

JULY/AUGUST 2018

SUPPLEMENT INSIDE:  
DATA WORKS

# LPM

LEGAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

THE ONLY  
MAGAZINE  
FOR LAW FIRM  
MANAGERS

## LPM ASKS

*Vidisha Joshi, managing partner at Hodge Jones & Allen, about being boss*

EXPERT  
COLUMNISTS  
AND ADVICE  
FROM PRACTICE  
MANAGEMENT

## BRAIN TRAINING

*What's a holistic lawyer and should your firm consider joined-up legal services?*



# Who are you?

*Every business has a culture, whether you like it or not  
- what are SME law firms doing to build up theirs?*

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# WELCOME

*It's time for fresh eyes and a new perspective at the SME legal market ...*

My reign as acting editor of LPM has come to an end – but fear not, you'll still see me lurking in the pages of the magazine and at our conferences. Why? Because our fabulous new editor, Charlotte Bastiaanse, will be taking the helm from September.

Like any healthy business, it's time for fresh eyes and a new perspective on the SME legal market, which nicely brings us to the topic of this month's issue: culture.

Do you know who you are, as a firm? How do your people represent your company? Is it good, bad, or somewhere in between? What does it all mean? Lucy Trevelyan reports on 'Growing cultures' on p31.

How about taking a look at bettering your culture with other services? As threats from new entrants in the market and the like of the Big Four and other audit/consulting firms emerge, SME legal might want to consider taking the plunge at offering services outside the legal scope. Simon Walsh at Oury Clark (p20) reviews how a holistic approach might be beneficial.

And finally, a topic I've been wanting words on for ages: Barry Davies at Douglas-Jones Mercer talks the talk on law firm jargon and how it impacts your business (p10).

As a famous piggy once said, that's all folks! Well, in this form anyway – as I said I'll be lurking, like I do best. Give me a shout if you'd like to contribute, argue or just say hi.

Kayli Olson, acting editor  
@LPMmag | kaylio@lpmmag.co.uk



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# About us

LPM magazine is published by **Burlington Media**, a media and events business focused solely on people in legal business services and management – whatever size or type of legal services provider they work for.

We run LinkedIn groups with thousands of members, across several areas, from legal IT to legal process outsourcing. Find our LPM group at [bit.ly/lpmgroup](http://bit.ly/lpmgroup).

Our sister brand LSN's website is where you can find news, views and resources from the established legal news providers and hundreds of suppliers to the legal industry, all rolled into one useful information feed: [www.lsn.co.uk](http://www.lsn.co.uk).

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We also run the popular **LPM conferences**, tailored for anyone working in management in SME law firms and ABSs. Our 2018 trip has finished! Find out more about conferences here: [www.lsn.co.uk/lpm2018](http://www.lsn.co.uk/lpm2018)

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# IN PRACTICE

## SNAPSHOT REPORTING REPORTS

It's all change in the legal market, with new research and reports sparking transformation for law firms and revealing encouraging results. Good weather is not the only thing to be excited about this summer.

**The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has announced new transparency requirements for law firms** after research conducted by the SRA suggests that 85% of people want more information when choosing a law firm. New measures will require law firms to publish the prices they charge for certain public-facing services. These services include conveyancing, probate, and immigration for the public, and debt recovery, employment tribunals, and licensing applications for small businesses.

Additionally, firms must show the protections their regulated services give customers through a new digital badge scheme, which firms can display on their website.

A new searchable public register will also be developed to find information on all solicitors and regulated law firms in England and Wales.

In other news, **the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is to become a "simpler, smarter organisation,"** details its CEO Shaun McNally.

The agency's annual report showed that administration costs fell by £13.7m from the previous year, achieved through fewer contract and agency staff being used and the consolidation of desk space in their London office.

Despite already modernising how they pay advocates and litigators and introducing a new online portal, McNally continues to stress their continued commitment into transforming and modernising the agency to deliver more effective legal services.

Finally, **two reports that present encouraging news around the standards of advocacy in criminal courts have been released.**

The first report, from the Bar



Standards Board (BSB) and the SRA, looked into the views of the judiciary on advocacy within criminal courts. The second, published by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research of Birbeck, University of London, involved in-depth interviews with 50 high court and circuit judges.

The reports revealed that advocacy quality was generally meeting standards despite judges being unsure when and how to report poor standards to regulators. The main barrier to better standards was advocates taking on cases beyond their level of experience.

