

November 15, 2010

## Global LPO Conference: Stakeholders Views and Foreign Law Firms

The Global LPO (Legal Process Outsourcing) conference was organized by KPO consultants in the capital over the weekend, which had some interesting trends and stakeholder discussions. The conference was held on 13th and 14th of November at Hotel Radisson, Noida.

Speaking to Bar & Bench, Pankaj Parnami Director KPO Consultants said, "We are primarily a consulting company and our main objective is to consult buyers and the General Counsels community who want to come down to India for outsourcing. Our goal is to advise the buyers, educate them and help them select the right vendors. The main challenge faced by the buyers is the lack of trust, which includes lack of education. The buyers want to come down to India and their main request is to meet people on a one to one basis and see what opportunities are available and also, they are not aware of the pricing structure and how exactly things are implemented. This is the platform where we have invited the buyers, the GCs, the consultants who are based in the US and the UK and the Partners of various law firms based abroad".

### On the Conference

**Sanjay Kamlani, Co-CEO Pangea3** said, "This is the 2nd annual conference of the LPO industry in India, as last year was the 1st one that Lexis put together and this year KPO Consultants with Pankaj Parnami have put up this great conference which gives opportunity to vendors across the industry to come together and talk about growth of the industry and the issues facing our industry. It is also great for the perspective clients along with existing clients to get exposed to the LPO industry and ask questions and to learn about the things that are concerns for them".

## **Law Firm Led LPO**

**Arihant Patni, CEO Bodhi Global** spoke on the clear cut definition of an LPO vis-a-vis a law firm said, "LPO is Legal Process Outsourcing, it's a legal support system and thus it's not rendering legal advice or legal opinion. It is only facilitating the data mining of voluminous documents associated with litigation or corporate due diligence with the main purpose being, to try and help the attorneys on the case to look at a more focused and shrunken data set. And under their guidance to finally sort out the documents, and the data they really need to look at minutely from the ones which have no relevance to the case, so that they don't need to waste their time and, that is where our focus is built-in. This saves cost for the client and makes the process more efficient. We Indian lawyers often get questioned on what is the difference? The difference is that an LPO will be able to pull out facts and sort documents based on the attorneys advice, but it will not be able to comment on what to do with the documents because that's clearly legal advice and no LPO should engage in that".

**Percis Anklesaria Head of Quality Bodhi Global and Senior Associate AZB Partners** said, "LPO's have moved significantly beyond being just an opportunity for a cost arbitrage – to being the service provider of choice for certain non-analytical functions associated with – and up until now forming part of both, litigation and transactional legal practice".

## **Future of LPOs**

**Ganesh Natarajan, President and CEO Mindcrest** said, "You see a lot of maturity in the LPO conference, both in terms of the panelists and what they present and also in terms of the questions that were asked by the audience. Clearly it has gone beyond the notion of can LPOs in India do good legal work, because the questions that are coming up are much more sophisticated and nuanced as opposed to general questions. This shows the acceptance of the LPO business amongst the general public as well. The future is clearly very good because even in modern markets like the US, is now beginning to catch on and people are looking at LPOs more strategically as opposed to looking at it on a transactional basis. That is a big difference particularly in the US and the UK and whereas the English speaking market is concerned, India stands the best chance".

**Antony Alex, Managing Director Pangea3** speaking on the role of small LPOs said, "There is enough place in this industry, both large and small LPOs can successfully provide services depending on their size. If the smaller vendors feel they have the security and scalability to provide the infrastructure and meet the needs of the buyer, then they can also provide services to larger buyers, but if they feel that they can cater to the lower end of the segment in terms of volume and scalability because that's their spectrum, then they should focus on small buyers. The bottom line is that you have got to know your market and your buyers and depending on your capability you have to customize your solutions to meet the buyer's expectations.

**Sakthivel Venkataraman, Managing Director of Operations at Cobra Legal Solutions** said, "Lawyers graduating from law colleges and coming out of court rooms take up the option of a LPO not for the remuneration, but several other factors such as 50 percent of our staff is comprising of lady lawyers who feel more comfortable in the office environment vis-à-vis a court room. They like the 9 to 5 working hours and can focus on their family as well, thus maintaining a healthy work-life balance. It forms an alternative career. There is going to be growth in the LPOs for the fundamental reason, we have all the top 20 LPOs in India and we only touch less than 5 percent of the business opportunity. Conferences like these engage a variety of people in these forums and this is just a beginning. One thing is for sure, they cannot do without us and the LPO sector is going to grow and there's no looking back".

### **Foreign Law Firms Sending Work to Indian LPO**

**Nigel Kissack, Head of Pinsent Masons** speaking on convincing a lawyer to delegate work to an LPO said, "The reason originally of an LPO was to make more affordable, an exercise we undertake regularly with our clients as it was getting too expensive. So we found a LPO partner and this helped to cut our costs and at the same time deliver the same quality of service for half the price. Also, my staff had to be happy with it because on the face of it they were doing work and now it's gone away. The true answer is firstly they are happier, when their clients are happy and that's what happened. Secondly, they realized that actually what they want to do is the strategic work facing the clients and solving the problems, rather than being a part of a process that needs to recognize for e.g. the right evidence or electronically stored information. The whole exercise makes them more focused and the clients are getting a better price".

**Alison Hook, Head of International Department of Law Society of UK** said, "Our main purpose is education and training and we have a joint project, where we have an education consultant from the UK who has come out to talk with the Bar Council and look at the internal legal education directives and work with them to see if they have given all the challenges for the exam and ideas that continues professional development and also how they can organize their functions internally".

### **Views on the Foreign Law Firms and the Madras High Court Writ**

**Mark Ross, VP Integreon** spoke on them being dragged in the Madras High Court Writ Petition as the only LPO in the 31 foreign law firms issue, said, "My view on the petition is that our inclusion is entirely without merit and I mention that we don't practice law in any jurisdiction and particularly in India we don't represent Indian clients, we don't represent Indian corporations and we don't represent Indian law firms. The petition alleges that foreign law firms are unlawfully engaging in the practice of Indian law through a variety of media through clandestine meeting in hotels, flying in flying out and LPOs. But how can they be unlawfully active in providing Indian legal advice through LPO, if the LPO is not engaged in any India legal activity and that is Integreons position and we are confident that we will be removed from the proceedings".

**Lalit Bhasin, President of Society of Indian Law Firms** spoke on the issue pertaining to foreign law firms and LPOs, "To practice in India one has to fulfill a two set criterion i.e. a person has to be a citizen of India and has to be enrolled as an advocate in any of the State Bar Councils. In 1996 a PIL was filed, whose final decision came out in 2009 which held that under the Indian law, practice is only open to citizens of India and practice of law by non-lawyers is prohibited in India".



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