



No Budget for Legal Innovation? Try These 10 Tips

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Our ACC Australia members identified cost and budget constraints as the key barrier to in-house innovation and deployment of legal technology.

The in-house legal practice is changing. Fast. The more-for-less challenge is becoming increasingly intense. In-house clients expect easy, fast access to legal support and a pleasing user experience. Companies expect their in-house counsel to implement proactive strategies to avoid, mitigate, and manage legal risks through governance, controls, and training. In response, zeitgeist savvy in-house counsel are creating and implementing new and clever ways to deliver legal services. These exciting in-house innovations not only address current in-house challenges but also help future-proof the career trajectories of their creators.

But sometimes, there is no budget for innovation and technology. What then?

1. Innovation is about people, not technology

The most amazing and cutting-edge technology delivers zero benefit unless people use it in the real world. Entrepreneurial in-house counsel are delivering real and measurable value to their companies using no new technology whatsoever and by repurposing the technology that is already available. They are successful because they bring a mindset of continual growth and improvement to their in-house roles; they partner with IT, and they align and inspire their colleagues and in-house clients to support and embrace innovation.

Top Tip: Join the vibrant virtual community of ACC Australia's newly formed Legal Innovation and Technology special interest group at [Legal Technology and Innovation | Association of Corporate Counsel \(ACC\)](#) and be part of the conversation on how to align and inspire people on the innovation journey.

2. Innovation starts with a pain point, frustration, or opportunity

In-house counsel are brilliant at solving problems and capturing opportunities. Practical, doable solutions that support business objectives and enhance business reputation are the in-house counsel's strong suit. It is the same for innovation. Starting with the problem or opportunity enables laser-sharp focus on the options, learning, and resources to deliver a solution. A fertile ground for innovation is one that has repetitive, high-volume, low-complexity legal work; this provides opportunities for the business to self-serve and improve the user experience.

“In the wake of COVID 19, our legal team became inundated with queries regarding who in the business could sign their documents and whether our business could accept electronic signatures for different types of documents given the new and changing laws. Using Excel, I created an app called, 'Digi-Sign,' to answer these queries from across the business.”

Aussie Lawyer, International Company

“My in-house role included compliance training, usually a total snooze for the participants. I created a whole role-play experience based on the TV show 'The Office.' My clients loved it! They still talk about the fun they had and what they learned.”

Aficionado of The Office, Sole in-house Counsel, International Company

Top Tip: Start with the problem or opportunity, then find the innovation/tech to solve it.

3. Use the technology already available in your company

Innovating with the technology already in your company is a fantastic way to start. This technology is funded, deployed, and working — three significant hurdles already cleared! Also, you already know how to use many of them — for example, Word, Outlook, PowerPoint, and Excel can all be used in new ways for legal innovation.

“I use PowerPoint to create interactive documents that feel like you're using a website. Here's a 3-minute video: [How to create interactive PowerPoint presentation tutorial - YouTube](#)

. My clients click to explore, which lets you store a lot of information in one place without overloading the client with information they don't need.”

Corporate Counsel, Large Legal Team

“I needed to track the status and assigned actions for my procurement contracts portfolio. One of my IT colleagues helped me get started by repurposing their IT software development management technology as a contract matter management tool.”

Erstwhile TechnoPhobe In-house lawyer

In-house counsel who have access to the Microsoft Office 365 platform within their companies are using it to build their own legal innovations, including automation, data representation, and matter management.

“We needed to implement an electronic document signature solution that would be cost-effective, intuitive, and work within our existing processes. After evaluating several popular but relatively expensive off-the-shelf systems, we understood that our existing document management software included an electronic signature module at a minimal additional cost. Implementation was simple, and change management was made easier as users already had experience.”

Cheapskate In-house Lawyer, Mining Company Compliance Team

Top Tip: Find out what technologies are already available in your company and investigate their functionality. You might be surprised!

4. Innovation self-education has never been so freely available ... and overwhelming

Webinars, podcasts, publications, presentations, ACC CPD eligible events — so much is available without cost to you or your company. There is no single best way to start or even a preferred route. The most important thing is to get started — and whether you know it or not, you already have.

“I found a [one-minute YouTube video](#) that showed how to use Microsoft Word Developer to create template documents with drop-down lists. I watched the YouTube video on one screen and followed the instructions to create my template on the other screen. The improved

templates were a huge success with my clients as they could now self-serve, and I freed up one hour per day filling in contract details!”

YouTube Savvy Sole Lawyer

Top Tip: If you’re looking for some quick wins, check out this selection of self-education opportunities selected especially for time-challenged in-house counsel [Legal Technology and Innovation | Association of Corporate Counsel \(ACC\)](#).

5. Innovation requires an investment of time

Finding time to innovate and use technology is arguably the biggest hurdle for busy in-house counsel. CPD requirements provide in-house counsel with ring-fenced time to learn the theory of legal innovation, but innovation and technology skills are best acquired by doing — interacting hands-on with technology — and that takes time.

“I spoke with my direct manager and asked for her support to allow me to develop my innovation idea. It meant that BAU (business as usual) legal work might be a little slower than usual, but I pitched it as the opportunity to invest some time to free up a whole lot more time for our legal team.”

