



Building a Business Using Technology Foundations

When Portsmouth law firm Biscoes looked at their IT infrastructure in 2002 they clearly identified that they needed to improve it immensely if they wanted to achieve their ambitious expansion plans. Biscoes were then a 3 office practice with 80 staff; they had no practice wide case management solution and used Axxia for their accounts and practice management.

Jacqui Ivemy, the firms' head of accounts said, "Axxia provided us with a very reliable accounts solution, but we knew that we needed a far more comprehensive practice solution than just an accounts solution."

Jean Evans, the senior partner of the practice, tasked Jacqui Ivemy and Mathew Smith, the firms' technology partner, with searching the market for a comprehensive solution to meet the firms' requirements. Business sense dictated that the solution needed to put profits first, the case side of the business was where the big savings and increases in profits were to be made. Mathew knew that most firms searched for the accounts first and that case was a secondary consideration, they reversed this logic and prioritised case.

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Jacqui Ivemy
Head of Accounts Biscoes

They narrowed their search to 3 systems, Axxia, Videss and One Office from DPS. After lengthy, and necessary, due diligence they entered into a contract worth £300,000 with DPS Software for the provision of a case and accounts systems throughout the practice. At the time this was a huge commitment for the firm, the promise was to deliver a completely unified practice IT infrastructure that would deliver enough savings to repay the investment within 30 months of installation.

Case systems were installed for Conveyancing, Personal Injury, Crime, Family, Remortgage and Probate. All of these case systems fully integrate to their Cashier accounts software.

Jacqui Ivemy says, "The savings made in the criminal department alone are huge, we do not have to re key any DS6 or 7 billing information, the fee earners put in their time, the software produces the CDS6, then we post it straight into the accounts system and receipt it, all using precisely 3 mouse clicks. That aspect alone took up to 4 days of time before we installed the new software."

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The accounts department no longer has to open clients and matters, all the work is done at case level. Cheques for disbursements and billing guides are all requested electronically by fee earners. Ledger card prints are called off by fee earners and secretaries straight from their case systems. Information in the form of reports is generated from the system on demand with no delays in report production. The Cashier accounts system is 'point-in-time based', meaning it allows matter balances, and other critical financial reports, to be generated as at a point in time, meaning the traditional month end bottleneck is avoided. Accounts staff can close a period days or even weeks after the month end has happened allowing users to post into forward periods while month end procedures and checks are completed.

The hardware infrastructure took nearly 2 months to install, including linking all the offices into a centralised 'thin client' system. To ensure minimum practice disruption both DPS engineers and Biscoes staff worked weekends to achieve a problem free installation.

This joint effort between practice and supplier resulted in the complete solution being quickly and effectively installed. The attention to detail by all parties involved has meant that the practice had an IT foundation that they could really build upon.

Improved productivity rapidly followed which enabled Biscoes to take over other practices and generally increase business and profits. The first of these was in April 2004 when they took over King and Franckeiss to become Biscoes King & Franckeiss, further acquisitions followed with the merger of Covers and Wilkinsons.

In short, the practice has grown from an initial 80 to 140 staff within 2 years. They are now opening a new office in Gosport to serve the Solent area.

What about the users themselves, are they getting benefits? Karen Coffin, a fee earner in the conveyancing department said, "What I find most useful is the electronic file, I can sit at my computer and look at all the documents on the file on my screen, emails in or out, searches, whatever, it is all very accessible. My task list is a great incentive and makes sure that things I should be looking at are in front of me when I need to look at them."

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So how about for the practice as a whole; three years down the line was it all worth it? Absolutely says, Jean Evans, Senior Partner, "We did not 'spend' the money, we invested it in the business and we are reaping the benefits."

Does Jean have any advice for practices that are looking to invest in IT? Jean says, "Any practice that wants to build a business, has to make sure the foundations are right. We worked with our supplier to get what we wanted when we wanted it. That is what a practice has to do. You need to target software performance against productivity targets frequently and always push the boundaries of the practices' IT requirements to achieve greater and greater levels of efficiency. Last but not least target the areas of the business where you make money!"

About Biscoes

Biscoes King & Frankeiss are now a 12 partner practice with offices in Portsmouth, Southsea, Waterloo, Wickham & Gosport. They installed the One Office practice management system from DPS incorporating accounts and case management systems for conveyancing, remortgage, family and personal injury work. The database for all applications is SQL for scalability in size.

They use a Citrix network infrastructure that links their 5 offices and 140 staff using Windows 2003 server technology with remote logins for their remote users. The complete infrastructure solution was designed, installed and now maintained by DPS engineers.

Since initial installation the practice has doubled in size to become the largest multi discipline practice in the area. They are still growing by absorbing other practices and opening new offices.

About SQL

The One Office version of DPS Case Management & Accounts Software has been written using the latest SQL database technology. SQL databases are relational, meaning that information can be stored more effectively and complex searches across files can now be performed easily.

Another benefit of using SQL databases is your case management system can now be fully linked to your accountancy software package, as long as it also uses a SQL backend, therefore allowing dual traffic of information from one to the other, which will reduce the amount of duplicated data.

About One Office

One Office from DPS Software is the latest step in application development using the Microsoft .NET framework.