

Priori Legal Case Study for Financial Times Intelligent Business Awards

Scope of the Challenge

Hearst Corporation (“Hearst”) is a Priori Legal (“Priori”) client and one of the nation's largest diversified media, information and services companies with more than 360 businesses. The Hearst Corporation organizes these businesses under major divisions including Entertainment & Syndication, Magazines, Newspapers, Broadcasting, Fitch Group, Hearst Health and more.

Hearst’s legal function, the Office of General Counsel (“OGC”), with headquarters in New York City, is headed by Eve Burton, the company’s Chief Legal Officer. Burton and the OGC are responsible for providing legal services to all of Hearst’s 360+ businesses around the world, an undertaking that requires the OGC attorneys to advise on a wide variety of legal matters, ranging from complex acquisitions and litigation to day-to-day customer and vendor contracts and compliance issues.

To accommodate and streamline the diverse range of legal work across Hearst’s portfolio companies, the OGC is comprised of experienced attorneys, coming out of the top law firms, with subject-matter expertise across a range of practice areas, including corporate, privacy, employment law, First Amendment, litigation, intellectual property, real estate and more, with the attorneys collaborating on projects across practices. These attorneys oversee all of the company’s legal work, choosing to handle most of the complex and strategically critical work internally.

Like any legal operation, ordinary and routine legal matters also need to get done for the OGC’s clients. Due to the global scale of Hearst’s operations, Burton encourages the OGC attorneys to use outside counsel for legal projects that require local counsel or niche expertise as well as for some of the more basic work that can take time away from more complex, mission-critical legal challenges. Doing this efficiently and cost-effectively, however, has become increasingly challenging as the hourly rates for law firm partners surpassed the \$1,000 mark, on one hand, and identifying smaller, less expensive providers has become an extremely time-consuming endeavor with unreliable results, on the other. Because of these constraints, OGC attorneys were instead absorbing the work themselves, which meant they had less time to focus on more high-value projects.

In that context, Burton turned to Priori to help eliminate the alternately expensive or time-consuming task of finding, hiring and managing outside counsel.

Solution

Priori is an online marketplace for in-house legal departments to find, hire and manage top outside counsel without the costly infrastructure of a firm for a full-suite of legal needs, including on-demand expertise, local counsel, overflow support and on-site staffing. Priori offers

a vetted attorney network and full-service technology platform that reduce the cost and risk of finding appropriate outside counsel to legal departments and the cost of doing business to law firms.

Priori provides clients, including fast-growing technology companies and traditional corporates, access to a global network of top, independent and boutique firm lawyers using an end-to-end technology platform. Priori runs a data-driven vetting process that incorporates qualitative and quantitative metrics and yields only a 10% admissions rate. The lawyers in the Priori network are typically former BigLaw and in-house attorneys who have demonstrated expertise in their practice areas and maintain a technology-forward, client-centric practice. Once admitted to the network, Priori's technology enables attorneys to create a custom, granular and extensive map of their practices and experience. Using data from successful engagements through the platform, Priori has created a reliable process to identify excellent attorneys, so that in-house counsel can use Priori to hire outside counsel without the uncertainty that typically accompanies that decision.

Priori connects in-house teams with the attorneys in a vetted network via a proprietary technology platform. Clients submit detailed RFPs via the Priori platform, and its system matches data from the RFP with data collected from attorneys during the application and onboarding process to generate a custom shortlist of qualified attorneys for the client. Clients can use the Priori platform to compare modular lawyer profiles that have been customized to highlight relevant experience, communicate with their suggested attorneys by scheduling a call or meeting, messaging them or requesting a project specific bid, and at any point, the attorneys can submit a bid for the work on a flat, hourly, success or mixed basis with the benefit of a set of data tools that help them price themselves competitively. If the client and attorney elect to move forward with the engagement, they use Priori's billing and invoicing software and messaging and document-sharing tools to manage the engagement from beginning to end.

The combination of Priori's unique legal talent pool and streamlined technology platform drives efficiencies for clients at every stage of the process of finding, hiring and managing outside counsel. Priori operates as a single-source solution to outside counsel needs and allow clients to benefit from onboarding only one vendor, Priori, instead of multiple firms, substantially reducing administrative costs. Priori additionally reduce network lawyers' overheads with business development, data resources, and billing and invoicing software, enabling them to offer discounted rates.

It was these benefits that compelled Eve Burton to turn to Priori to help the Hearst OGC overcome the challenges it faced in sourcing quality outside counsel. At the time of writing, Hearst has committed to a year-long engagement with Priori for outside counsel support.

Impact

As Burton explains, “Priori’s easy-to-use technology platform lets Hearst compare, centralize and streamline relationships with multiple [legal] providers while reducing the amount of time spent finding appropriate counsel, managing communication and billings by over 80%.”

Leveraging Priori’s attorney network and RFP process, Hearst OGC attorneys have been able to find quality attorneys who have the necessary experience and bandwidth to meet the breadth of their legal project needs, while at the same time saving the OGC substantial time and cost. Examples of the types of projects undertaken since Hearst began its partnership with Priori include SaaS contracts, healthcare law advice, media and entertainment counsel, equipment leasing contracts, local real estate attorneys in multiple jurisdictions, and contracts overflow.

Testimonial from Eve Burton

“Co-founders Basha Rubin and Mirra Levitt have a clear and powerful vision for the future of legal services and their team is working tirelessly to execute it. I fully expect their technology will create a rising tide for the legal industry by bringing efficiency, data and transparency to the outside counsel selection process while improving satisfaction for in-house groups and rightsizing costs. Outside practitioners will also love the platform as it will drive business development and help provide flexibility that is so sought after by the Millennial and Z generations.

I have had the opportunity to personally observe Basha and Mirra with their superb team and have been impressed by their motivational and effective leadership style and the culture they are driving through their young organization. Anecdotally, I’ve heard from several clients and network attorneys that have validated that Priori is driving real value for them and that has changed the way they do business. Priori’s approach to revolutionizing how legal services are sought and transacted has major potential in this industry.”