

Legaltech® news

2023 Legalweek Leaders in Tech Law Awards

Tech-Enabled Hybrid Work Environment, Law Firm: Thompson Hine LLP

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The 2023 Legalweek Leaders in Tech Law Awards honor the best of the best from law firms, corporate legal departments, and legal tech providers. The winners continue to not only bring innovative, ground-breaking work to developing new solutions and approaches that solve the real, practical problems the professionals in our industry are still struggling with, they also help to make the legal industry more inclusive and a better place to work.

This year's nominees, finalists, and winners show that change is not just coming to the legal industry—it's already here.

As part of their award entries, we asked our winners a few questions about the innovation challenges they've faced, how legal tech is continuing to grow, what innovation means to them, and more. Throughout the coming weeks, we'll be running Q&As with each of our award winners. You can find all of them here.

Here's what William Garcia, Chief Practice Innovation Officer at Thompson Hine, winner of this year's award for Tech-Enabled Hybrid Work Environment, Law Firm, had to say.

Tech-Enabled Hybrid Work Environment, Law Firm: Thompson Hine LLP

Reason for Win:

Thompson Hine created their own internal software tool to facilitate assignments among employees in



William T. Garcia, chief practice innovation officer with Thompson Hine.

various locations and different time zones, streamlining the staffing process, reducing partner administrative time, improving inclusion/equity of staffing assignments, and improving morale, engagement, growth, and retention of associates.

Legaltech News: Looking back at some of your most rewarding projects over the past year, what were the biggest challenges you faced, and how did you overcome them?

William Garcia: Change management and measurement.

Improving efficiency through standardizing processes usually means lawyers must approach service delivery differently. But once lawyers are

convinced (not necessarily an easy task) a solution offers improvement, they will adopt.

Measuring results before and after the changed process is the best way to demonstrate a change advances efficiency or predictability, two hallmarks of innovation. We build a business case that shows the impact of the innovation and the measurable improvement.

The design trick is to find the right thing to measure and the right way to measure it. At the outset, activity may be the only obvious metric until one understands the nuances of how the innovation will affect existing processes. Measuring results rather than activity can be hard. Measuring results consistently and objectively can really be hard. Measuring qualitative criteria (is the brief better?) vs. quantitative criteria (was it generated quicker?) can be the most challenging of all.

Once you settle on what to measure, you need to determine how to do it. Measurement must be simple and fast enough that it does not burden the users. Finding the balance between perfect information and tolerance for data capture to validate process is key.

How does your solution/company demonstrate innovation in how it tackles legal issues?

We brand our mindset to exhibit innovation with predictable, efficient, and transparent delivery as “SmartPaTH™.”

It’s unconvincing simply to incant “we’re innovative”; clients know it when they see it. In client discussions, we might use some of the practice innovations embedded in our methodology like workflow diagrams or a budgeted work plan generated by our proprietary tool. But the most convincing demonstration is to just employ innovation. It is routine to engage in front-loaded client discussions about goals, options, likely outcomes, and budgetary con-

straints guided by tools that capture our lawyers’ historical best thinking. We use data analytics to improve our cost and outcome estimates because we should, not to claim we are innovative. As the engagement progresses, we methodically apply the systems we have developed. We don’t say “aren’t we innovative because we are using technology to assess timelines and predilections of judges on outcome-determinative motions?”; we just make it part of what clients can expect. It’s in our DNA to make our service better and faster. The proof is that our clients see our practice innovation as facilitating solving their business problems.

Looking at the legal world as a whole, what does “legal innovation” mean to you?

Innovation in the legal world is a transformational change in the use of people, processes, or technology to drive client value. It can be the combination of well-developed processes in new ways. Innovation can be the implementation of established technologies in new ways. Innovation can also be the creation of something completely new.

Innovation means never being content with the status quo. Smart innovation can also mean getting inspiration and borrowing best practices from other environments and professions. The important thing is to stay open to new ideas and not stop at “It’s just always been this way.”

At Thompson Hine, we have always had a focus on putting our clients at the center of everything we do. But over the last decade, we have more formally and deliberately built on that focus. We proactively evaluate the hows and whys of what we’re doing, and ask ourselves, “What are we doing well? What could we be doing better?” Every improvement—even a seemingly incremental change—contributes to the whole and makes a difference over the long run.