

## In the know: Asia's Knowledge Management departments

By Rashida Yosufzai | Tuesday, 7 July 2009

*How do law firms make sure that all their practitioners have access to as much relevant information as possible now that they are spread right across the globe? ALB talks to the people who make sure it happens*

Today's information society functions around buying and selling knowledge. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the modern day law firm where knowledge is disseminated, new talent is developed and trained and intellectual capital built on a daily basis. In managing a firms' most vital resource information—knowledge management (KM) departments are becoming increasingly important. ALB investigates how three of Asia's leading law firms' KM departments operate, and the technologies they use to make this happen.

### **Nishith Desai Associates, INDIA**

*Mihir Parikh, head of KM, and Milind Mundankar, chief technology officer*

#### **Q. How is the firm's KM department structured?**

While we have several people involved in the department, the structure is purposefully kept fluid to utilise different skills required at different stages. I head strategy and conceptualisation and our IT director heads the implementation of technologies. Our HR director looks after the integration of work processes with KM processes and training. Plus, all associates are involved in the development and build up of knowledge base. We've established a program where every morning a senior associate briefs others in the firm on a complex project, practice sub-area or new regulation. In this way, the KM department helps extract essential knowledge gained by a team of lawyers and transfers it to another team working similar projects.



#### **Q. How does the technology or software program assist the KM department?**

We are in the process of installing iManage Worksite, a document management system, which integrates with our already-installed Elite 3E. iManage Worksite will provide the platform to provide a seamless access to various knowledge repositories across all of our offices as well as integration with work processes. When we adopted Elite 3E, we needed a more flexible and integrated system that could produce customised and sophisticated management reports. The firm had been successfully billing clients using a legacy system for the past 10 years and we were looking for a system that would centralise the time billing and accounting functions. Fee-earners have been delighted with the way it allows them to check details and enter their time remotely. Partners are finding that reports can be generated quickly, and that the software allows them to generate complex industry-wide and practice area reports. Overall, information technology assists us in many ways. It provides the platform for not only generating, acquiring, and organising knowledge within the firm, but also distributing and applying it from various resources. Some of these resources include general internal content—such as precedents, forms, practice statements, practice presentations, research articles—and external technical content, such as pending legislation, regulations, judgments, case law and tax treaties.

#### **Q: How can the KM department assist with cost-saving measures?**

KM for us provides more strategic value than pure cost-savings. Law firms are pure knowledge enterprises. Through our approach to research and KM, we expect it to create intellectual assets that will help us develop more innovative products; build a learning organisation by tightly integrating individual and organizational mental models; and develop systems thinking to provide rational, systemic approach to client work.



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