However, despite satisfactory standards, training for advocates was found to be inconsistent, infrequent, or not properly planned. The market was also found to be dominated by smaller firms and aging individuals, with low numbers of new entrants.

Reported by Andrew Muir [LPM](#)

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IN NUMBERS

### Progress in percent

The recently released annual statistics report from the Law Society presents an encouraging image of diversity in law firms.

**50.1%**

of practicing certificate (PC) holders were women, outnumbering male colleagues for the first time

**17%**

increase in the representation of BAME groups among PC holders

**34%**

of trainees were male in 2017, falling from last year

Source: Law Society Annual Statistics Report 2017

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# HARMFUL HABITS

Out-of-hours working is undermining employers' well-intentioned initiatives to boost employee health and wellbeing



## BAD NEWS BEAR

**37%**

of employees in the legal sector find working outside of traditional working hours harms their mental wellbeing

**20%**

of employees in the legal sector believe it negatively affects their output

**89%**

of large law firms contractually oblige staff to be available outside office hours

## CALL FOR BETTER WORK-LIFE

**47%**

of employees in the legal sector say they would not even consider a job if it required availability beyond core office hours

**45%**

of employees in the legal industry surveyed cite flexible working hours as the most important benefit they could receive in the next 10 years

Source: The Global Benefits Forum survey by Lockton international

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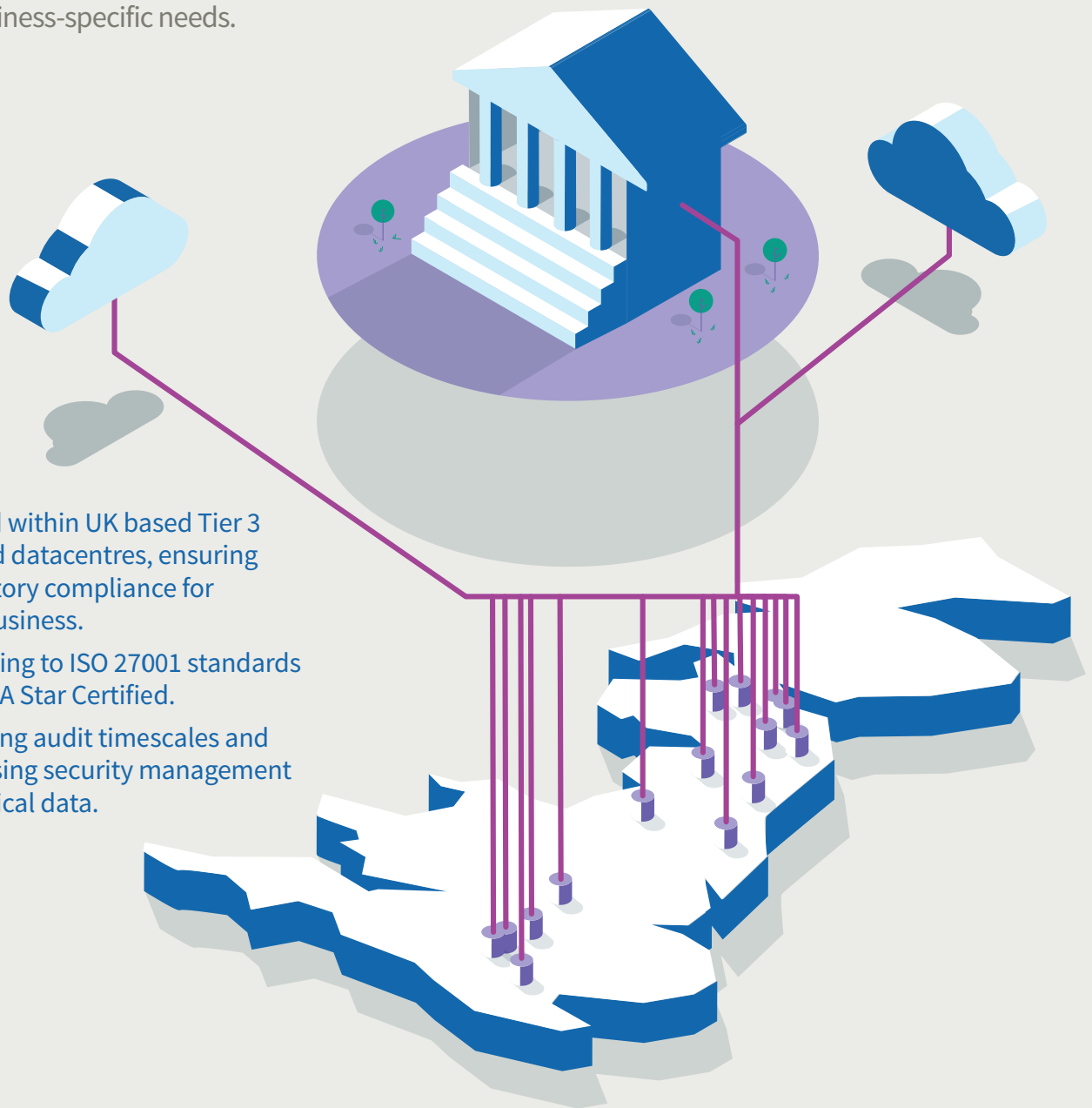
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## ASK THE EXPERT



