PITON Global

EXECUTIVE WHITE PAPER · WP-35

LEGAL RESEARCH · PHILIPPINES

The research-leverage standard: the executive economics of legal research outsourcing to the Philippines.

An analysis of why hours billed is a volume vanity metric, how research reliability and attorney-ready work product — never research throughput — decide the true cost of a legal-research operation once wrong authority, missed precedent, un-Shepardized citations, and attorney rework are counted, and the vendor-selection discipline that delivers research an attorney can sign.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES — VOLUME 35

Every legal-research proposal is priced per hour billed, because time is easy to count. This volume is about the only research outcome a legal team actually depends on: the memo built on the controlling authority, with every citation verified, delivered so an attorney can rely on it and sign it. The gap between billing research hours and delivering research an attorney can trust is where wrong authority and rework live. The full series lives at piton-global.com.

THE PITON-GLOBAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

About the authors

John Maczynski

Chief Executive Officer

John has bought legal-research capacity for three decades, and learned that the fast researcher who bills every hour and finds the wrong authority is the most expensive one a legal team can hire — because a memo built on bad law is rework at best and a sanction at worst, and every un-Shepardized citation is a landmine under an attorney's signature. His standing question ignores the timesheet: of the hours you billed, how much came back as research an attorney could actually rely on and sign? Applied at PITON-Global, that question is what clients get on every legal-research sourcing decision — personally, with no account layer in between.

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Chief Strategy Officer

Ralf has spent twenty-five years running Philippine legal-process floors, and he judges a research team by its reliability and attorney-ready rate, not its hours logged: whether the controlling authority was found and every cite verified, or the memo bounced for rework. The research contract in Section 3 codifies what he learned rebuilding teams that billed hours fast and researched loosely. He now reads legal-research providers the way he once ran them — from the rework log and the citation-error rate backward.

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PITON Global

ABOUT PITON-GLOBAL

PITON-Global is a buyer-side advisory practice, Manila-based since 2001, that has never operated a delivery floor or taken a placement commission. Its stock-in-trade is knowing the Philippine provider market at the operating level — 1,000+ mapped operations, re-verified continuously, including each legal-research team's real reliability and attorney-ready rate rather than its hours-billed headline — and converting that knowledge into a shortlist of six to ten genuinely qualified partners per engagement. Buyers from Tripadvisor, Garmin, TSYS, HealthPartners, Yetipay, Workrise, and Norman Disney & Young have run their searches through the practice.

SECTION 01

Executive summary

-62%
Fully-loaded cost per attorney-ready memo vs. US onshore

99%+
Citation-verification accuracy on vetted teams, up from 88–94%

-63%
Reduction in attorney rework on vetted teams

6.4×
First-year ROI, reconstructed case (Section 6)

A legal-research engagement is bought on the hourly rate and paid for on the research it gets wrong. The vendor reports thousands of research hours at a fraction of the onshore rate; the legal team finds the memos built on non-controlling or overruled authority, the missed precedent that surfaced in opposing counsel's brief, the un-Shepardized citations an attorney had to re-verify line by line, and the associates redoing offshore work instead of relying on it. The operation billed its hours and the firm inherited unreliable research, a rework backlog, and risk under an attorney's signature. The gap between billing research hours and delivering research an attorney can rely on is where the real cost of cheap legal research hides, because a memo on the wrong authority is not work product delivered — it is rework acquired or malpractice risk taken on.

The Philippines — a common-law jurisdiction with an English-language, US-oriented legal-education pipeline — is where legal research is delivered with the most reliability discipline, because a deep, law-trained talent pool can run the authority analysis, citation verification, and attorney-ready drafting that reliability demands. Five findings:

1 **Hours billed is the industry's most flattering number.** Any researcher can log time and hand over a memo. Vetted teams are measured on outcome: research reliability, citation accuracy, and attorney-ready rate. Weak providers quote a low hourly rate the firm repays in wrong authority, rework, and risk. Section 2 shows the gap.

2 **The attorney-ready, reliable memo, not the billed hour, is the product.** Research a lawyer can sign comes from finding the controlling authority, verifying every citation, and drafting it to the firm's standard — not from logging hours against a matter. Teams that research reliably deliver work an attorney relies on; teams that bill loosely deliver rework and risk that cost more than the hours saved.

3 **Unreliable research cuts both ways — wrong answer and missed answer.** The wrong authority relied on can sink a filing; the controlling case missed can lose the argument. Vetted teams hold reliability above 99% precisely because both tails cost — the bad law that gets in and the good law that gets left out.