Automation Advocate In-house Lawyer

“In my experience, dedicating a day a week to innovate paid off in about three weeks when we launched a few small initiatives. In those weeks where I couldn’t afford to take a whole day out of BAU work, I scheduled tech time as my ‘frog of the day’ at 7 am.”

YouTube Savvy Sole Lawyer

Team-building days, scheduling innovation project time (hack the Google 20% Project), leveraging legal training and development, and other creative mechanisms to dedicate time for innovation are all necessary for legal innovation to flourish.

Top Tip: Use your persuasive skills to secure the support of your manager to invest time to innovate.

6. Innovation is not a spectator sport

Things are changing and developing rapidly in legal innovation and technology. If you delay innovating until you're an expert, you'll never start. The best way to build capability is to select a practical project to work on — something small and achievable. Base your learning on the project, so it is focused, grounded, and practical.

"COVID was a great opportunity to acquire a new skill. I decided to try learning Microsoft Forms so I could use it to get information and feedback from my team about the various locations where their documents were stored to help migrate to a new document management system. No one taught me how to use Forms. I didn't even watch any training videos. I just kept clicking around and experimenting to find out how things worked. I'm using it all the time now! Here's a one-minute YouTube video: [Create a form in Microsoft Forms - YouTube](#)."

Erstwhile TechnoPhobe In-house lawyer

Top Tip: Start innovating now! The most powerful learnings come from jumping in the deep end.

7. Innovation is a team sport

The most successful innovations are those designed with the user in mind — human-focused design. Legal innovation is no different. Consult and involve the stakeholders and users in all stages of innovation — ideation, designing, developing, testing, deploying, and modifying.

"We had everyone around the table to map all steps of our contracting process — not just the steps involving legal. Not only did we discover a variety of views about what the process actually was, we eliminated multiple touchpoints and steps that added no value; we also identified steps that could be fun in parallel to speed up the process. Because everyone was involved in the streamlining, they understood the new process, and they were excited to put it into action."

Whiteboard Wizard In-house Lawyer

Top Tip: Involve all your stakeholders at all stages of the innovation process. Better still, inspire them to join you on the innovation journey!

8. Innovation develops new superpowers for lawyers

In-house counsel, even those who feel "tech-challenged," are eminently capable of mastering tech skills. Don't be trapped into the belief that you don't have the technical capability or expertise to use technology or deploy automation. Lawyers are smart and capable of drawing on the superpowers of patience, resilience, and experimentation. They also can accept an innovation that is good but not

perfect. The innovation journey will involve times when lawyers may feel lost, frustrated, and unable to figure out what's doing on — why isn't this tech working? or what are these (IT) people talking about? It's OK. Stay calm and carry on. The rewards are worth it.

“I spent the whole day trying to build my contract automation app. It still wasn't working. I kept saving new versions and trying different things. The versions were called Last Hope, Desperate Last Hope, Very Last Hope. It was almost 10 pm when finally I figured it out and the app worked. I was ecstatic!”

Erstwhile TechnoPhobe In-house lawyer

Top Tip: Patience, resilience ...and turn your computer off and on again.

9. Innovation technology can be accessed through law firms and alternative legal service providers

Tech-savvy in-house counsel can access the benefits of legal technologies through their external lawyers or alternative legal service providers. The key is to identify when there is a value proposition to leverage tech through external service providers. And let's be honest, the plethora of available legal technology is overwhelming.

“I needed to place insurance to cover the risks my company had accepted in many hundreds of existing contracts. I was aware of a contract analysis tool that could identify and extract risk provisions from contracts and automatically put them in a table for further review. Bringing this contract analysis tool technology in-house was not an option; however, I accessed the outputs of the tool by engaging a law firm to use the technology. This enabled me to focus my time on reviewing the risk provisions that were automatically extracted by the technology.”

General Counsel, Healthcare Sector

A general understanding of existing legal technology enables in-house counsel to identify opportunities to access tech capabilities from their external lawyers, where there is no budget for legal technology or where a special-use case exists but is insufficient to justify deployment in-house. Understanding the ecosystem of legal technology is also an investment in the future. If your company is not yet ready or able to invest in legal technology, that is likely to change as the business case becomes more compelling.

Top Tip: Have a general awareness of the capabilities of existing legal technologies — you might not need them today, but in the future...

10. Find your innovation community

The best insights and ideas about in-house innovation and technology come from in-house counsel

who've done it!

Top Tip: Join the ACC Australia Legal Technology and Innovation community, check out the resources at [Legal Technology and Innovation | Association of Corporate Counsel \(ACC\)](#), be part of the conversation and connect with other innovation-minded corporate counsel and share your thoughts and comments by emailing programdevelopment@accglobal.com

The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge and thank the members of LTIC and other in-house counsel who generously shared their practical innovation experiences for this article.

[Schellie-Jayne "SJ" Price](#)



Senior In-house Counsel

Chevron Australia

Schellie-Jayne “SJ” Price is the inaugural chair of the newly formed legal innovation and technology committee for ACC Australia and senior in-house counsel at Chevron Australia. Price leads TIGLS, the Legal Technology Interest Group within Chevron worldwide. In 2020, Price was a finalist in the ACC Legal Innovator of the Year Award and Women in Law Innovator of the Year Award for Lawyers' Weekly. Chevron Australia was shortlisted for the Financial Times Innovative Lawyers Award 2021 – Asia Pacific.