# A NEW HOPE

Vidisha Joshi, managing partner at Hodge Jones & Allen, discusses some of the high impact projects she initiated at the firm

**Q** Why require your partners to take cash management and financial training?

**A** This was a big initiative I did early on with our finance director. One challenge for law firms like ours is cashflow – poor cashflow puts an enormous strain on the business. I wanted our partners to understand what that stress was and how it impacted our decisions. Fees don't always equal cash. It's important to me to demonstrate how we are one firm and will all pay the price if we don't have good financial hygiene. So, I showed them a year of financials – the peaks and troughs – and how it translated into business decisions, for example a cut in marketing spend. I didn't want to bombard them with numbers and spreadsheets – we approached it simply and transparently. And it's paid off – our year end in April

has shown one of the best years in the firm's financial history.

**Q** How did you create engagement and buy-in to become paper-light?

**A** I actually first joined the firm to implement a case management system and did that successfully in six months. When I could move away from that, our next focus was to become paperless. This was about two years ago and there was a lot of push back. But I've worked in a paper-free environment before. So, I knew it was possible and I didn't want to abandon hope, so we regrouped and rebranded it as paper-light – and that subtle change made a huge difference in terms of engagement and buy-in. We piloted it with a small team and then set up a working party with representatives from each area

of the business to discuss what worked and what didn't. We had a uniform process, and within six months we rolled it out across the whole firm. We are now paper-light and we have seen some great savings just from printing costs alone but also we are more efficient and organised because we can archive files electronically.

**Q** Why set up an in-house call centre?

**A** A big driver for this was being able to track how enquiries were coming into the firm. We're starting to automate this process, which would be difficult with an external call centre. It's important when we're making decisions on spend that we have this information. Having control of the full client journey is key in providing great customer service. Certain teams

receive large volumes of phoned queries – for example, our housing team receives around 350 a month, whereas other teams receive much less throughout the call centre. To factor this in, we wanted to centralise our query handling to be able to share resource and ensure no calls were missed. It's a mix of graduates, professional call centre advisers as well as paralegals. Our call centre staff are given in-depth training in various areas of law and this is especially important as we deal with many vulnerable people. It's not just a matter of handling their case – we're talking to people who have just been made homeless that morning and have a court hearing the same afternoon. Our people need to be alert and able to make decisions to convert the case delicately and quickly. **LPM**

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# IN PLAIN ENGLISH

BARRY DAVIES, PRACTICE DIRECTOR



While looking at our firm's promotional materials recently, I realised that one of our straplines graphically emblazoned 'jargon-free legal advice'. Which led me to wondering if this is actually true?

The legal profession is still classed by many as being a little stuffy, and the use of ancient terminology makes it very difficult for laypeople to understand. It's human instinct to be reluctant to admit you don't understand something. So, in the past, when a lawyer said 'we shall contact the plaintiff regarding the affidavit', most lay people would just nod and go with the flow, not understanding what on earth that means.

So, what place does legal jargon have in the future?

Firstly, there's the generational impact. I recently overheard a younger lawyer say, in a telephone conversation with a client, about a property matter, 'you will need to send a balance of two grand on Friday'. It raised my eyebrows, as I know some partners would have reached for the phone to apologise for the use of such casual language. Generation Y (and even more so Gen Z) lawyers are digital natives and as a result will expect things to be more digitally focused and up-to-date.

