

HUSCH BLACKWELL CONDUCTS LAWYER CHALLENGE TO DEVELOP INNOVATIVE CLIENT SERVICES

Husch Blackwell wrapped up its first legal innovation challenge and named a business diagnostic tool its inaugural winner. The challenge is part of a larger firmwide initiative to stoke innovation.

BY VICTORIA HUDGINS

Husch Blackwell awarded a startup adviser tool the winner of its first firmwide legal innovation challenge aimed at sparking creative solutions for clients' challenges. Husch Blackwell's chief growth officer Dean Boeschen said the competition is another example of how the firm has made a commitment to innovation and is fostering an environment of creative approaches.

"Clients want innovation," Boeschen said. "One of the things you have to do is make that innovative culture [at the firm] where there's a free flow of ideas and no fear of failing."

To be sure, the innovation challenge is one way the firm is encouraging creative approaches to clients' needs.



Indeed, Boeschen noted the firm measures both a lawyer's innovation and billable hours when assessing bonuses.

"We look at things like firm commitment, client service, how involved they are on our client service teams and other client development and in-

dustry structures," Boeschen said. "And one of the things we look at is innovation. ... We are looking at that as behaviors we want to encourage beyond the billable hour. From a client perspective, it [billable hours] doesn't move the needle at all."

Husch Blackwell's Legal Innovation Challenge started last Sept. 1. Boeschen estimated 20 teams of the firm's attorneys and staff submitted ideas. Later, the teams assessed each other's products and chose five groups. Via videoconference, a panel of firm attorneys and administrative staff then questioned the remaining teams on their product's cost-effectiveness and how much it helped their client's challenges.

Husch Blackwell bestowed its first-place accolade to a business diagnostic tool to help startups and their prospective counsel quickly grasp what the company's general legal needs are before an initial meeting.

The panel also selected a Title IX violations tool kit as runner-up and an Employee Retirement Income Security Act document management

portal as the third-place winner.

Discussing the winning tool, Boeschen said that "one of the things that stood out is they actually produced a pilot project and had been using it already. It did a couple of things so the clients knew the issues to address on their own [and] let younger associates understand that interview process."

Associates and co-creators of the winning tool Meghan Brennan and Jake Brown said the software was a solution to help Husch Blackwell lawyers engage with more startups.

"Sometimes it's hard to make the first meeting with a startup founder effective in terms of digging down into what their needs are and figuring out how to help them with their needs," Brown said.

The tool works by sending a survey to a startup founder before the first interview. The survey includes questions

concerning a startup's formation, employees, intellectual property and finances, the associates said.

The questionnaire takes roughly 10 minutes to complete and generates a report lawyers can review. The report enables attorneys to "have a holistic conversation about the state of the company and a road map for what their legal needs are immediately, six months from now or at different milestones," Brown said.

Likewise, the survey allows attorneys with no prior experience counseling startups an easier route to engage emerging companies, Brown added.

After soaking in the win, the next step for Brennan and Brown's product includes testing it with prospective clients, they said. Boeschen said the firm expects to continue hosting the firmwide challenge.