

The Connected Law Practice

The world has changed. Now is the time to consider how your law firm can deliver more efficient services and client satisfaction.

A fast-changing landscape

The Coronavirus lockdown of 2020 has brought with it increased pressure to look at how legal services are delivered, and the way in which law firms operate. The requirement for lawyers to work remotely became a necessity almost overnight. At the same time, modern, tech-savvy consumers grew even more dependent on digital technology to navigate a path through their day-to-day lives.

It was a perfect storm perhaps, but one that presented a huge opportunity to firms who were previously at a disadvantage due to size, resources or location. Moving to digital has become essential in helping firms manage business risk and remain competitive.

It was already clear that improving the clients' experience was becoming a catalyst for business transformation. This means firms that are looking to review how they operate, must start from the needs of the client and work back from there. Having a connected online infrastructure helps a firm to react faster and more efficiently to clients' needs. Moreover, the better a firm is at responding to change and demand, the more attractive they will become to any prospective new clients.

It's time for bold decisions

Our latest [Annual Trends Survey](#), published in late 2019, found nearly half (47 per cent) agree the most important attribute for a business leader is the ability to react with pace and make bold decisions. This reinforces the need for leaders to stay informed about technologies, and rapidly implement solutions that can help them future-proof their firm.



Current requirements are all about connecting a practice to the wider world by ensuring that all areas are digitally linked. Digital development is the best way for firms to gain the tools that will help meet today's challenges. A connected practice means that all departments within a firm are working together, often remotely, to reach high levels of engagement and efficiency.

LEADERSHIP



47%

think the most important attribute for a business leader is the ability to act with pace and make bold decisions

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There are plenty of things to do on the way to becoming a connected practice. These are our three main suggestions.

*Some businesses are further ahead in the journey than others. Just 12 per cent of our survey respondents describe their firm as innovators, while 16 per cent say theirs is in the late majority or a laggard. However, it's better late than never, and never too late to start.**

1 The communications challenge

As a sector, legal firms face a variety of challenges. At the moment, one of the most potentially disruptive is reduced efficiency due to a disconnected workforce and a lack of easily accessible communication tools. While it's not business as usual, it's easier to lose time on tasks that are not of high value. Although administration is critical, focusing on back office processes leaves less time for fee-earning activities, and makes it difficult to complete matters and build strong client relationships.

With a lack of communication and connectivity comes confusion, inefficient processes and duplicated effort - resulting in wasted resources and work potentially being missed. Moreover, this lack of connectivity will have a large impact on how productive you are as a firm. Critically, high levels of efficiency mean reaching clients wherever, and whenever, it is most convenient for them.

Nowadays, mobile work tools that allow staff to work easily from any location, are crucial to ongoing productivity. Fee earners who are working remotely cannot work on matters without the capability to access case information instantly or being able to see and post reports or view account ledgers, documents and emails.

Efficient communication allows clients to receive the highest levels of service, and provides them with the convenience of quick updates and case progression, without having to chase. That 'always on' attitude can help drive productivity in the simplest of ways. A 'yes/no' reply sent from a mobile is often all that is required and it progresses matters more quickly than some formal methods of contact.

In relevant circumstances, this level of 'micro-communication' may actually help to reduce the workload burden rather than increase it. It is very likely that the more a firm communicates within itself, and with clients, the more productive it will be. It provides a better experience for all involved. Digital technology is all about communication - whether it is the recording of data or the sharing of it - it's a tool law firms now can't afford to be without.

2 Think beyond the PCMS

Communication and connectivity is a good way to get ahead of the competition, whilst simultaneously engaging and assisting clients and employees alike, but it is not the only way. Although having a Practice and Case Management System (PCMS) in place is essential for the daily challenges your firm faces, there are a range of additional digital tools that are now at your disposal.

One option you may want to consider is an integrated system that connects your firms' HR needs with your payroll software. This integration in itself can boost both efficiency and management reporting. It only requires a further connection to your PCMS to quickly see how efficiently these combined tools could help track an individual's performance and manage bonus payments.

Take for example an HR system that has deep integration with your PCMS. Any fee-earner who is on leave could have matters and tasks automatically redirected to another team member, continuing the positive experience the client receives, and simultaneously ensuring any new activities are not missed.

Additionally, the power of a connected digital infrastructure means you can take advantage of your marketing and business development data using customer relationship management (CRM) to ensure you offer clients what they want, and importantly, more than what they expect.

Surpassing expectations is a tried and tested way to increase customer satisfaction, helping a firm to retain current clients and attract new ones. Moreover, the detail such a system could provide, combined with your PCMS, gives your firm the chance to increase interest and make the most of any cross-sell offers. Clients often consider only a small portion of what a firm can provide, and this leads to the loss of many potential opportunities.

INNOVATION



only

12%

of our survey respondents would describe their firm as technical innovators

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The capacity a CRM system has to manage and analyse a client's interactions and data throughout the customer life cycle allows legal professionals to enhance business relationships. Every single firm now needs to work hard to boost client retention and drive growth in order to thrive in this high pressure environment - while also meeting the demands of their clients. In essence, these pressures influence the structure of day-to-day working across entire organisations. Therefore, it is key to make sure that the information used to operate is as accurate and data driven as possible.