The next factor would be the inevitable loosening of non-reserved legal activities and the heavily diluted Code of Conduct, which may lead to some legal advisers not being trained through traditional routes. This could lead to less jargon being used. The SRA has stated that the new code will reduce complexity and improve flexibility, mainly from a cost of compliance perspective, but this will also reduce the amount of 'jargon'.

Lastly is the impact of artificial intelligence (AI). While a vast number of lawyers will say 'never in my day' to its adoption, it has been on the horizon for some time. Such systems may still retain the use of legal terms that date back centuries, but can interpret and churn them out in a language that is widely understood. IBM

developed their super computer Watson some years back and has since released the legal AI computer Ross. AI technology was used by the Serious Fraud Office in a recent criminal case and the system was 2,000 times faster than the human process they had previously engaged. This equated to half a million documents a day. The SFO has stated it will continue to use such systems in future and has done so for what are likely to be bigger cases.

Alan Siegel delivered a TED talk many years ago on the simplifying of legal jargon. He was responsible for reducing large agreements for multinationals to just a few pages and campaigned for

the use of plain English. It could be argued that it is not just the legal sector that needs to be alive to this but the corporate sector overall. There are too many 'moving forwards' and 'moving the goalposts' in the working day for my liking.

Because of the nature of law, there is always going to be a need for some degree of sector-specific jargon, and it would take a very long time for the machines to take over.

On a lighter note, I attended a marketing seminar hosted by the ever-entertaining David Gilroy, where he played 'lingo bingo' by making use of certain phrases in his presentation. Quite simply, you score points when certain jargon words are mentioned. The winner is the first person to have none left. If you have never played this game I urge you to do so in your office presentations as they will be listened to with greater intensity! **LPM**

“ *The legal profession is still classed by many as being a little stuffy and the use of ancient terminology makes it very difficult for laypeople to understand.* ”

## ABOUT

Barry Davies  
Practice director  
Douglas-Jones Mercer  
[www.djm.law.co.uk](http://www.djm.law.co.uk)



**Revenue: £3.5m**

**Corporate status: Limited company**

**30 fee earners, 50 total staff**

**Offices: Swansea, Mumbles, Cardiff, Porthcawl**

# MOVING MONEY

GLYN MORRIS, PARTNER (NON-LAWYER) – HEAD OF FINANCE

In my previous two articles, we have been considering the multiplicity of payment methods used by law firms to transmit funds on behalf of their clients. On some occasions, a client or a lawyer's perspective on the fee levied by a firm for a transaction can drive the decision on the correct payment option. However, lawyers should be robust about using the correct payment method regardless of any decision concerning the price of a transaction.

Every time a decision to send money is made, a lawyer should consider value, timing, whether the funds are required to be cleared on arrival/the same day, and the type of account receiving the funds.

In those cases where a firm's client has difficulty appreciating why there may be a legitimate fee levied for any transaction services, the following information may help:

- Banks usually charge a fee to the firm for the transmission of funds
- A lawyer's time collating and gathering the correct information, for example sums involved and accurate and compliant payee details
- A lawyer's time validating the requirements for making a payment
- Obtaining accurate bank details and verifying these securely, with a mind to avoiding exposure to cyber fraud
- The number of people in the payment process to ensure strong segregation of duties can include: a lawyer, a secretary, a partner authorisation signature, a finance processor, a first online banking authoriser and a second online banking authoriser. This can also extend to an online banking administrator or members of Treasury Committee where approval limits are required to be adjusted.
- Maintenance and operation of a secure online banking platform, including the operation of the bank's security software, middleware and the creation and operation of a full set of policies and procedures designed to protect a client's money
- Maintenance of adequate cybersecurity insurance and professional indemnity insurance cover to provide backup in the event of a fraud perpetrated beyond their control.

Many clients are in business themselves and therefore may have perceptions regarding banking and charges that may or may not be accurate, the most common being: "My bank doesn't charge me".

Bank charging structures will vary significantly. It may be that the client is saying that they are not specifically charged for individual electronic payments made. However, there are two key things to note: clients and banks use the terminology around electronic payments interchangeably, for example, Chaps and Faster Payments. Many banks are inconsistent with charging and even if charges apply they may waive them or reduce them, especially if challenged.

Is the client referring to personal or business accounts? Personal banking platforms often do not charge for payments up to certain limits. This is because the person is performing all of the processing activities described earlier, particularly when they are taking on the risk of performing the processing task themselves. Business banking platforms, to our knowledge, all charge something. But again, the business or person is performing all of the above activities, particularly when they are taking the risk and performing the processing task themselves.

