start small with Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs), then move on to the automation of service consultancy agreements for Foodstuffs' property team. Given the success of automation to date, the Foodies legal team now has two other major automation/innovation projects on the go.

Automation frees up legal team for high-value work

Foodstuffs was formed in 1922 and Foodstuffs North Island or 'Foodies' is the North Island Co-op behind major New Zealand supermarket brands New World, PAK'nSAVE, Four Square and Gilmours. Foodstuffs North Island has a small, high-performing legal team of six who deal with a wide range of legal issues from contracts, franchises and property to employment and acquisitions.

Empowering a high-performing legal team

Foodstuffs' Associate General Counsel Julian Benefield is passionate about legal innovation, which drove him to evaluate ways of harnessing

technology to increase efficiency and productivity in their legal operations. Because their legal work is wide ranging, high-volume and complex, Julian needed an automation solution that would streamline the contract and document process, freeing the team up to focus on core, high-value and more strategic activities.

"We were looking for ways to innovate and do things more efficiently," Julian says. "There's been a lot of talk about what legal automation can do – I was keen to see how it could actually work and achieve efficiency gains in practice. So when I met Gene and Allen at a conference, and they told me what LawHawk does and what they could do, it was the first step to implementing contract/document automation."

After a couple of false starts, Julian decided to break the launch of automation at Foodies into iterative and more manageable chunks, starting small and evaluating the solution's efficacy, then moving on to more complex matters. To that end, he needed a solution that was flexible enough to work in this way.

"People at Foodies who have used our automated contracts love that we have embraced legal innovation, with many really enjoying the process. It's not just the legal team who have been impressed by it and how easy it is to use. It is starting to represent significant time savings for other departments as well as ours."

- Julian Benefield, Associate General Counsel

Although Julian looked into other legal automation options, it was LawHawk that stood out. "I think that with LawHawk being commercial lawyers and great people to work with, they really understood what it is we do and the practical challenges we face, and that was key for us," he recalls. "Setting up automation isn't just about flicking a switch. You need to think through the process and make sure the templates and internal processes work for your business, and LawHawk were able to work through all that with us."

A strategic approach to implementing legal automation

Once the decision was made to implement LawHawk's technology, Foodstuffs began with the relatively simple task of automating the drafting of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs). "That was the key to getting things moving," says LawHawk Co-Founder Allen Li. "They're not the most complicated contract, but it was a good way for Julian and the Foodies business to get an initial look at the potential of legal automation." Julian also wanted to give the business confidence that legal automation was reliable and easy and efficient to use.

Foodstuffs were impressed with the NDAs right from the start. "The way we've structured the automation of the NDAs means the legal team doesn't need to be involved themselves," he explains. "The licence allows people in the business to generate the automated document themselves with clear and simple instructions. Because the forms have been integrated with our SharePoint intranet 'Trolley' in a self-service area, people in the business can create the documents themselves but in a way which retains sufficient oversight from the legal team."

Feedback from other departments at Foodstuffs has been extremely positive. "People love it, many of them actually enjoy the process," Julian says. "The IT and Marketing teams particularly have been impressed by it and how easy it is to use, and they think it is great that lawyers are innovating with tech."

With the SharePoint integration, the whole thing looks and feels like a Foodstuffs solution."

Because the automated workflow has clear instructions and is easy to use, it is also popular among the external users.

The automation tool at Foodstuffs has generated 89 NDAs over the past year. Previously, NDAs may require up to an hour or more of a lawyer's time in terms of drafting and other support. This means the NDA automation project may have so far resulted in as much as 90 hours in time savings for the Foodies legal team, without any impact on the quality and accuracy of the NDA and our filing processes. "It means that we can then use that significant amount of time to work on more valuable things for the business," Julian explains.