4 **The rework and the risk, not the hour, are what cost.** A memo researched wrong costs the attorney's re-do, the missed-precedent exposure, and the malpractice risk — many times the hourly saving. Teams that research reliably free attorney time and de-risk the work product, and that reclaimed leverage — not the offshore rate alone — is where the case study's return is built.

5 **Contract on the attorney-ready memo, not the billed hour.** The contracting failure of legal research is paying by the hour and hoping the research is reliable. Vetted deals price against reliability floors, citation-accuracy targets, and attorney-ready-rate minimums, making trustworthy work product the team's problem, which is where it belongs.

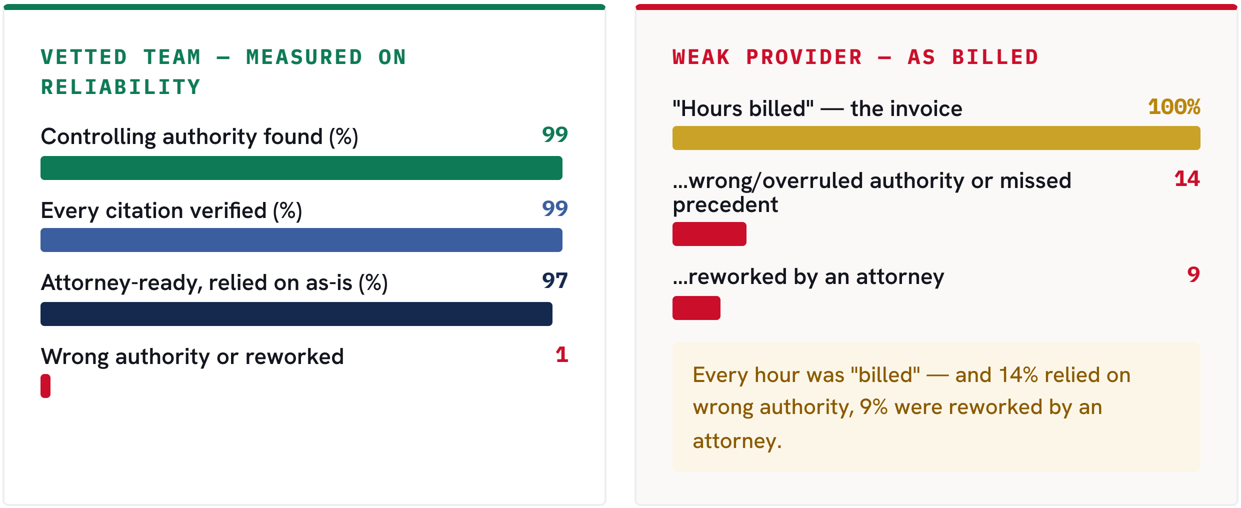
The intended reader is a general counsel, law-firm managing partner, or director of legal operations buying legal research by the hour and paying for it in wrong authority, rework, and risk. Sections 2–4 separate the teams that research reliably from the teams that bill hours; Sections 5–7, the method and the proof.

SECTION 02

The volume mirage: hours billed versus reliable, attorney-ready research

Figure 1 shows one month of a legal team's research two ways: as the hours report a weak vendor bills, and as the reliability reality the attorneys and the work product experience. The hours-billed number is identical in spirit to a chatbot's containment rate — a figure engineered to look like output while wrong authority, rework, and risk accumulate underneath.

FIG. 1 — ONE MONTH OF RESEARCH: RELIABILITY QUALITY VS. REPORTED HOURS



Every hour was "billed" — and 14% relied on wrong authority, 9% were reworked by an attorney.

Left: PITON-Global engagement instrumentation, 2025–26, reliability audited. Right: composite of pre-engagement vendor reporting reviewed in diligence.

The economics follow the reliability, not the hours. On the left, ninety-nine percent of research rests on the controlling authority and ninety-seven percent is relied on as-is, so attorney leverage is real and the work product is safe; on the right, a cheap hourly rate gets the authority wrong on fourteen percent and sends nine back for rework, paying in wrong law, attorney re-do time, and malpractice risk at once. A low hourly rate that produces unreliable research is not a saving; it is rework and risk, delayed and sometimes catastrophic. The reliability audit — controlling-authority accuracy, citation verification, attorney-ready rate — is the cheapest due-diligence instrument in this paper.

SECTION 03

The research contract: find the controlling authority, verify every citation, deliver attorney-ready

Figure 2 lays out the three clauses of a working legal-research contract — the machinery a floor read verifies before any hourly rate is believed.

