THOMSON REUTERS INSTITUTE

Tell Your Value Story: Writing for the Board

Practical tips for communicating legal performance and strategy with clarity and impact

Board presentations are high-stakes communications. Directors have limited time, diverse expertise, and competing priorities. Your job is to make legal performance and strategy accessible, relevant, and actionable. This guide provides practical techniques to help you craft presentations that inform decisions and demonstrate value.

Five core principles

1. **Prioritize your audience**

   Put yourself in their shoes.
   Board members care about risk, strategy, and business performance, not legal process for its own sake.

Weak	Strong
"Legal processed 847 contracts in Q1, a 12% increase YoY"	"Legal accelerated 3 major partnerships by reducing contract cycle time 40%, enabling $15M in Q1 revenue"

2. **Build around the central question**

   Every board presentation answers a specific question. Identify it before you start writing.

   Example board questions:
   - How is legal supporting our expansion into Asia-Pacific?
   - What are our top legal and regulatory risks for the year ahead?
   - How did legal perform against budget and targets this quarter?

   Draft your story first: Get the story clear in writing first by outlining your headline and supporting evidence before you start building slides.

AI tip: Identify your central message
This example prompt below helps you test whether the structure you've built actually answers the question you think it does.

"I'm preparing a board presentation on [topic]. Here's my draft outline: [paste outline].

- What is the single most important question this presentation answers?
- What should my headline be?
- What are the 3-4 key supporting points that matter most to board members focused on risk, strategy, and business value?"

Remember to check your company's AI policy before uploading data. Never put confidential information or personal data into public AI tools like ChatGPT. Use enterprise AI solutions if you have them or anonymize your data first.

3. **Be concise**

   Complexity suggests unclear thinking while simplicity demonstrates mastery. Use concise yet clear writing throughout your presentation or report to convey confidence and control and make sure that your slide title(s) tell the story.

   For example, "Q1 Performance" is not specific or engaging while "Legal delivered $2.3M savings in Q1" is much stronger as it provides the core information concisely and clearly.

Avoid	Use
• Undefined acronyms • Latin phases • Legal jargon without context • Repetitive points • Vague references	• Plain English • Active voice • Specific numbers • Clear headlines • Direct language

AI tip: Simplify and condense

This example prompt below can be used iteratively on dense sections of text to identify and reduce unnecessary words.

"Here's a paragraph from my board presentation: [paste text].
Please rewrite this to:
- Cut the word count by 40%
- Use plain English instead of legal jargon
- Remove any acronyms or explain them on first use
- Make the key point immediately clear

Show me the before and after word count."

AI tip: Transform headlines

Weak headlines are the most common board presentation mistake. This example prompt can help you use AI to test alternatives quickly and lead to more compelling titles.

"My slide title is [current title] and the content shows [brief description]. Suggest 5 alternative headlines that clearly state the key takeaway a board member should remember. Make them specific and action-oriented."

4. **Make visuals work hard**

   Every visual should illuminate your point, not decorate it. Visuals can be a very helpful tool to convey your message more effectively but they must be used thoughtfully to avoid confusing or diluting the message.

   Visual design best practice:

   - **One idea per slide.** If you need two visuals to make your point, use two slides.
   - **Reduce clutter.** Remove gridlines, excess labels, and decorative elements that don't add meaning. Aim for a clean design and balance content with white space.
   - **Use company templates.** Consistency signals professionalism.
   - **Avoid clichéd legal icons.** Skip the gavel and scales. Consider abstract representations or simple data visualization instead.

5. **Build in time to review**

   Great board presentations are refined, not rushed. Make sure you start early, build in enough time for iteration, and seek input from a trusted colleague who understands your goal.

   Suggested timeline:

   - **3 weeks out:** Draft outline and narrative
   - **2 weeks out:** Create first draft, get peer review
   - **1 week out:** Refine based on feedback, practice delivery
   - **2 days before:** Final polish and rehearsal

AI tip: Test board-level effectiveness

The example prompt below asks AI to simulate a board member's perspective and identifies blind spots you might miss.

“You are a board member reviewing this presentation: [paste slide content or full deck].

Assess: Is the key message immediately clear? Does it connect to business strategy and risk? Are there any confusing terms, unexplained acronyms, or overly technical sections? What questions would I likely ask? Rate the overall clarity and impact from 1-10 and explain your rating."

AI tip: Gap analysis

The example prompt below can be used to understand why some sections work better than others, then apply those lessons consistently.

