



Client Profile

Digital Dictation with One Office

"I certainly wish we'd done it before," says David Towler, Managing Partner of Whittles, a firm with four offices in the Leeds and Manchester area.

He's referring to a new digital dictation solution that the firm is piloting. Despite the availability of digital dictation solutions for sometime now, the industry is surprised that more law firms haven't realised its obvious benefits.

Put simply, it is inefficient to record work on tape because it can't be moved around conveniently from one typist to another. The result is that some typists are overloaded with work, while others have insufficient work. There is a clear imbalance in allocation of resources, and that means inefficiency.

DPS Software's TeamTalk includes templates and document styles that can be sent with the electronic file, so that the typist can not only reproduce the document, but also reproduce it in a prescribed form - and this can apply to a document, letter, attendance note, or whatever is being produced.

"We have moved from a point where we were about a week behind with transcription work to our present position where we are now dealing with yesterday's work."

David Towler
Managing Partner, Whittles

It also integrates fully to the DPS case management software allowing users to dictate jobs against matters. The job of filing documents electronically against files is automatically done by the system. This tight and seamless integration to case delivers huge benefits to the practice.

Once typed the document joins a workflow, finds the appropriate typist who then returns it to the fee earner (or an alternative fee earner) for checking on screen. The authorisation is electronic and either returns it to the typist as typed or amended for printing and despatch.

DPS's solution correctly handles outsource workers as part of the team in the practice. The workers can be at home, in another team, at another physically unconnected office, or in another company altogether. This means that they can deal with overflow, as well as normal work. The saving of expenditure on temporary staff is enormous.

TeamTalk offers management reports either as standard or tailored to the requirements of the firm, department or fee earner.

Lisa Bendelow, the firm's IT Manager, explains, "We have now upgraded our DPS Case

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Management to One Office. The database is SQL and the extra functions of One Office mean that we can develop our DPS applications to take advantage of these.

However because One Office is fully compatible with our previous applications we have been able to make a relatively smooth transition."

Whittles began rolling out DPS Software's One Office and TeamTalk in January 2005, this was mixed in with the general update of their IT infrastructure. "Generally speaking, both fee earners and secretaries have found it smooth," says David Towler. "And it has certainly made us rethink our office procedures and processes - for instance, digital dictation means we have no need to move files around with items of work!

"We really felt we had a work imbalance and we wanted to address it - that's what motivated us to look at digital dictation. In some areas of the practice we were operating on a 1:1 fee earner/secretary ratio with tapes and no case management, there was an obvious inefficiency. So we're looking to roll this out to all of the firm's four offices.

"It's too early to make an assessment of its impact on profitability; perhaps we'll have to wait a year or so, but on the basis that increased efficiency is invariably followed by increased profitability, we anticipate an improvement there also."

It is the effect on the fee earner/secretary ratio that perhaps has provided the most noticeable change. "We are still employing the same people," says David Towler, "but we are using them differently. We have broken the 1:1 ratio that the old tape system tied us into. We still have full capacity, but the difference is that transcription work finds itself with the next person in line and urgent work can receive absolute priority. It is completely flexible.

"We have moved from a point where we were about a week behind with transcription work to our present position where we are now dealing with yesterday's work." says David Towler.

On the question of training, he says there have been no problems. "It's been very easy really. DPS came into the firm and trained a number of in-house trainers. In turn they have given training to fee earners and secretaries. The sessions last only about 45 minutes. It helped that we are already using DPS's previous case systems of course."

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The training involves each site having a supervisor user. Selected personnel are trained in tailoring the system to the needs of the practice and are the first point of contact for all users.

Training is provided in setting up details of the firm and any branches; then setting up the user details. This is followed by a user course for both fee earners and secretaries.

Lisa Bendelow adds, "We'll extend the system to our conveyancing department and then perhaps to the debt collection department. The next stage will be to roll it out to our other offices."

Looking at the cost benefit overall, David Towler is confident that investment in this technology will prove to be a wise investment. "Look" he says "we have a small branch office with two secretaries and at one point they were under utilised. The flexibility of the system enables us to feed them work temporarily from other offices."

Working at the coal face of implementation, Lisa Bendelow says her experience is that on the whole everyone who has been involved so far has been happy and has recognised many of the obvious benefits.

With new entrants coming to the legal services market, law firms will have to ask themselves whether systems like One Office that integrate case and digital dictation are 'must have' solutions.

About Whittles

Whittles Solicitors are a proactive and well established firm with sector-leading expertise, providing clients with the benefit of almost 100 years' experience of the law.

About TeamTalk

TeamTalk is the innovative digital dictation solution from DPS and has proven to be invaluable in the legal practice. TeamTalk features support for dictation and transcription via LANs, WANs or the internet with seamless integration for digital recorders, Pocket PCs, mobile phones and landlines.

The software incorporates usage by both a fee earner and administrator in ensuring that a dictated document is processed in as quick a manner as possible. Dictated files can be directed to individuals or pools of typists dependent on the importance or sensitivity of the document itself. Additional dictated material can be added to existing DPS templates and saved in the typing pool for transcription at a later stage.