FIG. 2 — THE RESEARCH CONTRACT, AS OPERATED ON VETTED TEAMS

FIND THE CONTROLLING AUTHORITY

Research runs to the binding authority in the right jurisdiction — the on-point statute, regulation, and controlling case — with contrary authority surfaced rather than buried, and an ambiguous question flagged for the supervising attorney. The answer rests on the law that governs, not the first case that fits.

VERIFY EVERY CITATION

Every citation is Shepardized or KeyCited for good law, quotations and pin cites are checked against the source, and nothing enters the memo that has not been verified — never a citation an AI tool or a colleague asserted without a source. The work product carries no bad law, so an attorney can rely on it without re-checking.

DELIVER ATTORNEY-READY

The memo is drafted to the firm's format and analytical standard, answers the question asked, and arrives inside deadline — with a reliability report the legal team can read. Attorney-ready means the supervising lawyer can rely on and sign the work, which is the only outcome legal leverage actually feels.

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THE ATTORNEY-READY MEMO 99%+ RELIABILITY EVERY CITE VERIFIED ATTORNEY CAN SIGN

Research rests on the controlling authority, every citation is verified, and the memo arrives attorney-ready — so wrong authority disappears, attorney rework falls, and the work product is safe to rely on and sign. The operation gets cheaper per attorney-ready memo and de-risks the work at the same time, which is the entire promise of outsourcing legal research to people who measure reliability, not hours billed.

Operating parameters from PITON-Global legal-process engagements, 2025–26. Offshore researchers work under supervising-attorney review; nothing here substitutes for licensed legal judgment.

In diligence, the contract is tested from the attorney's side: assign a blind research question and re-check the memo's authority and citations against the sources to measure true reliability; read the rework log for memos built on bad law; interview on how they handle a question with no clear controlling authority. Perhaps one team in ten survives it cleanly. Steps 3 and 5 of the framework exist to find that one before the contract does — because everything in Table 3 of Section 6 depends on research reliability, not hours billed.

SECTION 04

Cost and performance: cost-per-attorney-

ready-memo economics and benchmarks

TABLE 1 — FULLY-LOADED COST PER ATTORNEY-READY MEMO: THREE OPERATING MODELS (2026)

OPERATING MODEL	COST / MEMO	VS. US BASELINE
US onshore associate / in-house research	$720	baseline
Low-cost offshore LPO mill (per-hour)	$470	−35%
Vetted Manila team — reliable, attorney-ready	**$274**	**−62%**

Basis: PITON-Global engagement pricing 2025–26; cost per attorney-ready memo = fully-loaded operating cost divided by memos delivered reliable and attorney-ready (wrong-authority and reworked memos excluded); the LPO mill looks cheap per hour but rework, missed precedent, and attorney re-verification lift its true cost per attorney-ready memo; US comparator fully-loaded associate/in-house cost for a comparable research memo.

TABLE 2 — LEGAL-RESEARCH BENCHMARKS, VETTED VS. BASELINE (2025–26)

METRIC	VETTED TOP TIER	BASELINE	EXECUTIVE READING
Research reliability rate	99%+	88–94%	The only research number leverage follows
Citation-verification accuracy	99%+	88–94%	Good law, or a landmine in the brief
Attorney rework vs. baseline	−63%	baseline	"Deliver attorney-ready" — held or not
Research turnaround vs. baseline	−46%	baseline	In hand for the deadline, or late
Attorney leverage reclaimed	+31%	baseline	Time on judgment, or on re-checking

Source: PITON-Global legal-process engagement data 2025–26; baseline = typical pre-engagement operations billed on hours.

The strategic read: the LPO mill's −35% per hour is a false economy — rework, missed precedent, and attorney re-verification lift its true cost per attorney-ready memo far above the hourly gap, and a filing sunk by bad law is a cost no rate recovers. The vetted Manila team's −62% is real because it is measured where the value is: the memo built on the controlling authority, every cite verified, that an attorney can sign.

Buy on hours billed and you buy the right column of Figure 1; buy on cost-per-attorney-ready-memo and you buy research reliability — the same discipline every volume in this series keeps arriving at from a different door.

SECTION 05

Sourcing discipline: the 7-Step Vendor Vetting Framework, applied to legal research

Legal-research diligence adds one hard requirement to every step: an hourly rate is real only when the research reliability behind it survives a blind re-check of the authority and citations against the sources. The funnel below is representative of a 20–50-seat legal-research search.