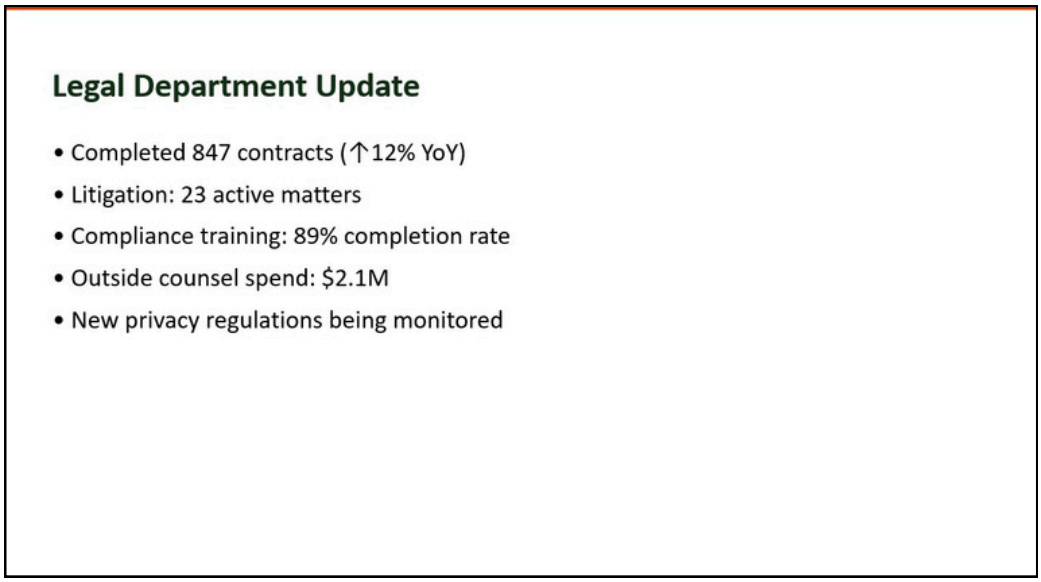
“Compare these two pieces of content from my board presentation: [Section A] and [Section B]. Which is more effective for a board audience and why? What techniques from the stronger section could improve the weaker one?"

Pre-presentation checklist:

Content	Design
□ Central question is clear □ Headline tells the story □ Data supports business value □ No undefined acronyms □ Plain English throughout	□ One idea per slide □ Visuals are clear and necessary □ No clutter or decorative elements □ Company template used □ Reviewed and refined

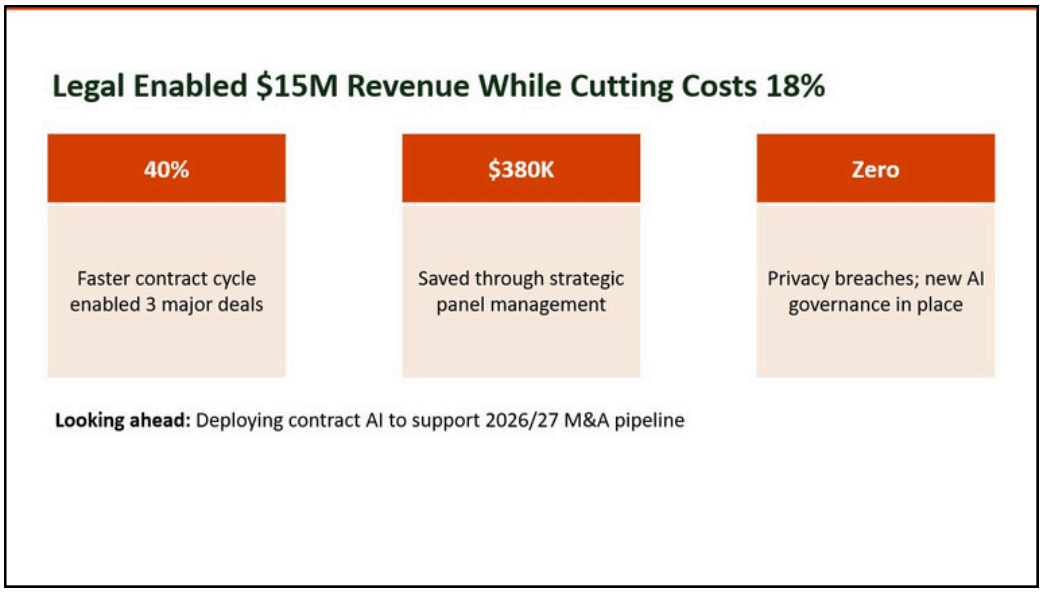
Example: Real-world before & after

Before: Weak slide for the Board



The problem with this example is it shows activity without context. How do board members know if "23 active matters" is a good or bad number for litigation? It provides no clear takeaway and does not connect to the business strategy. How do the board members know what action to take next?

After: Strong slide for the Board



This example is much better as it shows a clear value story, with helpful context. It connects to business revenue as well as cost, with specific numbers. It highlights what is working well and why that matters to board members, and it provides a forward-looking view.

AI tip: More ways AI can strengthen your board communications

Below are additional example prompts that use AI to help you convey your message clearly, prepare for follow-up discussion, and build confidence with every board interaction.

Data storytelling

"I have these metrics: [list data points]. What's the most compelling narrative that connects these numbers to business value? What's the 'so what' that board members care about?"

Anticipate questions

"Based on this board presentation content: [paste], what are the 5 most likely challenging questions board members would ask? For each question, draft a concise, data-backed response."

Balance technical and accessible

"This section explains [technical legal topic]: [paste]. Rewrite it for a board audience with a business focus. Keep it accurate but accessible. Use an analogy if it helps."

Executive summary generator

"Here's my full board presentation: [paste or summarize]. Create a 3-bullet executive summary that captures the must-know takeaways if directors only read one slide."

Jargon scanner

"Review this text: [paste]. Identify any legal jargon, technical terms, or acronyms that might confuse a board member who does not have a legal background. For each, suggest a plain English alternative."

Remember: You're not writing to showcase legal expertise; you're writing to inform business decisions. If a board member can't immediately see how your message connects to business outcomes, rewrite it until they can.

THOMSON REUTERS INSTITUTE

Value Alignment Toolkit

Access toolkit

Thomson Reuters Institute