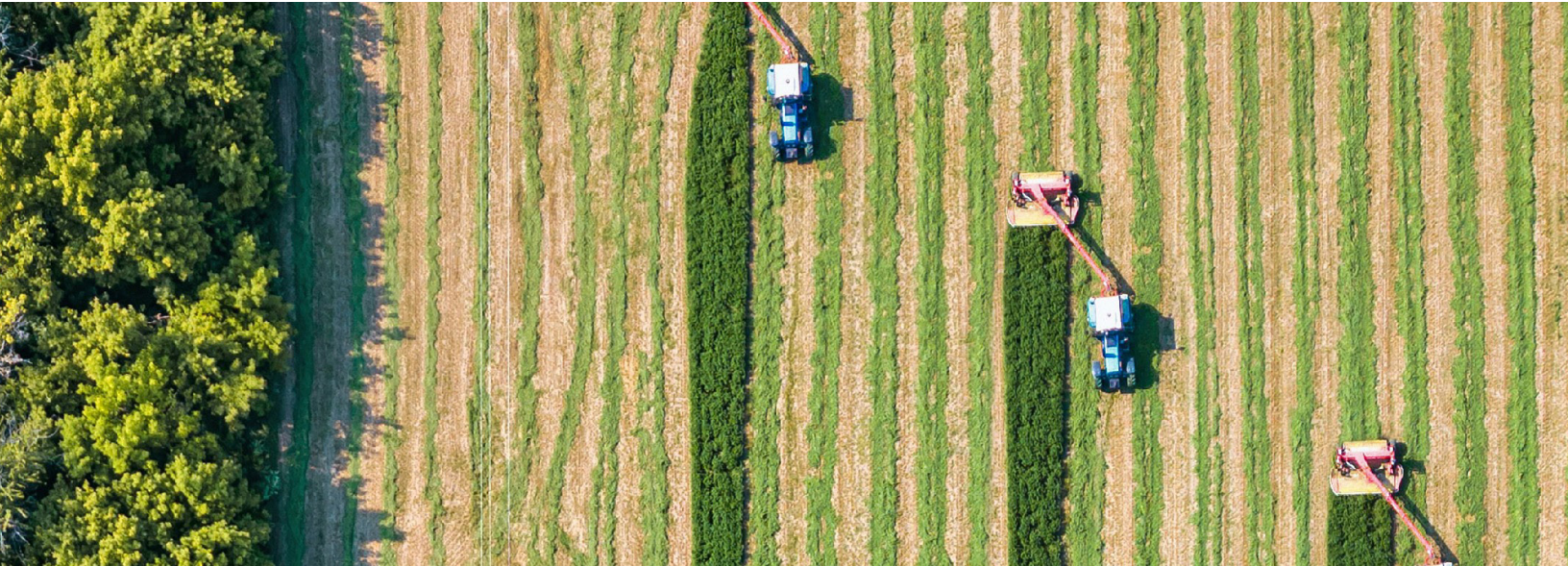


From Good to Great: How Syngenta Keeps Improving Its Legal Operations



Their counterparts at most other companies may have felt more than satisfied. Roles were clear, processes were standardized, and reports were reliable. No small feat for a legal operations function responsible for empowering 220 colleagues and 340 law firms in support of a business operating across 60 countries.

But “good enough” isn’t a phrase overheard at Syngenta headquarters. So when it came time to consider renewing the contract with its legal operations software provider in late 2019, several lingering concerns and limitations were discussed.

With the software hosted on-premise, technical maintenance would continue to represent a significant expense for the Syngenta team. Considerable time and money would also need to be invested in system upgrades if they hoped to resolve the frustrations of internal users. The invoice review experience had become so burdensome, for example, that a third-party service provider had been hired at additional cost to assist with the task. Additionally, their lack of confidence in the data surfaced by the software was preventing the team from adopting alternative fee arrangements (AFAs) more broadly.

“Another seemingly small factor creating big issues for us was an inability to support PDF invoicing,” said Suha Gehrer, Legal Operations Billing Lead at Syngenta. “Since most law firms outside the U.S. rarely produce invoices in the LEDES format — and that was the primary one our legacy software supported, a surprisingly large portion of our



The Syngenta Group is one of the world’s leading agriculture innovation companies, with roots going back more than 250 years. In more than 100 countries, the company strives to transform agriculture through breakthrough products and technologies that play a vital role in enabling the food chain to feed the world safely, sustainably and with respect for our planet.

outside counsel would circumvent the technology altogether. That meant we never saw a complete picture.”

