
Law360 Pulse: Flaster Greenberg's 1st CIO Talks Legal Tech

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Flaster Greenberg PC's first chief information officer speaks to Law360 Pulse about his plans for the role, his view of artificial intelligence, and why the firm chose to create a dedicated executive role for its IT functions.

What prompted the move for you?

For me, it was really about trying to find a company where I could use my experience to better the IT environment. I spent the last 20 years working in the health care industry, 17 of it in human health care. And after 17 years, I realized it was time to make a change, so I made a move to a CIO position at a veterinary health care company — and obviously working for veterinarians is different from working for human physicians, but the challenges were very familiar to me.

It just felt like I needed a change. I wanted to take my career in a different direction, so I could experience new challenges. I started a search for a new CIO role in a different industry. And I saw an opportunity at Flaster Greenberg.

One of the things I really was looking for was a company that really believed in what it did and in its people. I was really excited when I saw that Flaster has been around for 50 years — not a lot of companies can say that. I spent a lot of time looking at what people say about Flaster Greenberg, and it was all very positive. The employees seem to have been here for a very long time, and they're always on the list of best places to work.

I thought, "I hope it's going to be as good as it seems," and I have to say I have not been disappointed.

What was behind the firm's decision to create this role?

Like most companies, Flaster realized that technology is a critical part of what they do. They also realized that while the systems that are in place today serve Flaster very well, they were put in place about four years ago and technology has changed a lot. Within the firm there was an understanding that technology is a journey, rather than a destination. In order to provide the best technology for its attorneys, its staff, its clients, it needed a person who had a sole focus on that area.

Because technology changes fast. Things that were cutting edge and made sense five or six years ago are different today. You hear a lot of buzz about artificial intelligence and everyone wants to work from everywhere. It became a situation where the firm understood it needed a dedicated set of eyes.

What is your philosophy or approach as you take on the job?

My philosophy and the philosophy I bring to the firm is that IT really serves a firm best when it provides value. And value can be a vague term, and businesses define it in different ways. But what I've discovered is there are a few things that are common that every business should expect from its IT department.

The first pillar is trust in your IT department; without trust it's hard for IT to make change and implement

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new systems and new policies. Second, a robust IT security program, because every business is under constant threat of attack and every business needs to understand that every IT decision needs to have an IT security part of the conversation. Regardless of if it's a big decision or a small decision, security is critical. Third: world-class service and support. People really look at their IT departments and a lot of their opinions are drawn from their interactions with the team. I'm a firm believer in building consensus and communication.

And fourth: excellent and high availability of services. Because people want to work everywhere. If you give the business the tools that it needs, and you make them available when people need them, they become more efficient.

So those four areas are always where I like to start, and same thing here with Flaster Greenberg. My first couple of items now that I'm here will be looking at the current state of IT services and support within the firm, looking at what makes sense today, and making sure that technology isn't getting in people's way — which happens all too often.

Maybe you love 90% of the computer work you're doing, but 10% drives you crazy. The IT departments that I lead focus so strongly on that 10%. I bring in a philosophy that critical feedback is a gift, and I really believe that. I'm really looking forward to building a new type of IT support that works hand in hand with the business. It's not a service user relationship, but a true partnership.

And second on my list is looking at where the technology is today and where it might be three years from now. People talk about five years, but five years is a lifetime in technology times. I really want to look at the technology and look at where Flaster Greenberg wants to be three years from now. Not to be an early adopter — I'm not a big fan of being on the bleeding edge because that tends to cause trouble. But watching technology trends, seeing what works and doesn't work, and, most important, seeing what makes the business better.

There's a lot of talk today about AI and ChatGPT, and there are still a lot of questions there, ethical and practical. My strong opinion is that firms need to watch that but wait as it matures.

Speaking of technologies, are there any technologies that are emerging or maturing that you find exciting or promising right now?

Our business at Flaster Greenberg is really focused on deliverables, like documents. So I'm really going to be focused on technologies that provide better ways for us to create, manage, find, and share documents. Some of that may cross over into the area of artificial intelligence when it comes to searching. Some of it has to do with the ability of people to work remotely from any place. In a business like legal where people need to work not only from their office but from a courtroom or a client's office, having technology that allows them to pull up documents quickly in a secure fashion is critical. That's one of the areas I'm looking into here, because there have been some advancements in that area to improve things like document searching and recovery.

It's maybe not the most exciting technology trend, but it's really important for what we do here as a business. Because, in the end, that's what our clients are looking for. They're looking for us to use our expertise to create those documents for them, to keep them for a considerable amount of time and make sure they're kept safe, and to be able to retrieve them and use them.

What are some areas where you see opportunities for technological improvements at Flaster Greenberg over the long term?

What I see for Flaster Greenberg in three years is to be a primarily cloud-based organization. I'm going to use that term loosely, because cloud means a lot of things. But for the most part, Flaster Greenberg is still a

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combination of resources on premise and resources in the cloud. I see us moving to a secure cloud environment.

It will most likely be on equipment we own in data centers. Doing that will allow us to keep a high level of security while still taking advantage of the technology that's leading the sector today.

If you think of companies like Microsoft and Google, the investments these companies are making are all in the cloud.

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