Berkeley Bridge

Kennedy Van der Laan: Six Years In Sync with Berkeley Bridge

Jeroen Zweers Discusses Partnership/Collaboration with Berkeley Bridge

Case Study

How Kennedy Van der Laan Pioneers Subscription-based Legal Services

Kennedy Van der Laan is a tale of two cities: Amsterdam and Eindhoven. In Amsterdam, there's global business and leading law firms; in Eindhoven, Europe's most powerful high tech companies, such as ASML and Phillips, alongside startup hubs and independent innovators. It's legal; it's IT. At Kennedy Van der Laan, people from both of these worlds work together. It's no coincidence that Microsoft was one of their first clients.

Ever since eleven young lawyers founded Kennedy Van der Laan in 1992, the firm has never been afraid of change. They've positioned themselves as the nimble, socially-minded contender in the legal playing field. While big firms and corporate legal counsels are scrambling to keep up with AI and other technological changes, ever-more regulation is threatening to overtake law firms' capacity to handle their work. From the sidelines, clients are telling them to do that work in less time, for lower fees. But Kennedy Van der Laan is leading the race, due in part to their embrace of innovation.

Launching Kennedy Van der Laan | Sync in December of 2017 was the latest step in the firm's effort to nurture their client relationships and open up new revenue streams. Sync brings legal tech solutions to clients, including tools for document analysis and automation, compliance checks, and workflow optimization. More than just a software startup, Sync also guides clients through the complex landscape of legal tech and helps them implement and maintain their tailor-made solutions.

Jeroen Zweers

We met with Innovation Director Jeroen Zweers to discuss the changing legal world that Sync responds to, as well as the firm's long-time partnership with Berkeley Bridge. As founder of Dutch Legal Tech and board member of the European Legal Technology Association (ELTA), Zweers was recognized by the Financial Times in 2016 as one of Europe's most innovative and influential thinkers in the legal world.

Responding to challenges in today's legal sector

"Our society is juridifying," Zweers has said. In all business sectors, regulatory pressure is on the rise, with heavy fines for non-compliance. At the same time, clients are demanding better and faster service from their legal firms and counsels. Developments in legal tech, such as eDiscovery and contract automation, mean the end of much routine work and help firms save time.

Automation fundamentally alters a legal firm's relationship to their clients. Clients know that while routine solutions require expertise, they do not always require an attorney's expensive presence. Firms and other legal businesses now occupy a level playing field; it's no longer about the practice of law by lawyers, but the delivery of legal services by whatever means possible. IT is now taking over much of that delivery. An attractive option for a general counsel would be to outsource that work to legal startups – so how can firms retain their clients?

Automation also spells the end of the old billable hours model; clients now demand services for a fixed price. The old model serves the interests of the firm first, the client second. Not only can automation make legal work more transparent and secure, it also enables clients and firms to collaborate as sparring partners. Clients no longer want to leverage a firm's expertise for a transactional one-time fix; they want to develop and maintain long-term solutions.

Zweers affirms that "most firms are still on the traditional model of billable hours." In order to tackle the triple challenge of building long-term relationships with clients, staying on top of legal tech developments, and beating the competition from tradition billable hours firms, KvdL launched Sync. Sync does things differently than most legal tech startups and large IT companies. "On the one hand, there are document assembly tools. When you get down to it, 8 out of 10 startups does that. And then there's expert tools which come from big companies. Few legal firms actually know the difference."

Breaking new ground with subscription-based legal consultancy services

Zweers emphasizes that Sync is above all a legal tech consultancy firm. "What we do at Sync is seek solutions for legal departments." That might be building software, it might be something else to do with legal tech. Zweers notes that "the demand within large legal departments goes much further than questions of a juridical nature. They need different kinds of capabilities. We're doing consultancy, too, because we understand what their challenges are. That's absolutely where things are going."

They don't come in for a one-time fix or deal. Zweers aimed "to do not just assembly but business rules, for example. We also wanted to build our own applications." The business model behind Sync sounds as simple as it is surprisingly new: "We build the application, we maintain it in terms of both the techno-logy and the juridical content, and we sell it to legal departments through a subscription model. It's a model that you don't see very much."

