



Where is Everybody? The Secret Sauce to Successful Hybrid

Can We Do Better Than Microsoft Outlook?

It's time to be successful with hybrid—and it's going to take more than Microsoft Outlook to do it. But in the most recent ILTA Tech Survey, that's exactly what firms are doing: mainly using Microsoft Outlook to manage their hybrid operation. That's actually the best case scenario. In a majority of firms (60%), the technology in use is nothing: 60% of firms have no booking technology but are simply using Microsoft Outlook. Most firms do have conference room booking technology, but 48% of those firms are also using Microsoft Outlook.

So in a word, yes. We can do better. In fact, we must.

When we talk about “better”, however, what exactly are we talking about? Here it would be beneficial to talk about what hybrid success looks like and then consider what kind of technology tools might support that success.

One of the key metrics for hybrid success must surely be optimizing attorney time in the office. Today, according to a survey of the Am Law 100 from Savills, the battleground is around increasing the number of days in the office – not around whether or not the firm will go hybrid or not—and how to get there: mandates versus strong encouragement. According to this data, 67% of firms are encouraging or mandating 3 days a week in the office with some variance around ‘anchor days.’ Even here, whether strongly encouraged or mandated, compliance is an issue of which other studies show that across the board, about 94% of attorneys are not complying with RTO policies.

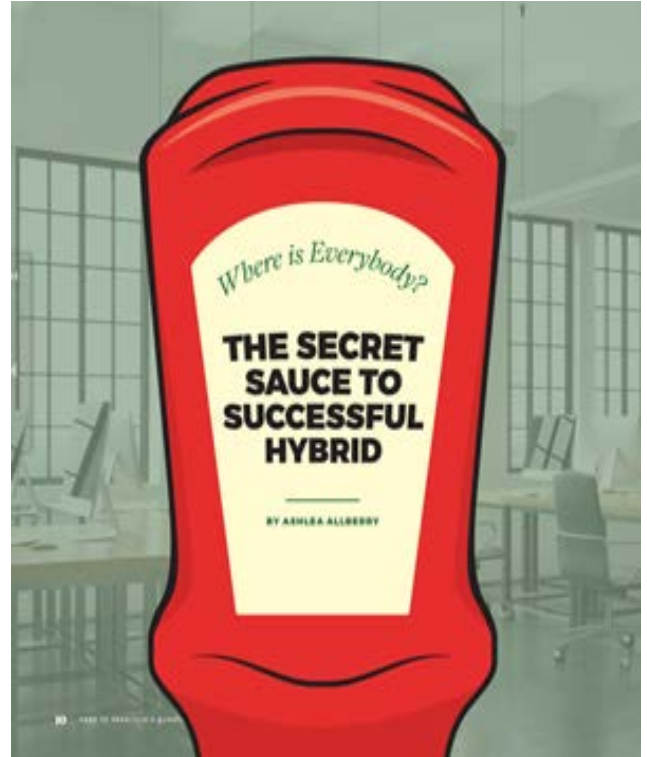
Another key metric for hybrid success must also be the experience of an efficient and productive hybrid environment. Attorneys and staff need to know that their in-office time is going to be optimized with no productivity loss due to information gaps, say, around AV or tech needs for hot desks that have been booked; no services interruption for catering or hospitality needs when conference rooms are booked with clients or prospects; that visiting attorneys can seamlessly be accommodated, and more.

But it's the last metric for hybrid success that may be the most important, and that's ensuring that attorneys can intentionally connect and collaborate when they are in the office—and this means, facilitating simple and effective ways for attorneys to “see” who is in the office (or going to be in the office) on what day so that individuals or groups can select the same days and locations to intentionally create the opportunity to connect. In fact, the business professionals in the office also need quick, effective access to this information to significantly improve the performance of their jobs as well.

This type of visibility is called presence: just a simple indicator as to whether an attorney is present or not, and can even indicate with great precision as to where: what seat on what floor in what city. Presence is the secret sauce to hybrid success. Here's more to why.

People: The Secret Sauce to Hybrid Success

People want to be with people. Period. In a study cited by Thomson Reuters' 2023 State of the Legal Market report, Microsoft surveyed 20,000 people and analyzed trillions of Microsoft 365 productivity signals to determine what factors are most important in getting employees to return to their offices, the survey disclosed, perhaps not surprisingly, that the real value of the office is not the place but the people.



When asked what would motivate them to come into the office, the surveyed employees had a resounding answer – time with coworkers:

- 85% of employees would be motivated to go into the office to rebuild team bonds;
- 84% of employees would be motivated to go into the office if they could socialize with co-workers;
- 74% of employees would go to the office more frequently if they knew their “work friends” were there; and
- 73% of employees would go to the office more frequently if they knew their direct team members would be there.

Can Microsoft Outlook help attorneys connect with their peers? Sure, usually through cumbersome email threads that are yet another drag on the administrative burden creep attorneys have been experiencing since the onset of the pandemic.

Where is Everybody? Technology to the Rescue!

If we are to solve this problem with new technology that is purposely built to answer this question, then that technology should 1. reduce administrative burden on attorneys and staff while also 2. provide information that is enhanced and significantly more actionable than an email thread, and 3. Help promote a vibrant in-office culture that fosters networking and collaboration.

The worst-case scenario for hybrid is when an attorney comes into the office – but the office is a ghost town. Nothing will demotivate RTO faster than just one ineffectual, lonely workday. Firms must figure out how to cluster attorney time to ensure that in-office culture and vibrancy.

This is something almost all law firm leaders agree on: working in person has huge benefits to building culture. The 2022 Citi Hildebrandt Client Advisory found that many firms believe the remote environment has damaged personal relationships at work and the sense of belonging amongst many lawyers--and may be a contributor to the ease with which lawyers, from partners to associates, are moving firms. Culture happens in the office.

And there is a solution for that we call “presence.” Presence is a new technology functionality delivered specifically to solve this issue in hybrid organizations. Presence delivers simple visibility into who is in the office and who is working remotely without the need to install any hardware devices or any work on the part of attorneys and, instead, just works in the background effortlessly: hence, reduced administrative burden.

With presence, attorneys “see” their peers. They can see their peers today or their intentions for tomorrow and make decisions about where they want to work.

It is deceptively simplistic. On the back end, attorneys and professionals need do nothing for presence to work. On the front end, presence delivers a simple visual experience--a green dot versus blue—indicating at a glance the precise location of their peers.

Presence delivers the ‘watercooler’ experience of the office back into the in the palms of attorneys hands, one where they can easily see where their peers are, understand how and when they can network, read a bulletin about a holiday office party, and make decisions about clustering their time in intentional ways.

Bringing it All Together

In a hybrid world where the greatest attraction of the office is people, presence is a key feature to enable success. But the challenges of hybrid extend even beyond this and touch everything from making data-driven decisions about real estate optimization, space efficiency, and attorney productivity to easily routing catering to a conference room—and let’s just say without beating a dead horse too badly, Outlook is just not cut out for it. We simply can’t use old tools to solve new problems – and that’s the exciting part of the challenge on the road ahead.



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