It wasn't necessarily a smooth experience for the law firms that did engage with the technology either. With no access to the provider's support team, outside counsel would routinely come to Syngenta for help navigating a tool they found clunky and confusing. In addition to the hours of new work this created, there was also concern within the team about the fundamental fairness of having law firms pay usage fees to the software provider.

Searching for a Solution

As the team began surveying the market and weighing potential alternatives, several criteria became clear. At a technical level, both legal operations and IT leaders concluded that a purely cloud-based platform would be an absolute requirement. Significant investments had been made in customizing Syngenta's legacy on-premise system over the years, but now those modifications were making it even more difficult to implement the upgrades users wanted to see. The ongoing disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were also providing an urgent reminder of the operational risks associated with tools that adapt poorly to remote work.

At a strategic level, the legal operations team knew that advancing its analytical capabilities would be a critical part of driving increased value for the business. Gaining complete visibility over its global portfolio of work was the immediate priority. But the long-term hope was that emerging technologies could help uncover new layers of insight beyond merely hours and rates.

“We knew we had only scratched the surface of what's possible with today's tools,” explained Laurent Giezendanner, Head of Legal Operations at Syngenta. “We wanted to become a department that consistently sets precise budgets, negotiates alternative fee arrangements, and partners only with value-adding providers.”

Aligning on the Answer

Syngenta immediately noted several unique advantages during its evaluation of Brightflag's technology. The cloud-based infrastructure and software-as-a-service (SaaS) model would offer greater flexibility and faster updates to the team. The fact that the software supports PDF invoices as easily as LEDES files promised a remedy for several invoicing headaches. But it was ultimately the patented artificial intelligence (AI) at the core of Brightflag's legal operations platform that attracted the most interest.

“

Since most law firms outside the U.S. rarely produce invoices in the LEDES format — and that was the primary one our legacy software supported, a surprisingly large portion of our outside counsel would circumvent the technology altogether. That meant we never saw a complete picture.

Suha Gehrer
Legal Operations Billing Lead
Syngenta

“We knew AI could be a powerful way to increase productivity, enabling us to move even faster by automating more elements in our key workflows,” said Giezendanner. “What was more surprising, though, was the depth of useful data generated by Brightflag. We saw that it could elevate us into a much stronger position for making decisions and delivering impact.”

Any hesitancy Syngenta may have had about making a bold change was ultimately resolved by the personal connections forged with the Brightflag team. Even from the earliest sales conversations and technical demonstrations, the dynamic felt fundamentally different from what Syngenta experienced with other vendors.

“Throughout the RFP process, Brightflag was always curious to learn more about our vision for legal operations progress and able to present creative solutions,” said Surya Kottakota, Legal Business Process & Technology Specialist at Syngenta. “There was clearly a strong and unified team behind the technology that would stay invested in our long-term success.”

Planning for Success

The collaborative spirit continued as Syngenta formally began its transition to Brightflag. A working group of more than a dozen participants was assembled to confirm strategic objectives, prioritize technical tasks, and create a detailed project plan for the months ahead.

As the work of mapping processes, migrating data, and configuring features began in earnest, a proactive change management plan was also underway. Brightflag drafted messaging templates that Syngenta adapted and circulated internally months before finalizing the software switch. This enabled the legal operations team to articulate the expected business impact, confirm key project milestones, and invite colleagues to voice any concerns about potential disruptions to their work.

In the weeks leading up to the official launch date, the Brightflag team hosted live training workshops across multiple time zones to ensure both Syngenta staff and their outside counsel partners would be comfortable using the new platform. This early attention to detail yielded positive reviews, with stakeholders from every segment praising the intuitive technology and smoothly managed transition. Several members of the core working group continued meeting on a bi-weekly basis for the next few months, reviewing progress against an updated mutual success plan.

