



Overview

Challenge

“We needed a tool designed specifically to handle legal documents, with an intuitive interface that would be easy for new users to learn quickly, when I learned about LeasePilot at a conference, I realized it was exactly the solution we needed.”

CASTO accelerates leasing process and cuts costs with LeasePilot

Based in Columbus, Ohio, CASTO is a privately held real estate development and management company that's been in business since 1926. The company develops, owns and manages approximately 23 million square feet across more than 100 shopping centers in seven states.

Led by Director C.H. Waterman, CASTO's lean legal team keeps busy managing all legal matters for the company. “Our group has five attorneys in Columbus, two paralegals and an administrative assistant, plus a part-time attorney and two paralegals that work out of our Sarasota, Florida office,” said Waterman. “We handle all tasks related to litigation, HR issues, risk management and leasing of all commercial shopping centers.”

According to Waterman, leasing is the lifeblood of the company. To that end, a portion of the legal staff is dedicated exclusively to the leasing business. “Those team members are essential to the corporate function and the overall health of our company,” he said. “We're responsible for drafting and negotiating the leases, and for keeping tenants happy.”

Waterman's team faces numerous challenges every day, not the least of which is responding to the intense pressure to complete leases quickly. There is also intense pressure from throughout the company to move from a letter of intent (LOI) to a signed lease as quickly as possible.

For every day we don't have a signed lease, we lose income for that space,” Waterman said. However, quality is also critical. “You can't sacrifice the quality of the work, the value of the lease and the legal protections it provides for both parties, just to complete the transaction quickly. There's a constant need for balance between quality of work and the velocity at which the lease travels through the department,” he said.

In an attempt to achieve this balance, CASTO implemented a few different initiatives: developing 20 different lease forms, developing a robust language library, and assigning lease drafting to an administrative assistant. However, each of these initiatives resulted in even more challenges: updating 20 different forms multiple times a year; manually searching, inserting, and formatting correct language from the library; and intensively reviewing lease drafts.

Additionally, the amount of time it was taking to get leases done in-house created bottlenecks and at times, these bottlenecks forced them to rely on outside counsel. “We tried using outside counsel to handle some of the overflow, but doing so meant losing some control over the quality of work,” said Waterman. “It was also costly.”

Solution

“The typical hiccups of installing new software didn’t happen—it was simple to integrate and easy to use from the start.”

LeasePilot offers a web-based lease automation platform for real estate companies to streamline the process of drafting, editing and ultimately closing leases, all while reducing costs. The platform enables real estate companies to use their own lease forms and language, and its intuitive interface enables users to get up and running quickly with minimal training. LeasePilot also empowers staff without legal expertise to take a more active role in lease drafting and editing, without the additional legal oversight and review typically required.

Waterman said integrating the team’s existing lease forms and language with the LeasePilot platform was smooth, fast and easy. “We didn’t experience any significant downtime in the leasing process,” he said. “The typical hiccups of installing new software didn’t happen—it was simple to integrate and easy to use from the start.”



Results

“LeasePilot has significantly cut down the time it takes us to prepare first drafts of leases – down to less than 30 minutes for simple deals. That has also reduced the time it takes us to get leases into our tenants’ hands – in some cases we’re now able to send a lease to a tenant within a day of receiving the LOI.”

Since implementing LeasePilot, CASTO’s legal team has reduced the amount of time spent on the leasing process while also getting lease drafts to tenants quicker. In particular, “LeasePilot has significantly cut down the time it takes us to prepare first drafts of leases – down to less than 30 minutes for simple deals. That has also reduced the time it takes us to get leases into our tenants’ hands – in some cases we’re now able to send a lease to a tenant within a day of receiving the LOI,” said Waterman.

Reducing the amount of time spent on the leasing process has had multiple benefits for CASTO. To start, it has allowed the legal team to reduce bottlenecks by spending more time on high-value work. According to Waterman, “LeasePilot frees up our time to focus on higher-level tasks, such as legal analysis, which can’t be outsourced.” LeasePilot has also enabled CASTO to cut their outside law firm bills. “Leases can now be processed by administrative-level employees, cutting hours off lease-prep time we used to outsource,” said Waterman.

In addition, there are potential revenue implications since speeding up the process of going from LOI to signed lease can lead to additional revenue. “Every day sooner we can get a lease signed means another day of rent received,” said Waterman. Finally, Waterman said LeasePilot is helping the legal department make a measurable impact on the company’s bottom line. “Legal departments are usually viewed as ‘cost centers,’ and other departments want to see you reducing costs,” he said. “LeasePilot helps us show how we’re working to reduce costs and increase revenue for the company.”

LeasePilot combines document automation, word processing and user-centric interfaces into a single web-based platform expressly designed to radically accelerate the entire process of drafting and editing commercial leases, from a letter of intent through lease execution.