

An interview with Mark Flint

General Counsel, Geocon



GEOCON



When General Counsel Mark Flint joined Geocon, he immediately created a strategy to transform the legal team's processes to establish a firmer grip on external spend, decrease disputes and prioritise the completion of complex construction contracts to drive the profitability and efficiency of the organisation using technology. Mark says:

“When I took the position, two issues became apparent fairly quickly. First, the company had limited software to support increasingly complex legal demands, made more acute by higher-than-normal levels of dispute resolution. Geocon held its data on a shared filing system accessed through File Explorer. That was manageable five years ago but as the business grew, the architecture became unwieldy, to the point where navigation and searchability was difficult. We still use File Explorer a lot, but it has touchy searchability, is not accessible by the external providers, is not cloud based and we lacked tasking capability and the ability to log critical dates.

The most immediate and enduring benefit of Dazychain was tasking capability. It alleviated Sunday afternoons preparing task lists for the next week or two. Tasks still need to be set, but a centralised system that permitted allocation and status tracking was a big benefit. Dazychain displays worklists for each team member and issues reminders that can be customised so you are not nagged to death if it isn't necessary. As General Counsel, I have a much better visibility of the workload across the team and can adjust tasks accordingly.



One recent innovation in Dazychain that has proven especially useful is the ability to rename emails as you save them. This gives us the ability to highlight important emails, where otherwise they may be masked with generic descriptions. The ability to work remotely, especially in times of lockdown, has been immensely useful. We can log into our server-based systems too, but burrowing in with VPN's is less desirable than the cloud based option.

The second issue that needed to be addressed was a high level of debt with our external legal providers. This was not a problem with the quality of the service. The problem was partly due to inadequate control at the procurement stage. Staff in the various business arms of Geocon have authority to engage external lawyers, but rigor around fee estimates and documentation was lacking. Our accounting system was clunky and disjointed and this impaired timely payment because the legal bills were inadequately tracked and addressed.

Dazychain gave us immediate visibility of the expenditure on external lawyers, and greater control over procurement. At the same time Geocon implemented a more rigorous procurement process across the board and revamped the account management systems. Those measures resolved the problems. Dazychain still has an important function though. Where bills are uploaded to Dazychain the legal team has ready access to the accounts rendered by the external lawyers where otherwise that might not be apparent”.

Mark and the legal team use the Dazychain search function to locate matters, deliverables, documents and invoices:

“Everyone uses the system differently. I search mainly by project using keywords. But if I’m looking for a precedent or need a document, I know we have produced previously, I’ll use the general search function. It’s remarkably effective at finding the documents that we want.

Searching in File Explorer is an option, but the magnitude of data makes searching slow and you can get timed out. In Dazychain, the search is quicker and is focused on documents relevant to lawyers’ work, so it excludes all the dross that otherwise is dredged up.”





Mark has some great ideas about where he's going with Dazychain next. He says:

“I think we use about 30% of the capability of Dazychain at the moment. In the last two years we've experienced the full lifecycle of large-scale development; the feasibility studies, the planning process, the marketing, construction and delivery. Some tasks could have anticipated and done better if we'd had our checklists and precedents in place. Now it's about enhancing systems enable us to deliver what we need to. That will be the focus for the next few years. We are not alone here. Systems development has been the focus of attention across the enterprise. The construction arm has well refined processes, the rest of us are catching up to some extent. Procedures, policies, and software upgrades have been the subject of enormous effort by everyone over the past two years. The upcoming work with Dazychain is part of the wider effort.”

Working processes and priorities have changed for the Geocon team, according to Mark:

“Geocon has spent a lot of time re-evaluating the way it works, the most important objective being greater collaboration between teams. Legal was a bit of silo, but that sense is all but gone now. There has been a reduction in litigation and dispute work compared to two years ago, our role is more commercial advisory, opinion-based and strategic. The people in Geocon are coming to us much earlier and saying, “This is going to be an issue in three or four months' time, what's our legal position and what are our options?”, not delivering a box that is ticking suspiciously. The efforts towards greater integration will continue and we will refine our systems to be better at delivery. As any lawyer knows, precedents can be tedious, humdrum stuff, but I think there's a widely felt sense that transitioning to a really big company requires a commitment to systems development.”