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## Outsourcing the lawyers

SCI-TECH SCENE | Mindcrest sends Fortune 500 companies' repetitive tasks to attorneys in India

(<http://www.suntimes.com/technology/guy/415358,CST-FIN-ecol06.article>)

June 6, 2007

BY [SANDRA GUY](#) Sun-Times Columnist

A Chicago company is taking the outsourcing business to an unlikely field -- the legal profession.

Mindcrest, the brainchild of two attorneys and two engineers ([www.mindcrest.com](http://www.mindcrest.com)), works mostly with Fortune 500 companies whose legal departments can save money and free up their staffs by sending work overseas.



**Mindcrest General Counsel George Hefferan III (from left), Vice President of Business Development Diana Smith and CEO and President Ganesh Natarajan hold a discussion in Mindset's office on Wacker Drive.**  
(Rich Hein/Sun-Times)

Ganesh Natarajan, CEO, president and one of the company's four founders, said he got the idea of outsourcing legal work when he was an attorney at Gardner Carton & Douglas, a Chicago law firm recently acquired by Philadelphia-based Drinker Biddle & Reath.

"Many of my clients were Indian companies investing in the United States or U.S. companies going to India," Natarajan said. "Many were software companies. They used good-quality talent in India to service clients in the United States."

"I thought, 'There must be a way to do that in the legal profession, especially with rising legal costs,'" he said.

Natarajan teamed with his law colleague, George Hefferan III, now Mindcrest's vice president and general counsel, to come up with the business idea. The other founders are Rohan Dalal, the managing director in India and a longtime friend of Natarajan's, and Teju Deshpande, the vice president of client services. The team started Mindcrest six years ago.

Mindcrest employs 150 lawyers at its two offices in India. The number will soar to 300 to 400

by year's end to meet demand that has seen business triple in the past 12 months.

The company offers a variety of legal services, from basic research to detailed documentation required by Fortune 500 companies, at a savings of 50 to 90 percent of the conventional expense, Natarajan said.

Natarajan, who grew up in Mumbai, said it makes sense to use legal resources in India because law-school graduates there are trained in common law, and are skilled at using Internet-based legal tools.

The company enforces strict rules to keep the data private: Employees use special entry passes to access the offices in Mumbai and in Pune, the latter known as the "Oxford of India" because of its highly regarded colleges and universities.

Employees have no disc drives in their computers, making it impossible to store information, and paper documents are either shredded or sent back to the clients upon their request.

Most of Mindcrest's lawyers in India are women, who find that working for a U.S. company lets them balance family life with work hours, and use their law degrees for meaningful work outside litigation, said Deshpande, the lone female among Mindcrest's founders.

Mindcrest reached a milestone last December by receiving a \$4 million investment from Talon Asset Management, a Chicago-based diversified investment management company with more than \$1.1 billion under management.

Walter Freedman, an outsourcing consultant and an investor in Talon, said general counsels at Fortune 500 businesses are becoming a critical part of companies' bottom lines.

Mindcrest can take care of high-value but repetitive tasks such as filling out forms for securities filings or splitting a couple's retirement assets when they divorce, Freedman said.

Outsourcing can free up young attorneys' time, at \$180 an hour, to do more interesting work, said Bill Wolf, a partner at Talon Asset Management and a Mindcrest board member.

Mindcrest is thriving amid a wholesale shakeup of the legal profession, which is under unprecedented pressure to boost profits. At the same time, clients are increasingly demanding discounts on hourly rates.

Forrester Research forecasts the value of legal outsourcing to India will grow to \$4 billion by 2015 from \$80 million today. The number of outsourced jobs would soar to 79,000 from 12,000.