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Law firm, outsourcer aim to offer one-stop shopping

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Nicole Auerbach

Lawyers from Valorem Law have formed a firm that will work with legal process outsourcer Elevate Services. The new law firm will handle legal work that ABA rules dictate must be done by attorneys.

Local chemical distributor Univar hopes to cut \$10 million in annual legal expenses by hiring a Chicago law firm and a Los Angeles company to work together.

Lawyers from Chicago-based Valorem Law have formed a new firm that will work with legal process outsourcer Elevate Services. The new law firm, called ElevateNext, will handle legal work that American Bar Association rules dictate must be done by attorneys.

"We think this is the wave of the future," said Nicole Auerbach, ElevateNext's co-founding partner along with Patrick Lamb. "It really covers the gamut of legal services from A to Z. . . .Nobody has done this."

Regulation of the legal profession prohibits non-lawyers from owning a stake in a law firm, to guard against a conflict between clients' interests and a firm's owners. Elevate is not a law firm, but it sells services like contract review, due diligence, e-discovery and consulting, as well as proprietary software.

By partnering while remaining legally separate entities, Elevate and ElevateNext seek to stay within the rules while attracting clients with the promise of one-stop shopping.

The partnership comes as law firms are competing for clients against legal process outsourcers, companies that offer similar services, up to a point, but at a lower price. UnitedLex, a legal process outsourcer in Overland Park, Kan., inked a deal in March with General Electric to do work in legal operations, litigation, investigations and other areas. The Big Four accounting firms already compete with law firms outside the United States, where these rules don't apply.

Univar General Counsel Jeffrey Carr has worked with Auerbach and Lamb since they started Valorem. The law firm has earned a reputation for business innovation in the legal profession; Valorem pioneered alternative fees, rather than the billable hour, a decade ago.

Downers Grove-based Univar has 21 employees, including nine lawyers, in the legal department. The goal is to cut the legal spend by half over time.

“As a customer, I don't like the concept of going one place for certain things and going to other places for other things,” Carr said. With Elevate and ElevateNext working together, “it's seamless to me. I don't have to do separate contracts. I don't have to worry about separate management. I don't have to re-aggregate the work done by a disaggregated workflow. It's just like hiring a law firm.”

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