

Profiting by Managing Technology

It was in early 2001, when David Levene (pictured above) first ordered a case management and accounts system from DPS. It included software modules for personal injury, employment, family, conveyancing and criminal practitioners. The firm were growing fast with some 230 staff.



A consultant was employed to help shortlist six potential solution providers. The

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Charlotte Brice
London & European

firm sent out an extensive invitation to tender running to

some 200 pages and took a long look at three providers. Initially DPS were omitted by the consultants and were late entrants to the race. Levenes insisted on their inclusion because of their close proximity and reputation.

Says IT Manager, Michael Brown, "We chose DPS for many reasons; they were strong on personal injury and crime systems; they had solutions for family and conveyancing; and they could help develop our education and disability solution.

The software was modular, scalable and open and we could integrate it into our business one department at a time.

"It was also vital that the solution provider should be able to provide an integrated accounts system. DPS offered just such a 'one-stop-shop' as well as a help desk.

"As part of the tendering process, we visited a number of DPS clients and were impressed with our findings. Typically the fee earner/secretary ratio had reduced dramatically. One firm with four criminal practitioners and four secretaries reduced secretarial staff to one with no loss of turnover or efficiency. These were the savings we were hoping to make as it would mean a quick return on investment"

By mid 2002, changes in the marketplace forced the firm to look carefully at their business and in particular their sources of work. They were providing a quality service but could foresee profit margins reducing while client expectations increased.

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The effect of the technology was to reduce staffing requirements because working procedures had made processes more efficient. Automated workflows through the case management systems were affecting every department – effectively reducing staffing levels by a quarter.

But the pressure was still on. Client care was high on the firm's agenda yet the firm knew that savings and efficiencies still needed to be made. Inability to recruit suitable secretarial staff also hampered efforts to be efficient. The work generated by the marketing department was plentiful, yet easy to process with the automated systems and fewer secretarial staff were required.

The firm now has 21 partners and some 200 staff scattered around the UK in offices in London (two), Cambridge, Cardiff and Birmingham. Since he arrived in 2001, Michael Brown has seen striking benefits.

“There are clear advances in terms of efficiency, profitability and the management of client relationships. For instance, our secretary/fee earner staffing ratios were 1:1. Now they are 1:4. The fee earner can use the technology – and even better, so long as legal advice is not required, in the fee earner's absence, the secretary has all information to hand, to be able to inform the client of progress.

“The reduction in back-office staff has significantly increased our profitability; while client relationships can be managed more effectively because the information on the system is at the fee earner's fingertips. We are now in the process of making the whole solution web-based. One real benefit has been the ability to provide up to date information to the many insurance companies for which the firm acts.

“Because of the way DPS works, it guides the user through lists of processes in each type of case. But DPS' solutions have real flexibility built in and don't constrict the user to specific processes and procedures in serving our clients,” He says. “The fee earner can keep close day to day supervision of a case meeting required dates and targets and keeping the client closely informed at the same time.

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Profiting by Managing Technology cont.

“Automation means many of the documents are created automatically so that fee earners can write many of the basic letters themselves. Many of our solicitors now have no secretary as the DPS system makes typing faster and easier. The employment department has almost doubled the number of cases a fee earner handles since importing the system.”

And because all case information is captured into a database, the firm can create reports which enable it to take an overview of all the work currently in progress.

The latest solution from DPS – the digital dictation solution TeamTalk, is another exciting development. “We developed this with DPS in its early stages,” he says. “Shortly, we’ll have rolled this out to all our offices. We adopted it as a pilot in November 2003. We chose IT-literate staff and got valuable feedback on performance. We ironed out the problems and fed the information back to DPS.

“The best part was being able to talk directly to the programmers and developers; that really sped up the implementation process. The most important aspect was that it enabled us to continue working the way we as a firm wanted to work – and didn’t require us to work in a different way, as was the case with some other solutions we considered.

“The solution allows a fee earner to dictate work either for a specific secretary or for a team of keyboard operators, depending on the circumstances. The key benefit is that the dictated work can be allocated to any staff available in any team throughout the firm. It means there’s no unused capacity.

“The Administrator can check the whereabouts of any piece of work and move it around to somewhere with capacity, according to its priority. On the other hand, if the work is highly confidential for instance, it can be reserved to a specific secretary for personal attention. “One great administrative feature is ‘Word Add-In’ which enables a template to be inserted when a document is keyed in, so that a complete stranger to the work

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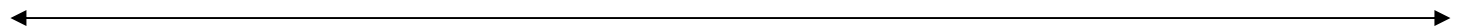
Profiting by Managing Technology cont.

can produce the document in the required layout. More than that, TeamTalk can assign numbers to documents that can then be slotted correctly into the case management system when returned, for instance, as an e-mail attachment. This is most valuable when work is outsourced to a team in India, which occurs from time to time.

“Of course, the Administrator can check progress and monitor the amount of work outstanding at any particular time and adjust the workflow as required. The most noticeable benefit has been the reduction in the need to hire temporary staff with all the induction, training and cost implications that arise.”

“Overall, though, I’d have to say that one of the key advantages has been the ability to integrate TeamTalk with the other solutions from DPS. Integration has never been a problem for us, thankfully,” he says.

“In fact, it’s the reverse. Because all the solutions are interoperable and can be tailored as we require, the combined solutions offer us unlimited flexibility.” Three years on, the upshot of this rapid and comprehensive drive to import technology is that the firm now has 170 staff. “We have vastly improved fee earner/administration levels,” says Michael Brown. “Our profit margins and turnover are all well up from the 2001 levels. The net result is that people are doing more work and the added efficiency makes the practice more profitable. Visionary management plus excellent IT yields profits!”



About Levenes

Established by David Levene, a leading personal injury specialist, in 1989 in North London, mainly as a Personal Injury firm, Levenes has expanded rapidly in terms of location and range of services offered. Today, Levenes has five offices around the UK, two in London (Chancery Lane and Wood Green), Birmingham, Cardiff and Cambridge.

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.