Onwards and upwards

The success of the NDAs gave Julian the confidence to try some more complex service and consultancy contracts for one of their key business functions that experience some of the highest volume of those types of contracts. "The property team is a critical function in our business, and they generate a high demand for service and consultancy contracts," says Julian. "They do big construction projects which may result in engaging 15+ consultants for each project. We've done a lot of work getting the right templates and review and approval processes in place, and we've now automated those consultant contracts and launched them on a first project."

Once again, a key factor for the legal and property teams was LawHawk working through the process with them, ensuring that the automation and the overall process was working as it should and that it was user-friendly for the people in the property team. "It has only just started, but the project managers are now using those agreements live on their first project," Julian explains. "It may result in a lot more than 100 contracts a year being automated – we expect it to be higher volume than NDAs, and the contract is a more complex document than an NDA, so we expect

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this particular automation to result in even greater time savings for Foodies." The collaboration of the Foodstuffs property team with Legal and especially the work of Katharina Reid has been another key part of this project's success to date.

Julian goes on to say that improved accuracy is also a key factor in the consultancy agreements. "Previously, the consultancy contract templates would be completed outside the Legal team but we often had issues – documents may not be completed properly. With greater accuracy from the automation, and the related review and approval processes, there's less chance a contract template can be completed incorrectly, which reduces the legal and project risk."

Not only is the legal team saving time, gaining efficiencies and increasing productivity, but automation is starting to see similar benefits for the property team as well. "We expect automation of the property consulting contracts to reduce not only the demand on the legal team in reviewing these contracts, but to also reduce the time taken by project managers to adapt templates," Julian says. "Plus, we can be confident that risks for those contracts are being managed effectively."

Smooth integration into existing technology

Another key benefit for the Foodstuffs' legal team has been the easy integration of the LawHawk solution into their technology infrastructure, an important consideration in a corporate environment. "It's worked really well, how we've integrated the technology into our internal systems," Julian says. "We use Office 365 extensively and our own SharePoint intranet, and the LawHawk technology blends really well with that. People can easily find and use it, and we've been able to provide instructions for it as well."

When it comes to support and responsiveness, Julian has high praise for the team at LawHawk. "They're so easy to deal with," he says. "To be honest, we really haven't had many issues, but when we have

they get on to it really quickly." Not only that, but in terms of speed and flexibility, Julian is quick to praise LawHawk's ability to quickly deliver and adapt the solution to Foodstuffs' individual needs within short timeframes and for agreed costs.

Embrace innovation – it's real and it works

Julian sees legal automation as a key part of the future of in-house/corporate legal work. "There's a lot of talk about legal technology, but I was really keen to see how it actually worked in practice," he says. "I wanted to see what the actual benefits would be. Now that we've completed those two things, we're looking ahead to projects of greater complexity."

The two new projects that the Foodies legal team have underway include automating the drafting of key high-volume contract types such as MSAs and SOWs, which they hope to complete within a relatively quick timeframe given all of the knowledge and learnings gained on the earlier work. The team is also actively implementing e-signature solutions for legal documents, particularly since the onset of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Julian's advice to other corporate legal teams is to remain open-minded about innovation opportunities. "Think about ways you can implement legal automation within your own business," he says. "Talk to people – those that are using technology like this, and experts like LawHawk who provide it and can make it easy to progress and get the results you need. Then the approach that worked for me (given how busy we are day to day) is to start small and break projects down. Prove to people in your team and business how automation can reliably work with something simple, and then move onto more complex projects. For us the momentum and desire to use contract automation has lifted since stakeholders outside the legal team have seen the time saving benefits and improved accuracy that can be realised to benefit their own projects and teams."

About LawHawk

LawHawk's advanced legal automation, with its built-in real-time training and compliance, allows anyone to draft highly customised documents and complete other legal processes in minutes rather than hours and at very low cost. Document drafts will be better quality, more consistent and compliant with key requirements. With a unique combination of legal and automation expertise, LawHawk is committed to revolutionising how high quality and consistent legal and procurement documents are generated, and setting new standards for what is possible.

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