

How Travers Smith, one of the world's most innovative law firms, uses compareDocs SDK



About Travers Smith

Travers Smith acts for publicly listed and private companies, financial services institutions, and private equity clients, as well as other business enterprises involved in large and complex UK & cross-border matters, transactions & disputes.

Travers Smith is regarded as a leader in its field regarding legal technology, having been shortlisted for Excellence in Technology & Innovation, Law Society Excellence Awards, and Future of Legal Services Innovation – Mid-sized Private Practice, Law.com Legal Innovation Awards.

Comparing contracts against a standard and allowing lawyers to review changes more effectively

Lawyers at Travers Smith rely on compareDocs' document comparison technology to find small but significant changes in complicated legal documents. "That is the desktop application that all of our lawyers use daily to run their comparisons," explained Shawn Curran, Head of Legal Technology.

However, the firm's needs go beyond the usual bread-and-butter comparisons compareDocs users perform. It also needs to compare large batches of contracts for essential differences.

"There could be hundreds of contracts with a slight variation from a standard form precedent," explained Shawn. "For example, each apartment in a block of 100 will have a slightly different leasehold agreement. Some will be studios, and others will be penthouses. The change could be small with each variation, perhaps for those purchasing studios who have less of a negotiating position, like the rent amount or leasehold term. Or, it could be a significant change, such as the addition of an exterior redecoration clause in the higher value penthouse."

To compare the different tenancy agreements against a standard form document, Travers Smith uses compareDocs SDK, a document comparison software development kit.



Legal



SDK



Customization

Learn about:

Comparing large batches of contracts and agreements against a standard

Customizing comparison output to show only material changes

Using compareDocs SDK to parse legal documents for entry into a database

Embedding compareDocs SDK within other software platforms

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The lawyers look at the comparison output and think, 'The term and the rent are either the same, or similar to, the standard form. However, there's a big insertion or deletion that's not in the standard form and looks material. I'll copy that out and do something about it. Where the SDK comes into its own is where that material change exists across several agreements.

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Shawn Curran, Head of Legal Technology at Travers Smith

“compareDocs SDK allowed us to build an output that enables our lawyers to review changes in the most efficient and effective way – regardless of whether a change is material or not.”

Lawyers won't have to review the entire contract if only a few pages have material changes. Instead, the output is the delta between the standard form and the agreement, said Shawn.

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Shawn is keen to highlight that the comparison process is not an exact science and that the quality of the underlying PDFs is a key factor in ensuring quality output. Furthermore, the comparison technology is only a part of the bulk compare process, and as with any SDK, bespoke programming is required.

Using compareDocs SDK to parse contracts for entry into Etatonna, a contract labeling tool

The technology department at Travers Smith – renowned for being innovators and early adopters of new legal technology – launched Etatonna, an open-source contract labeling platform developed in-house, in 2020. Etatonna allows firms to label contracts and store the data in a structured format to train AI models.

Contracts and other legal documents need to be parsed before entry into the database. The previous, and still the current Open Source parsing technology within Etatonna, wasn't great at understanding legal documents – particularly paragraphs as clauses, which are critical components of a contract. The firm wanted to invest in parsing technology that had years of experience with legal documents.

“We wanted technology that was very much aware of legal documents and paragraphs,” explained Shawn. “I've got a lot of experience of legal document comparison and know vendors like DocsCorp have spent decades fixing document comparison and parsing issues on complex legal documents. compareDocs SDK is very good at breaking down a document into a legal context because it must do that to perform a high-quality comparison. We wanted that technology to parse our documents into the Etatonna platform.”

For Travers Smith, the benefit of compareDocs SDK is two-fold: it aids in reviewing large sets of contracts for differences. And it parses documents for the reframing of structured data within an in-house developed platform.

The fact that these capabilities could be delivered through a single SDK saved the firm's Legal Technology department time designing its own solution and the cost of purchasing two different products.