

Leading law firm Stibbe saves time in their core processes

A case study on how Stibbe has integrated Berkeley's solutions



Stibbe embraces digital transformation by automating its knowledge

Stibbe is an international law firm advising on the laws of the Benelux countries and European law, with offices in Amsterdam, Brussels and Luxembourg as well as [branch offices] in Dubai, London and New York. Their practice groups include corporate, mergers and acquisitions, private equity, capital markets, finance, tax, litigation, dispute resolution, EU competition, employment, pensions, administrative law, environment and planning, energy, real estate, construction, technology, media and telecommunications.

As a specialist firm, Stibbe's lawyers work in multidisciplinary teams with the aim of delivering pragmatic advice. They build close business relationships with their clients, which range from local and multinational corporations and financial institutions to state organizations and public authorities. Stibbe realises that understanding their clients' commercial objectives, their position in the market and their sector or industry, allows them to render suitable and effective advice.

In addition to their own international presence, Stibbe collaborates closely with other top-tier firms for cross-border matters outside their Benelux home jurisdictions. These relationships are non-exclusive and enable Stibbe to assemble a tailor-made, integrated team of lawyers with the best expertise and contacts for each specific matter. This guarantees efficient coordination on cross-border transactions throughout a multitude of legal areas, whatever their complexity and nature.

As early as November 2014, Stibbe approached Berkeley Bridge for help in automating the expertise of their legal and notary division. The notaries had about 500 different documents to turn into models, while lawyers had about 300. On 31 August 2015, we sealed the deal on our solution.

Oskar Snijders, CEO at Berkeley Bridge:

"It's exciting that Berkeley Bridge was chosen after a very intensive selection process. We're proud to add one of the most prominent law firms in the legal world like Stibbe to our list of references. We're looking forward to collaborating closely with Stibbe's professionals."

Stibbe has now developed the different legal models it needs and has integrated Berkeley's solutions into its daily practice. We recently met Stibbe's Boyd Hendriks, Head of Knowledge Management, Sophia Baas, Corporate Support Lawyer, and Sylvia Schuurig, Application Coordinator, to catch up and enjoy the views of Amsterdam from the top floor of their spacious new office. We talked about the development phase, Stibbe's present practice, and what the future holds.

Boyd Hendriks gives us the lay of the legal land and discusses the role of automation

Boyd Hendriks described what he saw as the broader developments in the legal world that led to their decision to work with Berkeley. "A complex office providing extensive legal services has a need to automate its business in model form. We are working towards efficiency and providing a better service to our clients which means we have to look into ways to save time in our core processes".

He also emphasized that Stibbe is taking the lead when it comes to implementing expert systems into their practice. “We expect, in the long run, that all law firms will have to take these steps. We embrace innovation and recognize that this sometimes involves leaving traditional methods behind and switching to new methods to make sure we continue to offer a first-rate service to our clients. One of the main benefits of automation is that the basic components form an excellent foundation for our lawyers and notaries, which allows them to really concentrate on the exceptions and complex elements of the matter”.

Boyd expects that once law firms have chosen this path there will be no going back. It is interesting to see how easily an organization like Stibbe was able to adapt to the use of new modelling technology and how it has become an integral part of their core processes. “The bottom line is that our clients are the main beneficiaries”, explained Boyd. “We might be the first, but in the near future clients will expect this level of service as standard. It was important for us in selecting Berkeley Bridge that the technology was reliable and met all of our needs”.

According to Boyd, it is interesting to see other players in the legal field trying to follow suit. Stibbe’s leadership in innovation challenges others in the legal industry to look at their own possibilities in this area. “It is great to initiate a change that significantly contributes to the quest for efficiency and quality. Berkeley Bridge helped us to determine what information could be automated and how modelling technology could help in this process”.

“In the end, automation can never replace the highly skilled and experienced people at Stibbe. But for us, the boundaries are very clear”. To illustrate his point, he made a comparison with the way master painters like Rembrandt or Rubens employed apprentices in their studios. Apprentices take care of the background and colour of the broad composition, then the masters come in to provide the finishing touches and finesse.

