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## Future Ready Lawyer webinar takes deep dive look at technological innovation in corporate legal departments and law firms after a year of pandemic

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In introductory remarks for a lively fast-paced webinar discussion around Wolters Kluwer's *2021 Future Ready Lawyer Survey: Moving Beyond the Pandemic*, Legal Markets group Vice President [Ken Crutchfield](#) revealed a number of the report's key findings. He noted that digital transformation and technology continue to be key drivers for improved performance, efficiency, productivity and service, but also pointed to the performance challenges faced by law firms and corporate law departments. Crutchfield also highlighted gaps identified in the report including where lawyers are in their technology journeys as compared to where they need to be, gaps in expectations and priorities, as well as gaps in understanding between law firms and their corporate clients.

The [webinar](#) also featured some of the nation's leading voices in the legal tech and innovation space. Panelists included [Mark Brennan](#), Partner & Tech and Telecoms Sector Group Leader at Hogan Lovells; [Chris Johnson](#), Senior Legal Counsel, Americas at Avery Dennison; [Tommie-Ann Ferreira](#), Director, Contracts Management & Legal Operations at Rakuten; [Marlene Gebauer](#), Director of Knowledge Management at Locke Lord and Co-host of *The Geek in Review Podcast*; and [Terra Potter](#), General Counsel - EMEA/AP and Industrial at Hexcel Corporation.

**The pressure is on.** In setting the stage for the day's discussion, Crutchfield observed that the pandemic has affected all of us in personal and professional ways, and which the survey and has demonstrated in living color. In particular, Crutchfield asserted that corporate legal departments will be called on to deliver more with less, having to manage bigger workloads with smaller budgets. As a result, trends toward automating routine tasks and leveraging technology in work processes, as well as controlling outside legal spend are expected to accelerate. For their part, law firms will also be expected to deliver more and deliver those services in different ways.

**Law firms need to get with it.** Avery Dennison's Chris Johnson defined technology as anything that is not being done by a human that makes our work more efficient and effective. While observing that technological innovation in the legal realm has been more evolution than revolution, Johnson insisted the pace of things needs to speed up. He predicted those law firms unwilling to embrace technology will find themselves behind, and urged law firms to use technology to demonstrate their increased efficiency and productivity, as well as to equip their staffs with the right tools to perform

their corporate clients' work. Johnson concluded that law firms need to get with it on the technology front to keep clients engaged, happy, and ahead of the game.

**Law firms can lead here.** Hogan Lovells' Mark Brennan brought his law firm perspective to the table and shared a somewhat different take on the role played by law firms with respect to technological innovation. He noted the report's finding that 91% of corporate legal departments will ask their law firms, within the next three years, to describe the technology they use to be more productive and efficient. However, Brennan was astonished that nearly 50% of corporate law departments have not yet even asked about their law firm's use of technology, which leads him to believe that plenty of law firms will look to their corporate clients to lead the way on this score.

Brennan also noted that he has seen a number of situations where law firms are leading the way with their clients on technological innovation, and cited his own firm's efforts in frequently providing corporate clients with legal technology training. Brennan also observed there is a broad spectrum of what technological innovation means to various clients. Accordingly, Brennan advised lawyers to listen closely to their clients to determine where they are at in terms of their current state of digitalization and how the law firm can best provide assistance.

**Using technology to gain a competitive edge in delivering legal services.** According to the survey, 57% of corporate legal departments plan to ramp up their technology investments. Rakuten's Tommie-Ann Ferreira noted that this completely jives with her experience and what she has seen in her organization. Specifically, Ferreira pointed to her organization's use of collaboration tools to draft and review documents and contracts, implement workflow and process automation, and oversee legal spend management. In her view, utilizing legal technology facilitates the delivery of legal services, and being comfortable with those technologies gives the lawyers in her department a competitive edge. Ferreira observed that legal technology enables attorneys to deliver legal services more accurately and faster, and that then frees them up to do more value-added work.

**Addressing the gaps between corporate law department expectations and law firm capabilities.** The Future Ready Lawyer Survey also found that the gaps between corporate legal department expectations and law firm capabilities with respect to technology continue to widen. More than 70% of all corporate legal departments say that technological capability is an important factor when choosing a law firm, though fewer than 32% say these attributes accurately describe their law current firm. According to Locke Lorde's Marlene Gebauer, this is not a new discussion, and that better understanding and communications are needed from both sides. From the law firm perspective, she suggested that teams with different skills, not just attorneys, should be part of the communication process.

Gebauer also recommended that corporate law departments and law firms share information with each other about testing and the tools being used in an effort to bridge communication gaps. Gebauer also observed that it's just not a matter of "plug and play" when adopting new technology. She advised that timetables be built into processes to allow for testing, training, socialization to take hold, and to allow people to see the value of a new technology. Gebauer also noted with the adoption of new technology, there will likely be gaps in outcomes, and those expectations need to be managed as well.

**In pursuit of low hanging fruit.** Another key finding from the survey was that the pandemic has accelerated trends and put more pressure on performance. Still, when it came to recommending what technologies corporate legal departments and law firms should be looking to adopt in the coming years, there was a general consensus among the panelists that pursuing cutting edge technologies was not necessarily the best way to go. As Hexcel Corporation's Terra Potter suggested, corporate legal departments and law firms would be well advised to pursue the low hanging fruit, and consider using existing technologies as potential solutions to address work flow challenges. As an example, Potter pointed to an existing contract process or contract handling tool that can provide more data and more transparency to distill applicable risks into a readily accessible and portable risk picture.

The webinar was hosted in conjunction with the Corporate Counsel Business Journal (CCBJ). You can access *The Corporate Legal Departments Beyond the Pandemic* webinar recording, as well as the *2021 Future Ready Lawyer Survey: Moving Beyond the Pandemic* by clicking [here](#).