The amount of risk a person is willing to take with their own or a business's funds varies. Law firms have a responsibility to keep client money safe and they take that responsibility very seriously for all clients. Invariably, they have invested time and energy in implementing robust processes that ensure client accounts can be operated and maintained safely and successfully.

Perhaps in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the client to take on all the risk of the payments process in order to save themselves the 'small' law firm fee. [LPM](#)



## ABOUT

Glyn Morris  
Partner, head of finance  
(non-lawyer)  
Higgs & Sons  
[www.higgsandsons.co.uk](http://www.higgsandsons.co.uk)

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# PROCESS PREVAILS

DAVID GREEN, THE STRATEGIST

There are five key areas to consider when firms are looking to improve their business process efficiency. Continuing from my May column, here's the rundown on how your firm can take advantage of each area.

**OUTSOURCING** Firms should consider outsourcing routine tasks. Outsourcing is appropriate if you cannot undertake a task yourself, or if managing a task in-house is not cost-effective because the internal need doesn't justify the recruitment of an individual or team. For example, if you have a busy conveyancing department, why spend the time on routine post-completion work when you could outsource such work and direct case-handler time to work that earns fees, thereby increasing their case load.

Some other examples of areas where outsourcing can assist: reception overflow, case opening and closure, new business enquiry processing, case audit and risk assessment, and cashiering.

These are all important areas of law firm operation and management that do not generate fees but where a quality outsource arrangement can reduce expense.

**CASE MANAGEMENT** Ensure you use your case management properly. It is there for a reason and a case management system used properly and appropriately within a firm will assist with case control and visibility. If you or your staff are unimpressed by your case management system or find it cumbersome, this will be because it is wrong for your firm or there has been insufficient training on its use. Both can be resolved. Regardless of the size of the firm, a case management system is a must for efficiency, law firm management and control, and does not have to be expensive.

**NEW BUSINESS** How do you manage new business enquiries? Each time your firm receives an enquiry for delivery of a legal service it must be recorded, monitored, engaged and closed. Too many firms allow reception to record basic information and pass a new enquiry to a case handler who is then responsible for engaging the client and trying to convert the enquiry into new work. At this point, visibility disappears and conversion of that enquiry is not assessed. It is assumed that the enquiry has been processed, and if the client did not proceed then it is because they did not want to.

A simple review of new enquiries into your firm over the past two to three months and what happened to them may alarm you. Introduce an effective system to ensure that all new enquiries are handled properly:

- Engage the customer and record their details.
- Find out how they found out about your firm.
- Ensure the right person handles the enquiry and speaks to the client.
- Ensure that all enquiries are followed up in writing. A simple email of the discussion and a written quotation is infinitely better than just leaving the potential client to reflect on your conversation.
- If a potential client is sent a quotation and they do not respond, re-engage with them. Find out why and if they decline your service again, find out why.
- Record the outcome of each enquiry: case opened, lost contact, or quote declined (and why).

You can learn from this information and implement change to increase conversion.

**ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT** Are your secretaries, junior staff and general support fully utilised? Have you assessed what they do and how they do it? Have processes and jobs in the firm been assessed for the value they provide today as opposed to when they were implemented?

**TECHNOLOGY** Take some time to find out what technology exists in the market today and how much it will cost. There are a significant number of low-cost solutions that can help with process improvement and efficiency, but you need to find out what they are and how they would work in your firm. Companies like ours have knowledge and access to technology and understand how effective they can be in the different types of law firm and legal environments. [LPM](#)



## ABOUT

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# CLIENT CAPTURE

DARREN GOWER, THE TECH GURU



## ABOUT

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No matter what type of work you do, bringing clients on board is the key thing. Be it transactional property cases or complex commercial litigation matters, no law firm can survive without converting interested prospects into paying clients.

So far, so obvious! But I am constantly surprised at the lack of value firms put on this vital operation, assuming instead that not much additional effort or science is needed to move the 'interested' stage into the 'paying' stage.

Here are three key areas that firms need to have a handle on. Some will be on top of all these points, others nowhere near any of them. How do you rate?

### Hanging on the telephone

Prospective client called up to see how you can help them? Make sure your team are trained to do as much of the 'selling' as possible at this stage. Taking a message or promising to send out a brochure is not proactive enough and you risk losing that prospective client to a firm that is hungrier than you. Make sure you take as much detail as you can and try to move the enquiry onwards as much as possible. Don't fall back on just sending out a hard copy pack to sign, why not direct the caller to an online form (while you're on the phone with them) and take them through the process to become a client there

and then?