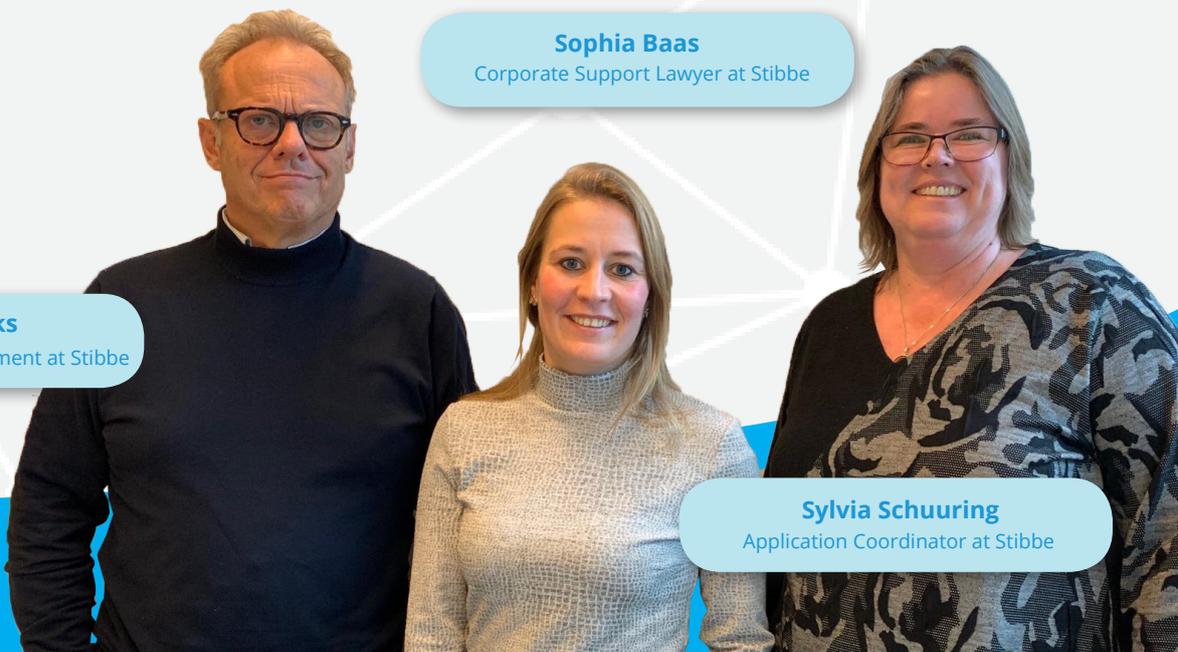
Sophia Baas, Corporate Support Lawyer at Stibbe:

“The main parts of the document can be automated and the lawyer or notary can focus on adjusting certain sections or drafting specific wording.”

Sophia Baas on the day-to-day experience with notarial models

She deals with the interplay between human judgement and automation that Boyd mentioned earlier. “In my experience, the level of automation depends on the area of law and the nature of the transaction. Sometimes an entire document has to be drafted from scratch. In most cases, the main parts of the document can be automated and the lawyer or notary can focus on adjusting certain sections or drafting specific wording”.

She explained how Berkeley Bridge supplemented the knowledge management practices already in place at Stibbe. “We have always used our exceptional knowhow and knowledge management to develop our own models. With this technological change, much more is possible and the process is much faster”.



Boyd Hendriks

Head of Knowledge Management at Stibbe

Sophia Baas

Corporate Support Lawyer at Stibbe

Sylvia Schuurig

Application Coordinator at Stibbe

Boyd also added that introducing Berkeley Bridge has naturally led to a review of the knowhow in general and how Stibbe wants its models to look in the future, which improves the quality of the legal service overall.

Sophia believes that having the data in one place, which is easily accessible, is one of the main benefits: "Having access to the data in one place helps from a practical point of view. Once the information is added at the start, it can be used throughout the transaction at the click of a button".

Stibbe pushed Berkeley Bridge to grow

Clients with a strong drive to grow and excel, like Stibbe, motivate Berkeley Bridge to do the same. Working with them was not a one-way street. The Stibbe case was a milestone in the development of the Berkeley Publisher. Stibbe's specific wishes required us to find and build solutions that we are now able to offer as packages to all of our clients. We created custom software integrations on site with various CRM and Document Management Systems as well as the Municipal Personal Records Database (MPRD). To handle the volume of legal models Stibbe needed, and to ensure maintenance was feasible, we expanded the capabilities of our Berkeley Publisher with so-called libraries.

You can compare libraries to a database of clauses. However, the libraries also store all logic, calculations and questions that belong to a specific piece of text.

Each option available for that text (e.g. languages, plural/singular, question-sensitive details) is stored in one place. This means that the number of entries is significantly lower than a traditional database. It's more accurate to compare a library to a complete 'sub-document' that any other document can call on.

This centralizes and simplifies maintenance. For example, if one document is updated, every other relevant/related document can be automatically updated at the same time.

Sylvia Schuurin on learning to build models on the Publisher platform

To discuss what it was like to build the models and work with Berkeley Bridge on the initial implementation, we turned to Sylvia Schuurin, who has been with Stibbe for more than ten years.

"Our collaboration has been really rewarding", she said. "I spent a week at Berkeley Bridge to learn the finer points of building models. It's also been great to be able to shoot an email to Kevin de Bruijn (Expert System Author at Berkeley Bridge) with a question and always get a quick response".

Considering that she stepped in when the project was already well underway, it's impressive how quickly Sylvia was able to pick up the skills she needed to build models. "What's fun about the documentation on the website is that you learn a lot by doing. What I'm doing now is mostly implementing changes in existing models, but I also built an entire model myself, which is going live soon. I'm really proud of that".



I see Berkeley Bridge as a solid and permanent basis.

- Boyd Hendriks, Stibbe



About Berkeley Bridge

Berkeley Bridge believes that the existing knowledge & experience in organizations is the most important precondition for success. The effective use of all information available allows organizations to optimize processes and to serve customers better.

Berkeley Bridge has been supporting organizations for over fifteen years by advising them and inspiring them in terms of knowledge systems. We provide solutions for designing, managing, and sharing knowledge in, inter alia, the legal domain, in health care, for the government, and in many other sectors. We do so with a team of enthusiastic knowledge experts and experienced developers from our office in Alphen aan den Rijn .

Contact

Curious about what we can do for your organization? Please feel free to contact us for advice on how we can help you achieve your goals.



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