The way they attract clients and do business with them is new as well: "In contrast to traditional application developers, we don't go around saying: here's our catalog, and here's a tool you might like. We flip the script and talk to you about your challenges. The starting point has to be the client's process. The only product I want to develop is one that transpa-rently fits into the client's existing systems."

A case study: automating risk assessment for procurement contracts

Zweers doesn't need to be asked about specific examples; it's how he explains what he does. Although he can't name names, he's eager to talk about the work Sync did on a procurement tool for a major multinational. He was talking to "a counsel who did a lot of work to assess all contracts that came in." The counsel said, "I get the sense that a large part of those contracts does not pose a major risk, and I don't have to look over them, if we can just know what the risk level is." Zweers brought the counsel together with their IT lawyer, and together they mapped out the logic behind these questions as a decision tree. That's how the tool puts a label of low, medium, or high risk on each contract automatically.

"When it's low, they put general terms and conditions on it, and it's out the door. Procurement gets involved when it's medium. Only when risk is high does it go to legal." The time savings are considerable. It turns out the counsel's intuition was right: "The majority of those contracts was low risk. Just the remaining high risk contracts end up on that counsel's desk."

Sync brings features of legal tech together that most companies keep apart in separate products: "We link analysis to assembly." But in the procurement case they went even further, expanding the tool with reporting and dashboarding functionality. Most legal departments don't actually have a good sense of what kind of risks they're running, Zweers observed, and most importantly, they don't see the larger patterns and trends. Sync ended up building a map of the risk contracts run in particular countries. "You might see, for example, that Belgium is in the red *[high risk]* zone. Why is that? Do we need to investigate?" That's the kind of information a CFO and other stakeholders would appreciate but which legal departments did not have the tools to provide.

"What we do empowers counsels within their organizations. We help legal departments make their process smarter." Zweers has a sense of humor about the image legal departments usually have within a business: "A pain in the ass. Someone might do an acquisition and have to wait three to four weeks for legal to clear it. These decisions usually take such a long time. But now, it's more in the vein of: our counsels are participating in business. That enhances a legal counsel's image."

Six years in sync with Berkeley Bridge

"With Berkeley Bridge it really is a partnership," Zweers affirmed. He recalls that "Rob [van de Plassche, Commercial Director at Berkeley Bridge] said that we're pushing the boundaries of what Berkeley Bridge can do. For instance, we're even talking about how you might incorporate blockchain technology into the platform, for timestamping contracts."

Sync, Zweers wants to note, is not a software company. "Yes, we build applications, but the platforms on which we do so come from third parties. Our goal is to add about 30 to 40% value. Berkeley Bridge is one of those dedicated platforms."

"I run a Dutch legal tech community, but I'm also on a European board of ELTA, and I interact with a lot of startups," Zweers said when asked about other IT companies he might work with. "We're really in the middle of legal tech, so we know what's available out there. Of course we did some research abroad as well, looking for alternatives."

But Kennedy Van der Laan has long been a client of Berkeley Bridge. "I've been at Kennedy for about four and a half years. It goes back about six years, so Berkeley was there before I was around." But it was Zweers who initiated a real partnership with Berkeley Bridge, not just a customer-client relationship.

"Berkeley is one of our dedicated platforms, because it can handle the scalability. But besides reasons of functionality, I also choose Berkeley because they're so accessible and because we know them so well. They're really eager to develop their product further, but they need parties like us to do that. Precisely because we have our eyes on the market and know what both legal counsels and businesses want. Rob used to focus on law firms, but I noticed legal departments could be very interesting for him as well. So we actually do pitches there together."

What lies ahead for Sync

Zweers is optimistic about Sync and Kennedy van der Laan's future. He's convinced that other firms will follow their lead, in part because of their efforts, in part because automation in the legal sector will be inevitable. Right now he has 1,5 fte working on Berkeley Bridge's software, which he expects to "double, if not triple in the coming year." He has four general developers.

"The so-called 'burden of proof'—apt for my business!—is on us to persuade legal departments that they need a bigger budget for tools like Sync. They're not used to having an IT budget at all. That's how accounting used to be some decades ago, and now it's all in IT."

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.

Zuidpoolsingel 12
2408 ZE
Alphen aan den Rijn (The Netherlands)

+31 172 - 51 51 46

info@berkeleybridge.nl