

Avis Budget Shares Secrets for Legal Ops Success

Law Department Management





Photo: Avis Budget Group receives 2018 ACC Value Champion award

In 2015, Vivek Hatti had an “ah ha” moment. A former law firm lawyer, Hatti had spent the last decade working with global corporations and law firms from the legal services perspective. He was ready to take that expertise in-house.

“When the ops role at Avis was first discussed, I knew that was what I wanted to do,” Hatti says of the position leading operations within the legal department at Avis Budget Group. The new role seemed like a natural progression for him.

“I’d been doing this role for multiple companies from the legal vendor side and thought it would be great to continue that work for a single company,” Hatti says. “It’s very refreshing to focus on a particular team and craft solutions internally. It’s a different kind of challenge from the legal services side because you now have to shift from crafting a solution to a defined problem, to finding multiple solutions to address departmental needs.”

Hatti credits his legal services background to his success at Avis and believes that corporate legal departments can draw from a rich pool of experienced individuals who have a background in cutting-edge legal services firms.

“When I meet other ops directors, I meet people who came into the role from various backgrounds, but very few from the vendor side,” Hatti notes. “I think it’s actually a natural fit for someone who has worked with many different companies and can draw from their knowledge of many different solutions.”

While the legal industry as a whole can be slow to adopt new practices, legal service providers are routinely recognized by highly regarded organizations, such as the Association for Corporate Counsel (ACC) and the College of Law Practice Management for their innovative processes, technology, and contributions to advancing the profession.

“You have an entire industry of legal services providers with years of experience, many of whom are also lawyers who have been exposed for years to what is working and what isn’t working to improve the practice of law,” Hatti says. (Photo Left: Avis Budget Group receives 2018 ACC Value Champion award).

Many ops executives are typically former litigation or corporate lawyers, or hail from finance, technology, and human resource backgrounds. Hatti, on the other hand, was a former senior principal at Infosys and worked with global corporations and law firms to design and implement legal services solutions aimed to increase efficiency, reduce and control risk, and improve quality of life for lawyers and staff. As such, he built his career implementing game-changing solutions, which encompass areas such as e-discovery and litigation support, contract management, due diligence, legal research, and compliance. He now employs these methods at Avis.

One thing Hatti has in common with his peers is a close partnership with his organization’s general counsel, Michael Tucker, who refers to Hatti as his “right-hand man.”

“Vivek brings the right mix of legal and budgeting experience, project management skills, and curiosity for deploying technological solutions that are the keys to winning today and in the future,” Tucker says.

As Avis executive vice president, general counsel, and chief compliance officer, Tucker collaborated with Hatti and with their colleagues, Linda Rush, Bryon Koepke, and Gail Jones, to launch a year-long legal transformation effort in 2015. They received an ACC Value Champion Award in 2017 for their innovative and impactful work. In fact, when giving guidance to those considering an ops role, Hatti’s first question is: “Who are you reporting to?”

“Number one, the ops director has to report to the GC,” Hatti says. “That is key.”

“If we don’t report directly to the GC, if ops reports a level or two down, they are, in reality, hiring a legal admin, not a true COO,” Hatti says. “Without that, ops will not have the necessary weight to transform the legal department and perhaps the company. To be successful, the ops director needs executive backing at the highest level and have honest conversations at the highest level.” Hatti and Tucker routinely engage in open and direct one-on-ones, fostering a relationship of mutual trust and respect, which are necessary to take on large-scale projects.

“Michael is a savvy forward-thinking lawyer and a driver of change and efficiency,” Hatti says. “He also makes the initial announcements of our initiatives. He sets the scene, which allows me to more easily work with my colleagues and attain the necessary 'buy-in’ — knowing we have his explicit support.”

Tucker’s admiration for Hatti is mutual: “Vivek possesses that special interpersonal skill that allows him to be firm with the attorneys and staff, without coming off as being overbearing. Or as I like to say, he’s very effective at holding everyone accountable — including me!”

This visible leadership support is critical to positive change management, and allows great ops executives to execute successful initiatives throughout the legal department — even when that means managing your boss.

The second question Hatti has for a potential ops director is: “Where do you have authority?”

As the legal ops director at Avis, Vivek oversees the legal budget, technology, outside vendors, law firms, and knowledge management matters. These responsibilities are carried out in consultation with the general counsel and other in-house lawyers. (Note: The ACC Legal Ops Section has compiled job descriptions for ops director positions.)

“The hiring of vendors should be within the purview of the ops director and removed from the in-house lawyers,” Hatti explains. “Ops directors are best equipped to conduct analyses of strengths and weaknesses of partners and solutions. Additionally, with oversight of the entire department budget, ops directors can help structure AFAs and determine whether the law firms are being efficient.”

Hatti’s first suggestion for ops directors new to their role: “Go for the easy wins.”

Getting money for ops initiatives is critical. Without budgets for operations, legal departments remain bogged down in the status quo. However, because many (especially public) US corporations are driven by Wall Street to hyper-focus on quarter-to-quarter earnings and budgets, long-term projects that target improving productivity require planning and preparing for solid business cases.

“There must be trust, and trust is built slowly,” Hatti says. “You have to honor your commitments and go from there. That is why I focus on the quick wins to start. Ask yourself, ‘What can you do quickly to show impact and earn the leeway for large-scale ideas?’”

This includes opportunities where initiatives may have been pre-approved but lacked the leadership

to drive them across the finish line. As such, know the areas where a ready-made solution can be relatively painless to put into place.

“Vivek’s demonstrated ability to produce savings and efficiencies makes it easier for me to obtain authorization or funds to acquire new tools to enhance the quality of our services or make our work more efficient,” Tucker says.

One quick win for Hatti was getting a handle on the new e-billing system that was put into place just before his arrival. This triumph concentrated on verifying the enforcement of billing guidelines, tracking invoices, requiring accruals reporting, and working with law firms to create more timely billing cycles.

Hatti swiftly dove into his role in the first few months at Avis. Hitting the ground running helped him to get to know the in-house team and panel law firms, understand who does what, learn which tech tools were already in place, and discover the needs or pain points of the legal team, as well as the larger business objectives of the company.

“At Avis, there is an appetite for change,” Hatti says. “Ops directors need to ask their GCs, ‘What is the appetite for change and will you provide the budget and support to back it?’ A lot can be accomplished with that.”



Vivek Hatti, Esq. is the director of legal operations at Avis Budget Group, a leading global provider of mobility solutions. Prior to joining Avis in 2015, Hatti was the senior principal at Infosys BPO where he worked with corporations and law firms to design and implement legal services solutions aimed at helping clients achieve objectives such as increasing efficiency, reducing and controlling risk, and improving quality of life for existing lawyers and staff. Mr. Hatti received both his J.D. and B.S. from George Washington University.



Michael K. Tucker, Esq. is the executive vice president and general counsel at Avis Budget Group,

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