### Pixel perfect

Surveys across our law firm client base indicate that it's becoming the norm for prospective clients to enquire online, rather than make a phone call. In a way this presents an even better opportunity to onboard them, as you can shape the journey and make it as simple as possible for them. How do you convert that person sitting on the sofa, browsing on their iPad? Your website should have clear 'call to action' points which make it easy for the client to find what they want, provide their details to you, and sign up for your service, all through clear and straightforward online forms. You can even tie this process up with a system that takes a digital signature to confirm commitment.

### A single source of truth

This may sound obvious but make sure that the information you gather at the enquiry stage is taken into your case or practice management system. It's far too common for incoming enquiries to sit on a Post-it note or an Excel file that is disconnected from the other systems a firm uses. You need one single source of data, so ensure that enquiry details are stored with care and in the right place to form a seamless and accurate history of every action; from 'enquiry' to 'client'. [LPM](#)

**“ No law firm can survive without converting interested prospects into paying clients. ”**

”



# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

CLAIRE SMITH, THE CLIENT SERVICES CHAMPION

As human beings, we're built to assess one another. We have, according to research, a mere seven seconds to win someone over when we first meet them. That means we have to be the best possible version of ourselves at all times, especially when it comes to business.

It was one good first impression – and one not so good – that got me thinking about the importance of this a few weeks ago. The first happened on a trip to London where I had a meeting at a mid-sized law firm. From the minute I walked through their front door I could tell they were different. The warm and friendly reception staff greeted me by name and knew who I had come to visit; I was shown to a bright, comfortable lounge area and within minutes was offered a cup of coffee, some water and a selection of beautifully packaged biscuits each inscribed with the company logo. I was even asked if I needed to use their WiFi. The whole experience was seamless and I left feeling like I was their most important client, not just a visitor.

My second encounter a week later, however, couldn't have been more different. I arrived at the building at around 8.45am for a 9am meeting but found the front door was locked. Ringing the buzzer, a receptionist informed me that "we don't open until 9am" and it was left to me to ask if it would be okay if I came in to wait as it was raining. To compound matters, I was then pointed in the direction of a drab waiting room with no windows, a few chairs dotted around the outside like a doctor's waiting room, and without any offer of a drink.

The contrast between these two experiences couldn't have been starker. Yet they are both mid-sized, high-street firms fighting for the same customers. And if I had been a prospective client I certainly know which one I'd have chosen to do business with.

So, the question is: what can we as businesses do in those first seven seconds, that magic window of opportunity we have, to make a fantastic first impression?

At Moneypenny we talk about being a 'GOFI': a God/Goddess of First Impressions. It's the term we use to describe the impression we want to create every time we come into contact with a client.

The first step is being available. It may sound simple but at a busy law firm, with lawyers working at capacity, it's all too common for emails to go unanswered, telephones to ring out, and visitors not to receive the attention they deserve at your front desk.

The next stage is remembering to wear your customers' shoes. Experience your firm as a new client would, looking at each touchpoint they could come into contact with. Visit your website, for example, send an email, see how long it takes to get a reply, ask a question via live chat, call your reception team and see how each element performs – particularly at lunchtime. Would you have been impressed if you were a client or prospective client?

As with so many things in life, it's often the little things that count. So, roll out the red carpet and make every client, prospective client or visitor feel like a VIP. Think about how you can impress them so much that they can't wait to go away and tell a friend how brilliant you are and how great your firm was. [LPM](#)



“ So, the question is: what can we as businesses do in those first seven seconds, that magic window of opportunity we have, to make a fantastic first impression? ”

## ABOUT

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# DEDICATED TO DESTRUCTION

NATASHA RAWLEY, THE FILE QUEEN

Wow, what a sizzler summer we are having already! Hopefully, by the time this column is printed, we are still enjoying sunny days!

In this column I want to speak to you about the importance of secure destruction. Yes, a very sexy subject! The issue is, because it's not an exciting subject, not many people are talking about it. We work with an array of legal firms and each one has their own approach to making sure that files, hard drives, USB sticks, old laptops and mobile phones are securely destroyed to prevent data breach.

But here's the question: are you dropping policies in place and just expecting everyone in the firm to follow them? Or are you being secure destruction advocates?

