

# Q&A

Netlaw Media talks with Jonathan Patterson, Development Director, DWF, to discuss business performance and the strategy behind DWF's highly successful innovative, technology-driven solutions.



“you have to make sure innovation becomes part of the culture”

**A**s the firms Development Director, how do you identify areas within the business that require critical change and investment?

It is pretty simple, but we find the best way is to start with a client problem or need and then work backwards to the areas within our business that need investment or change to be able to deliver a solution. We prioritise spending time with client-facing teams, getting their feedback and helping them to develop new ideas that clients are interested in, and increasingly we are also working directly with in-house legal teams to do the same thing.

We also have good senior-level support and we do spend time with the leadership teams in each of the main DWF business units to understand their business plans and priorities and see where there are opportunities to help them, so that's another way that we identify potential areas for change. I am a big believer that great ideas can come from anywhere, so you have to make sure innovation becomes part of the culture and use a variety of different ways to get people interested and to encourage them to step up with their

ideas and get involved rather than simply being told what to do or waiting for top-down directives or initiatives.

**How do you effectively communicate that to the board and gain buy in power?**

We are lucky that 'doing things differently' is a central part of our business strategy and an area that clients are really interested in. It also helps that it is a major focus for our CEO, so we are always well supported at board level. On technology investment, I work really closely with our CTO and also the CEO of our technology company DWF 3sixty and we have an R&D fund allocated to priority areas each year.

We also have a separate arms-length company, DWF Ventures, which has the license to experiment and develop prototype ideas without a lot of the usual law firm red tape that can get in the way and often suffocate new ideas before they get going. Once we have gathered feedback and the supporting data to indicate that a prototype idea should go into full development, we then present an investment case to the board in the same way as you would for any other business investment like a major project or a lateral hire.



**Define the key business outcomes that you have delivered over the last 12 months and their impact on your organisation's performance**

We have delivered a number of new or redesigned services, including things like our document automation service DWF Draft and our flexible resourcing service DWF Resource, which have both been really successful. We have also taken several other technology-based solutions to the prototype or demonstration stage so that clients and people in our teams at DWF can test them out rather than trying to make decisions based on their theoretical use. In terms of outcomes, we have three simple benchmarks that we apply to each idea:

1. Does it save us time, reduce costs or improve what we offer to clients?
2. Does it make our service more consistent or mitigate risk?
3. Does it make it easier for people at DWF to do their job?

DWF Draft is a good example of this - it has given us a new service to offer to clients, it saves our teams over 3000 hours a year, consistently generates documents from over 300 standard



“DWF Draft saves our teams over 3000 hours a year”

templates and has a 99% user satisfaction score. Just as importantly, in my view, is that we have also stopped a number of ideas in their early stages when it has become obvious that they wouldn't work effectively or the case for investment just doesn't stack up. I think the legal sector can learn a lot from how entrepreneurs and start-ups develop new ideas and services, particularly the mindset that not everything is going to work.

When the idea does not work, it is better to stop and move on to your next idea than doggedly investing in something that is never going to make it.

**What has been your involvement with innovation at your organisation – in particular, with products, business model and technology – over the last 12 months?**

It is always a team effort and our best innovations have come from bringing together the thoughts and ideas of a diverse range of people. I have been fortunate enough to be involved in a number of really interesting innovations in the last 12 months but, importantly, there are just as many where I have had very little involvement, which indicates that our approach to developing a culture of innovation, where we don't need to rely on a small number of people to come up with all the ideas, is flourishing.

In an ever-changing legal market with lots of challenges and opportunities it is a chance for everyone to take responsibility for developing new ideas or services and we want to encourage that. I think innovation should be a core competency of everyone at DWF rather than something that is seen as the responsibility of an 'Innovation Committee' or a back-office department.



If I think about successful products like DWF Pinpoint and DWF Evosafe or new services like DWF Resource or DWF Draft, the development from new idea to commercial implementation has required a wide range of people to be involved, ranging from senior sector experts and apprentices in our legal teams through to development partners and technology providers outside of DWF, so bringing together the right people and the right resources to develop a new idea is often the most important part of my job.

**What are your key strategic aims for next year?**

We have three main strategic priorities for the coming year. The first is to continue finding ways to engage with clients and our teams at DWF to help them develop new ideas and be confident about stepping forward to try and solve problems or make the most of new opportunities. We also want to help people develop their creative skills, so we have developed an online innovation kitchen where people can explore relevant content and learn useful approaches like 'Design Thinking for Law'.

The second aim is to deliver our agreed R&D pipeline which includes a range of prototype ideas ranging from virtual assistant platforms and an AI-based document review service through to a digital due diligence platform and a scoping and pricing app.

Our third and final priority is to ensure that the early growth services and products that we have recently developed are nurtured and supported so that they can continue to grow and develop at a quick pace. Alongside all three of these priorities we will also need maintain the brand association and recognition for innovation and continue to attract the right development partners and technology providers to collaborate with.

**What is the most rewarding part of leading innovation initiatives at DWF?**

I think it is the sense of satisfaction you get when you take an idea all the way to a successful commercial outcome where you get to see it grow and really deliver something valuable to a client. It can be a hard process, where at times people lose faith or think the idea is crazy, so it takes determination – but nothing quite beats that feeling when



we are finally seeing a once-in-a-generation shift in the legal industry, and there has never been a better time to challenge convention

you get through it and know that you have something that is really going to work and make a difference. I also love the fact that innovation attracts a diverse range of personalities and skills so you get to work with a wide range of really interesting people who can all make a contribution no matter how experienced or senior they are. I think we are finally seeing a once-in-a-generation shift in the legal industry, and there has never been a better time to challenge convention and do things differently.

**As a speaker of The London Law Expo, what are you most looking forward to at the event?**

I am looking forward to hearing from some really high-profile speakers on the really big topics. I think the format of the day and the agenda gives attendees the chance to contemplate and debate some of the major challenges and opportunities facing our sector and it is always useful to hear what other people think. The format also gives you lots of opportunities to meet new people and to check out the new technology and products that are on show in the exhibition hall. The champagne bar sounds like a good idea too! ■

# 10 Types of Innovation