FIG. 3 — THE 7-STEP FRAMEWORK AS A LEGAL-RESEARCH FUNNEL

	STEP	WHAT IT ELIMINATES IN A LEGAL-RESEARCH SEARCH	FIELD REMAINING
1	**Requirements definition**	Hours-first scoping: fixes the research-reliability floor, the citation-accuracy target, the attorney-ready-rate standard, and the turnaround the operation must meet by practice area	1,000+
2	**Market mapping**	LPO mills: operations that bill hours and treat wrong authority and rework as the client's problem, and generalist floors with no law-trained researchers or practice-area depth	~38
3	**Capability screening**	Teams without the machinery: law-trained researchers, audited reliability history, a citation-verification and supervising-attorney-review workflow, and coverage across your practice areas	~11
4	**Compliance & security audit**	Weak governance: client-confidentiality and privilege protection, conflicts screening, access controls on research and DMS systems, SOC 2 scope covering the legal-research stack	~7
5	**Operational diligence**	The blind test: assign a research question and re-check the memo's authority and citations against the sources for true reliability; read the rework log; interview on how they handle unsettled law	4–6
6	**Competitive RFP & negotiation**	Hourly pricing: finalists bid against research-reliability floors, citation-accuracy targets, and attorney-ready-rate minimums — all carrying credits for memos that come back on wrong authority	2–3
7	**Transition & launch governance**	Cold start: the team calibrates against your practice areas, citation standard, and format on sample questions before it takes live matters, with the reliability floor certified before steady state, PITON-Global embedded buyer-side	1

Field-remaining counts represent a 20–50-seat legal-research search, PITON-Global engagements 2024–26.

The standing guarantees hold: **vendor neutrality** — PITON-Global operates no research floors, drafts no memos, and takes no placement economics, so the shortlist reflects audited reliability performance, not inventory; **right-sizing** — teams for whom your operation is a flagship account. Six to ten genuinely qualified providers, delivered within 48–72 hours, free to the buyer, competing through a fully transparent, fair, comprehensive, and highly competitive RFP.

SECTION 06 · ANONYMIZED CASE STUDY

Re-basing the operation on research reliability: a 40-seat legal-research rebuild, reconstructed

Engagement LR-050 is a US law firm and corporate legal department — commissioning roughly 14,000 research memos a year across litigation and transactional practice — that had offshored legal research to a per-hour LPO. The hourly rate was excellent; the reliability was not: research reliability sat near 90%, citation errors were surfacing in filings, attorneys were re-verifying and reworking a large share of memos, and a missed controlling case had nearly cost a motion. The general counsel wanted the leverage without the wrong authority and the risk. Identifying details are anonymized under NDA.

SELECTION (WEEKS 0–8, BLIND TESTS)

Requirements fixed a 99% research-reliability floor, a 99% citation-accuracy target, and an attorney-ready-rate minimum, with a mandatory citation-verification and supervising-attorney-review workflow. Mapping produced 38 claimants; the machinery screen — law-trained researchers, audited reliability, citation QA, practice-area coverage — left 11; the confidentiality-and-conflicts audit left 7. Blind research tests re-checked against the sources shortlisted 5. A Manila team won priced against reliability and attorney-ready rate, with a blind re-check written into the reporting spec.

TRANSITION (MONTHS 2–6, CALIBRATED FIRST)

The team calibrated against the firm's practice areas, citation standard, and memo format on sample questions before taking live matters; the reliability floor was certified in month 3. The verification-and-review loop fed calibration from day one. By month 6 research reliability reached 99.3%, citation accuracy hit 99%, attorney rework fell 63%, and research turnaround dropped 46%. PITON-Global chaired the reliability review board to steady state.

TABLE 3 — LR-050 FIRST-YEAR VALUE BUILD-UP (US$)

VALUE COMPONENT	YEAR 1	BASIS
Labor arbitrage on the 40-seat research operation	$1.72M	75.0k productive hrs × ($32.90 − $10.00)
Attorney leverage reclaimed (rework removed)	$0.68M	Senior-attorney hours returned from re-verification
Risk & malpractice exposure avoided	$0.34M	Bad-law and missed-precedent exposure removed
Turnaround & capacity value	$0.18M	Faster memos and higher matter throughput
Gross value created	**$2.92M**	
Less: engagement & transition costs	($0.46M)	Calibration, review-loop build, DMS/citation-tool integration; advisory fee $0 (provider-paid model)
Net value ÷ cost = first-year ROI	6.4×	$2.92M ÷ $0.46M

Figures rounded; reliability, citation, and rework effects audit-verified. Method in Methodology & notes.