"What would a secure destruction advocate do?" I hear you holler. Well ...

- Regularly inspect desk bins to make sure there is no paperwork with any form of data on it being placed in normal bins.

- Inspect the paper recycling. Are people using these recycling bins for dumping sensitive info?

- Do you outsource your secure destruction or have in-house shredders? If you have an in-house shredder, is there a set process and policy that not only makes sure the shredded paper is checked after (it must be unrecognisable), but that high health and safety levels are maintained at all times? Is using the shredder listed on the new team induction tick list to make sure everyone is fully trained?

- Do you regularly have refresher training on data breaches and how to prevent them? Do these refresher courses include the whole firm? Do they include your secure destruction process and training?

- If you outsource your shredding, are you provided with a secure destruction certificate as evidence it has been shredded?
- Is the company you use audited, such as ISO 27001?
- Are you using onsite, locked secure destruction bins with your supplier or sacks? Do all members of the team know how to securely seal a sack before it is sent offsite?

As if that wasn't all enough, let's move on to the secure destruction of IT equipment. Now, most of this will be handled by your in-house or external IT provider, but as the practice manager you have an obligation to make sure this process poses no risk to your firm's reputation.

So, when a fee earner/partner is finished with a USB stick, what is the process? Do these go to IT to be wiped, or are they sent to be shredded? I know you may be a firm that doesn't allow USB technology, but what if you are sent a USB with files? What's the process?

What happens with old laptops, hard drives, or mobile phones? Is there a set process? If these are shredded and the process will have to be outsourced, who with? Are you issued secure destruction certificates? Does everyone in your practice know the procedure?

I know it's a lot to think about, but these questions are crucial in order to protect your practice reputation. **LPM**

“ *But here's the question: are you dropping policies in place and just expecting everyone in the firm to follow them? Or are you being secure destruction advocates?* ”

”



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# CLIENT COMMUNICATION

GRAHAM MOORE, THE DATA GURU



Email is the new snail mail. This was the suggestion made to me recently by the managing partner of a law firm during a fascinating conversation about how law firms communicate with their clients.

Ten years ago, when I first returned to the legal sector after a brief sojourn in financial services, one of the key efficiency issues I was struck by was the prevalence of paper-based correspondence. In the intervening years this has been much reduced by an increased use of email, but is that now becoming the new problem?

We are all now used to renewing our insurance by filling in a form online. Most of us wouldn't dream of emailing our bank, and visiting branches is becoming a thing of the past (yes, I know there are demographic differences). Even the government is in on the act with online tax returns and the MoJ providing paperless online divorce applications.

So, how does your firm communicate with clients? Are you one of those 'modern' firms that emails forms to clients that they then have to print off, fill in by hand, scan, and then return? And how do you provide progress updates on cases? Do you wait for the client to ring or email you? And do you then secretly resent the interruption to your daily work?

Is there a better way?

Some firms have 'client portals' in place now. This is not a new idea; I recall building one for a debt recovery specialist back in the 1990s. Often, these will provide consolidated updates on all matters for a given volume client or referrer.

All the data on progress should be in your case management system, so why not share that with clients?

Deal room technology also exists and provides a way for lawyers and clients to collaborate on document drafting and review. While these systems may be expensive, in most areas of business it is common practice for any document sharing to be done using cheap and

simple services such as Dropbox. Regulation may create extra hurdles for achieving this in legal services but it is by no means impossible.

However, in mainstream SME law both of these are, in my experience, rare. There is surely a huge opportunity for forward-thinking firms to distinguish themselves by providing online access directly 'into' the case file. Why should your client not be able to interact with you via secure messaging on the portal? Why should they not be able to access, review and approve drafts in situ without the exchange of emails? What about video calls with their lawyer to discuss the case?

