



INDUSTRY CASE STUDY

▶ The power of a unified platform

Simon Levine, global co-CEO and international managing partner at DLA Piper, discusses how the firm partnered with Fulcrum GT to deliver its ambitious finance transformation project — driving operational efficiencies, improving client experience and unleashing plenty of potential for the future

As an international law firm with a history of growth by acquisition, DLA Piper inherited local billing and finance systems used in offices across more than 40 countries — over the years, the administrative burden of continuing to operate integrated but discrete systems became increasingly unwieldy. As part of the firm’s wider transformation journey, it therefore partnered with Fulcrum GT to implement Project Vector — a mammoth finance transformation project aiming to replace all those legacy solutions with a unified alternative in Fulcrum’s Snap Digital Legal Business Cloud Platform. If that wasn’t ambitious enough, it was due to go live in 12 months and one ‘big bang’.

Fulcrum GT’s Snap Cloud platform, powered by SAP, was the obvious choice of a solution from the outset, says DLA Piper’s global co-CEO Simon Levine — “best-in-class technologies that align with both our current core objectives and long-term strategic ambitions”. He was confident it would ensure efficiency, accuracy and standardisation across multiple jurisdictions, and operational excellence across both business and client experience.

Nonetheless, a product is only as good as the people who build and use it, and the challenge of bringing so many systems “into the fold” within a relatively short period of time is no small feat. For DLA Piper, it meant working with a partner that not only had a proven track record of delivering large-scale, complex multi-jurisdiction projects for law firms, but one that also shared the same values around the future direction of technology and sustainability — as well as commitment to the firm’s vision of what it was setting out to achieve.

Getting platform ready

After a period of supplemental requirements gathering and planning, the project kicked off in January 2022, with a 40-strong multidisciplinary team across both parties working together closely on key stages of the deployment journey. Using Fulcrum GT’s product and Acceler8™ methodology — an “agile, gated and tightly governed approach” — the deployment was structured in five phases: among them, one for validating the solution’s fit, and each with its own objectives, tasks and deliverables. Fulcrum GT’s expertise with Cloud SAP technology, and its experience of how international law firms operate, allowed it to accommodate DLA Piper’s specific needs, to monitor and make adjustments where necessary — a process that carried through the post-implementation HyperCare™ phase.

This deployment structure, along with Fulcrum GT effectively embedding itself within the firm, played a big part in the project’s success. Levine notes, “It allowed us to work together as one committed, truly collaborative, emotionally connected team. The closest I’ve come to that before was in my work as a litigator — when cases would sometimes go on for two or three years, I would become very invested in these clients and cases. I can understand why it works, it’s very effective.”

Taking the leap

Coming to view one another as trusted colleagues, he notes, was vital to delivering the project on time and budget — going live across 30 countries (excluding the Americas) in one day. “It’s true in any business, and even more so in law firms that are naturally risk-averse, that you need to be alert to things that might go wrong. That can lead to a temptation to be too cautious, to go back and forth about whether you’re ready to go live. But in any deployment, especially in setting up a system that’s built to last, you have to deal with a small amount of disruption. The team helped us accept and prepare for this part of the implementation process.”

Fulcrum GT led the way in how to manage this from a change perspective, but challenged the business to stay on track, Levine says: “I describe it as doing a bungee jump — getting to the platform is one thing, but stepping off it is a whole different challenge. They helped us to take that leap.”

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As with any large-scale deployment, teething issues were anticipated, and something which DLA Piper faced. “We launched three months before our year-end and we were able to

deliver. After delivering our year-end, we went out to obtain feedback on the new systems, and identified areas which required further development or attention. With these insights, Fulcrum GT continue to work closely with our team to address the feedback and ensure the system continues to meet our needs,” continued Levine.

Measures of success

Since going live in January 2023 — Levine says the Snap finance system has already enabled the firm to deliver a strong financial year by driving greater accuracy and efficiency in the billing process and improving collections and cashflow.

It has been less than a year, but he says the team is already seeing the number of invoices queried by clients declining every week — no small success for a firm that has processed more than 128,000 bills since the new platform was deployed.

Another example of how the platform is already driving efficiencies is its inter-office billing: “About 12.5% of our billing activity was related to inter-office billing that takes place before the client even gets their bill. A standardised system that enables visibility across the business is significantly reducing billing time and effort, while increasing quality of service to the client.”

And the Fulcrum platform’s long-term benefits should be even more game-changing, he believes.

“If you get it right, the potential of data to inform how you operate internally and interact with clients is remarkable. We see a lot of learnings at DLA Piper and we’re constantly looking to harness them effectively. With a powerful SAP system like this, we’re going to be at the cutting-edge of technology for many years to come. The ability to harness data and create high-quality datasets is going to be huge.”

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