Firms can no longer rely on past performance to provide a stable and reliable platform for the development of growth plans. A solution that incorporates Business Intelligence (BI) within a connected infrastructure can turn data, from multiple sources, into actionable intelligence. Understanding current market forces can allow firms to streamline their abilities and to implement logical strategic actions that can propel the firm to even greater profitability.

The ability to optimise technology, such as an HR system and a CRM platform, alongside Business Intelligence, will equip your firm with all the relevant information to improve processes and centralise focus on what really matters. The market rewards those that respond effectively to challenges and opportunities and clients seek firms that actively display an understanding of their needs. When a firm makes the decision to progress to digital working it can help them in numerous ways to survive and prosper.

3 Embrace the Cloud

Increased digital access and exposure is vital today, and it's simply untenable for firms to lack a digital infrastructure. To ensure business continuity you need to provide efficient digital options and clear 24/7 communication channels to both your internal teams and your clients.

A connected firm makes sure that processes and productivity remain uninterrupted, regardless of where people are working. At home, in the office, while travelling or in court, mobile access to servers means crucial information can be securely accessed and uploaded. Real-time information views maximise business agility and flexibility. Scalability and ease-of-use instantly transform your firm to a stronger, more connected organisation.

A significant 67 per cent of our Trends Survey respondents said they are now seeing Cloud services in their daily working lives. A lower cost of entry, superior performance and unlimited scalability make Cloud technologies the best choice for modern practices. Firms who previously redirected their funds to move to modern, integrated software and systems are now benefitting from a platform that has provided a smooth transition during lockdown and a greater competitive advantage.

The events of 2020 will change the shape of law firms forever. Consider the example of Scott-Moncrieff & Associates (ScoMo), who were one of the world's first virtual law firms. Their digital capacity means that they have no need for a desk-based office, allowing them to gain the significant benefits of time and cost savings.



We provide ScoMo with the Cloud-based desktop management systems that allow them to meet their clients' expectations very effectively. Having no need for a large physical presence has allowed them to expand the breadth of their practice, and to recruit a team of talented specialists with reach across the UK. Although technology is central to the success of their operation, it does not replace face-to-face interaction. Consultants can still arrange to meet as often as they want via virtual online meetings or social channels.

This model proves that digital tech can increase business scope while using fewer resources. It's an excellent example of what can be achieved when firms turn to technology for solutions.

It is now critical for modern digital business leaders to listen and work with the rest of their workforce, to build a digital-first strategy that takes into consideration the pain points and needs that come with their job roles. So the question now becomes, how do I execute the next steps for my firm's future?

THE CLOUD



67%

of respondents
say they are
now seeing
Cloud services
in their daily
working lives

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The time has come

The world has been pushed into circumstances that we couldn't have predicted just a few short months ago. It has become critical for modern business leaders to listen to, and work with, their teams to build a digital-first strategy. At the forefront of considerations are the barriers and needs associated with changing work roles.

The 3 points, outlined below, can provide a roadmap to help your firm make a start.

While still dealing with the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, firms also have to overcome a number of hurdles around IT spending, legacy systems, cyber security, leadership and digital skills. However, if addressed, firms will be able to properly reap the benefits by using software to increase efficiency and boost productivity.

< Assess your firm

Work with your solution vendor to go through a thorough assessment of your firm. Consider your overall business processes. How can things be improved? Where can efficiencies be made? Think about how simply, quickly and efficiently any technical integration required can take place. If necessary, plan it alongside your technology investment cycles and look beyond just the next 12 months of investment. This may well not all happen at once.



PROFIT



44%

see improved profit as a key benefit from adopting new and innovative technologies

Thinking about a Connected Practice?

Try these steps along the way

> Make a plan

Think about how you can future-proof your firm and prepare for the unexpected. What services do you want to offer? Where do you see potential for growth? What are you too reliant on? What will your clients need? How do you see client interaction changing because of, or despite, your strategic goals? What do you need in place to make this plan a success?

> Find a solution

Although there are a range of software providers on the market, you need to partner with a business that will put you at the forefront of their agenda. One who will work with you to develop an integrated solution that is expertly designed specifically for your firm. An organisation that can combine ongoing stability with the foresight to offer solutions to support you in the future rather than just for now.

> Develop a project plan

When you have chosen a technology partner, develop and refine the platform you intend to deploy. It's important to ensure you are able to continue to work at optimum levels before, during and after the go-live phase.

> Manage the change

One of the biggest challenges will be ensuring the entire firm takes part in the journey and embraces the change. All departments and teams need to fully understand the benefits that new, digital technology will deliver to them. Appoint an adoption 'champion' in each key area to help drive acceptance and progress.

Ready for the future

So what have we learned? In light of the significant business disruption that 2020 has delivered, the answer may be clearer than it has ever been before. Connecting your processes across a digital platform is now an absolute necessity for all firms if they are to thrive and grow into the future.

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*Percentages used in this white paper have been taken from the Advanced Annual Trends Survey (Dec 19)