Fifty-nine percent arbitrage, forty-one percent from reclaimed attorney leverage, avoided risk, and faster turnaround — a typical split for the series, earned because the operation was re-based on research reliability rather than billed hours. Every line traces to a diligence step: the reliability floor to Step 1, the reliability-based pricing to Step 6, the citation-verification workflow to Step 3's contract. The general counsel's line at the year-one review: "The rate barely moved. What moved is that I trust the research now — my attorneys stopped re-checking it, and nothing bad-lawed its way into a filing."

SECTION 07

The executive playbook: governance for the first 180 days

A legal-research transition succeeds when the team is measured and paid on research reliability and attorney-ready rate — client in command throughout.

DAYS 0–30 **Define reliability, contract on it**	Set the research-reliability floor, the citation-accuracy target, and the attorney-ready-rate and turnaround thresholds with legal leadership before launch, and document the citation-verification and supervising-attorney-review workflow by practice area. Contract against reliability and attorney-ready rate — never per hour alone — with floors and targets carrying credits. Stand up the blind re-check as the program's arbiter of truth.
DAYS 30–90 **Calibrate the researchers, prove the floor**	Calibrate researchers against your practice areas, citation standard, and memo format on sample questions before they take live matters; certify the reliability floor and citation-verification loop. Switch on the verification-and-review loop from day one. Publish the research dashboard: reliability rate, citation accuracy, attorney rework, turnaround, leverage reclaimed.
DAYS 90–180 **Take live matters, certify steady state**	Route live matters to the team only after it holds the reliability floor and attorney-ready-rate minimum, always under supervising-attorney review. Review the reliability board monthly with the rework log and citation-error trend on the table. Certify steady state on two months at floor across practice areas; hand over on documented criteria; keep the quarterly blind re-check standing.

THE FIVE FAILURE MODES WE ARE HIRED TO PREVENT

Paying by the hour while research rests on wrong authority · logging hours instead of finding the controlling law · citing what an AI tool or a colleague asserted without verifying it · handing attorneys memos that need re-checking · taking live matters before reliability is proven. All five are settled at selection and contract.

The legal-research argument, in one sentence: a billed hour is time and an attorney-ready memo is research a lawyer can rely on and sign, and a vetted Philippine team delivers −62% cost per attorney-ready memo with 99%+ reliability and attorney rework cut by nearly two-thirds — for buyers who re-check the reliability instead of counting hours billed, and compete the finalists through a fully transparent, fair, comprehensive, and highly competitive RFP. Anyone can bill a research hour. We make sure you buy the team whose research an attorney can sign.

METHODOLOGY & NOTES

How the numbers were built

Reliability and rework figures (Fig. 1, Table 2) derive from engagement instrumentation in PITON-Global legal-process engagements, 2025–26. Research reliability and citation accuracy are measured by re-checking memos' authority and citations against the sources; attorney rework, turnaround, and leverage reclaimed are measured against the client's pre-engagement baseline. The weak-provider column is a composite of pre-engagement vendor reporting reviewed in diligence, shown for contrast.

Cost-per-attorney-ready-memo figures (Table 1) are fully loaded — wages, benefits and statutory charges, facilities, technology and research-platform tooling, management and QA overhead including citation verifiers and reviewing attorneys, attrition-driven recruiting — divided by memos delivered reliable and attorney-ready, with wrong-authority or reworked memos excluded from the denominator; US comparators reflect fully-loaded associate/in-house cost for a comparable research memo. An attorney-ready memo rests on the controlling authority, has every citation verified, and can be relied on and signed.

The case study (LR-050) is anonymized under NDA; volumes and dates are generalized, figures rounded. Reliability, citation, and rework effects are audit-verified; the leverage-reclaimed line reflects senior-attorney hours returned, and the risk-avoided line is a conservative estimate. ROI = net first-year value ÷ all engagement-related client costs. PITON-Global's advisory fee is provider-paid and appears at $0 in the client cost base; neutrality safeguards are documented at piton-global.com.

Market context draws on IBPAP reporting and PITON-Global's proprietary provider mapping (1,000+ operations; research reliability and attorney-ready performance re-verified May 2026). Offshore legal research supports, and never replaces, licensed attorney judgment; all work product is delivered under supervising-attorney review. Estimates and projections are PITON-Global analysis and should be cited as such. The full series is available at piton-global.com.

Would your provider's hourly rate survive a reliability re-check?

Thirty minutes with John will tell you. Free to buyers, strictly vendor-neutral — a reliability-verified shortlist within two to three business days.

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