“

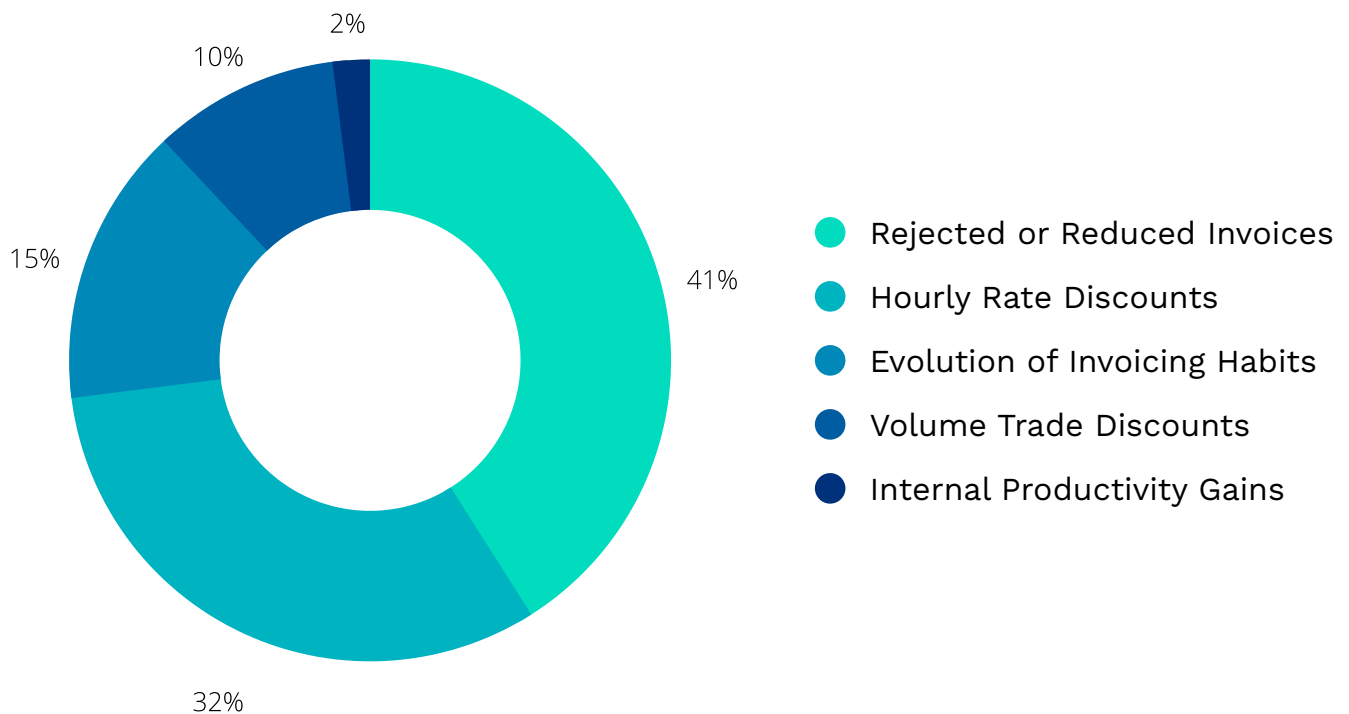
We knew AI could be a powerful way to increase productivity, enabling us to move even faster by automating more elements in our key workflows. What was more surprising, though, was the depth of useful data generated by Brightflag. We saw that it could elevate us into a much stronger position for making decisions and delivering impact.

Laurent Giezendanner
Head of Legal Operations
Syngenta

Realizing Results

The Syngenta team quickly integrated the basics of the Brightflag platform into their everyday habits and shifted focus to more advanced features. Automating rejection of non-compliant expenses, capturing accruals across multiple practice areas, and developing the foundation for price benchmarking were just a few early wins. As a result, Syngenta was able to recoup the equivalent of **10% of its gross legal spend in H1 2021**.

ROI Breakdown by Source



Pursuing Excellence

Realizing such results within one year of switching to a new legal operations platform would be a meaningful achievement for any team. But for Syngenta, looking forward to the next potential improvement is only natural. And they've certainly found a like-minded partner in Brightflag.

The two teams are already collaborating on the development of new software features that will put actionable data into the hands of Syngenta's procurement specialists even faster. As that technical work continues, the pair are also designing a law firm benchmarking report template that can be adapted to match regional priorities when managing outside counsel relationships.

"Each partner really respects the expertise the other brings to the table and graciously accepts suggestions for potential improvement," added Gehrer. "I really appreciate that Syngenta and Brightflag are challenging each other to continue defining and delivering a higher standard for legal operations."