

How Sonnedix Built a Sustainable Strategy for Controlling Legal Spend



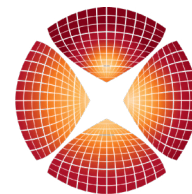
“We’re about 80% sure that’s our final number.”

It wasn’t the answer Heather was hoping to discover, and it certainly wasn’t one she wanted to relay to her CEO. With Sonnedix preparing to expand its operating capacity by a factor of seven, every business department within the global solar Independent Power Producer was being challenged to present their plans for improving cost-efficiency.

“How do you reduce a legal spend number you don’t fully know? When we first heard ourselves ask that question aloud, I think we knew something was fundamentally broken with our billing process,” Heather recalled.

Searching for the root of the problem revealed a complex network of moving parts and ad-hoc solutions that had been installed over the years. And although the team was finding ways to make it work, they ultimately knew the current system would not be a stable foundation for global growth.

“Continuing to work around this recurring headache would have been the wrong decision — both in terms of team morale and business logic,” Marissa explained. “We joined Sonnedix to support an innovative international business with sophisticated legal strategies, and troubleshooting admin tasks isn’t a smart or satisfying use of our time. The company correctly expects us to focus on delivering value in other areas.”



Sonnexix
Global solar independent power producer (IPP) with over 4GW of total controlled capacity across 8 countries



Marissa Corda
General Counsel
Leads Legal, Compliance & Risk



Heather Torres
Senior Legal Counsel
(Disputes)
Legal Operations
Manager

Searching for a Solution

Heather knew technology held the key to achieving 100% clarity and soon began searching for a spend management solution designed specifically for in-house legal teams. Ease of use was her top priority, since inconsistent adoption would ultimately negate the value of any investment.

“We work with a lot of firms outside of the U.S., and asking them to suddenly convert all their invoices into LEDES format just for us felt like an impossible request,” said Heather. “I also wanted to minimize any learning curve for our internal team so they could remain focused on core legal work.”

In addition to centralizing and simplifying the legal billing process, Heather also wanted to be sure the software she selected would support the team across a broader range of initiatives. Strong analytics would be a significant asset when evaluating law firm performance and installing more proactive cost control measures.

Instant Impact

Within months of selecting Brightflag, the transformation Heather envisioned had become reality. Every law firm was submitting invoices through the same portal, in-house lawyers were spending a fraction of their time on invoice review, and unapproved invoices were no longer inadvertently making their way to accounts payable.

“What everyone really responded to was the sense of clarity,” Heather noted. “Law firms saw where each invoice was in the approval process, we saw which line items were worth taking another look at, and our business saw the complete picture of legal spend.”

The new technology was also instrumental in Sonnedix’s push to reassert its legal billing guidelines and consolidate its law firm panel from more than 60 providers to fewer than 30. Common billing violations, budget adherence habits, and benchmarked rates were just a few of the data points guiding these nuanced discussions.

“I think a lot of in-house lawyers fear that enforcing guidelines and evaluating performance feels too confrontational because outside counsel are such close and valued partners,” said Marissa. “Good data can take the heat out of these conversations, and we’ve found that most law firms are actually eager for more objective feedback from clients.”

Why Brightflag?



Marissa says:

- Centralized view of global spend
- Data to guide financial planning
- Proactive & responsive attitude



Heather says:

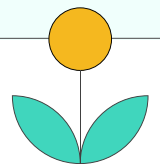
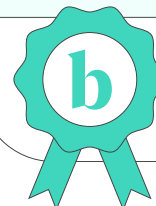
- Easy to implement and adopt
- AI-powered processes
- Data to guide law firm relationships





4.6 average rating

30+ five-star reviews

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 **Flags** (Tick flag to include it in adjustment, click the name to see relevant narrative lines below)

 Email Flags

- Research** **Potential Savings: \$19,565.75**
 A total of approximately \$19,565.75 was charged for research.
- Internal Communications** **Potential Savings: \$4,695.36**
 Internal communications comprise \$4,695.36 (4.68%) of this invoice.
- Prohibited Expenses** **Potential Savings: \$3,500.00**
 Disbursements of \$3,500.00 were charged on this bill.
- Incorrect Timekeeper Rate** **Potential Savings: \$1,140.00**
 The rate charged on this invoice for the timekeeper Darya M. Maynes is greater than the approved rate(s) for this timekeeper.
 - Rate charged on Feb 21, 2020: \$300.00.
 - Approved rate: \$150.00 (Effective Date: Jan 01, 2019).
- Administrative Support Costs** **Potential Savings: \$185.00**
 A total of approximately \$185.00 was charged for time carrying out administrative/secretarial work.
- Budget Warning** **Potential Savings: \$0.00**
 Total professional fees of \$110,994.36 were accrued on this matter, which has exceeded 70% of the matter budget. The agreed matter budget is \$150,000.00.

Continued Progress

Clear reports, efficient processes, and strong relationships are three results worth celebrating for any in-house legal team. But almost three years into its partnership with Brightflag, Sonnedix's business and ambitions continue to grow.

“Every corporate legal department can likely reduce costs just by modernizing its financial workflows and resetting vendor expectations,” Heather noted. “But as you accumulate more data, you eventually unlock an entirely new dimension of cost-saving possibilities.”

How should we divide the budget across each phase of M&A matters?

Where have partners been taking on work that could be done by associates?

Which comparatively high rates are actually justified by the quality of advice?

Asking and answering such questions through Brightflag has helped Heather build an increasingly data-based perspective of what certain legal services should cost. And the resulting negotiation of fixed-fee arrangements is delivering a degree of predictability that the whole business can appreciate.

“Whether it's at matter intake or annual budget meetings, we're now approaching all of our financial conversations from a much stronger place,” said Marissa. “We're quickly giving colleagues the numbers they need and getting back to crafting the expert legal strategies they expect.”

93%

Percentage of legal matters that began with a defined budget

93%

Percentage of legal matters that featured alternative fee arrangements (AFAs)

5.2

Average number of days from invoice submission to approval decision