I wouldn't claim to be the first person to suggest this but the technology is now there to provide a complete end-to-end legal services client experience online. It is not necessarily for every case type or every demographic group, but as millennials become more and more significant as consumers of legal services they will inevitably expect, or even demand, the same experience they receive in other walks of life. **LPM**

“ There is surely a huge opportunity for forward-thinking firms to distinguish themselves by providing online access directly 'into' the case file. ”

”

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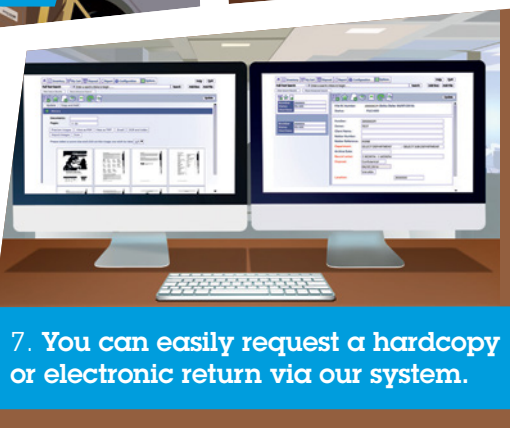


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# Interconnected



Simon Walsh, partner at Oury Clark, describes the path to a holistic law firm and why it matters

For a trainee or graduate starting their career, as we all remember, there are lots of options to consider and one of the first decisions is around what sort of firm you want to join. Should you join a large prestigious firm, the name of which your friends will instantly recognise, with its impressive foyers, corporate clients and snacks? Or should you join a smaller firm that can offer quicker career progression, a convivial atmosphere, and more direct access to partners?

This most fundamental of decisions requires a lot of thought. There are real differences between the two and a decision made at this point will determine the path an individual's career will take.

As we are all only too aware, the legal landscape is changing and now, more than ever, we're seeing a demand for a more holistic approach to law. Lawyers are no longer just required to provide legal advice. The role of a lawyer in commercial practice is becoming more akin to that of a trusted business adviser. Many firms are now taking this approach or considering changing their focus, including setting up MDPs to offer legal and accounting advice in the same way the Big Four do.

## EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

However, big questions remain for those managing law firms as to how you transition to 'holistic lawyering'. There has been a great deal of chatter about 'holistic lawyering' but what does it mean, and who benefits?

In my view, it means having the ability to take a helicopter view of a particular issue and proposing a solution that puts the business drivers at the core of the solution, balanced against the risk and legal

considerations. The beneficiaries are the clients, as they get a more rounded solution. The lawyer benefits as well, as it just makes the job of being a lawyer more interesting. This is where you start to appreciate the concept of being a 'generalist'.

The word 'generalist' might invite comments such as 'jack of all trades, master of none' but, in actual fact, being a generalist can be far more rewarding. The medical profession has survived and flourished by making a clear distinction between GPs and specialists, but there is a co-dependency as one can't survive without the other.

As the fear of taking on risk is omnipresent for lawyers, the general trend has been to specialise in one particular area and avoid giving general advice that crosses over multiple areas.

However, the real skill of a generalist is the ability to offer well-placed advice that takes all facets of an issue into consideration, and is able to involve specialists where necessary. Specialists can suffer from myopia and may miss a key consideration if it falls outside of the scope of their specialism.

## WHAT TO DO

In the current business environment, a more holistic approach to law certainly makes sense, but then that leads me on to my second question - how do you encourage lawyers to take the path to practice 'holistically' when the edict of the current system is to specialise?

To some extent, the answer lies in the likely natural evolution of the profession, and some 'specialists' may face extinction!

If you look at the growing complexity and interconnectedness of what we are

### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Oury Clark**

**Corporate status:  
Partnership**

**20 total staff**

**Office locations: London**



asked to advised on, the boundaries are becoming more blurred and certainly, in the early stages of new technologies, it's difficult to divide things up. Look at the overlapping nature of blockchain, cryptocurrencies, cybersecurity and data protection, for example. A boot-strapped startup would unlikely be able to afford the luxury of a team of specialist lawyers to advise on such matters, and would be more inclined to seek out a lawyer who is able to approach the advice in an holistic manner on the areas that are starting to redefine the future.

One of our internal mantras at Oury Clark is 'you need to know enough about everything, and a lot about some things'. This means we can focus on achieving our goal of becoming our clients' trusted

business partners and giving the best advice possible. In order to do this, we need to be holistic when we need to be, and call on the specialists when we need to.

Of course, everyone is different and being a generalist is not the right path for all individuals or firms. Some will choose to take the more specialised route that is right for them and in doing so they will likely trade away their ability to practice in a holistic manner.

For me, the ability to work in a holistic sense means I can really get 'under the bonnet' of a client's business and across dynamic subject areas that will impact all of our clients, either now or in the future. As the legal profession continues to evolve, generalists may just have the upper hand in the evolutionary process. **LPM**

“ *The real skill of a generalist is the ability to offer well-placed advice that takes all facets of an issue into consideration, and is able to involve specialists where necessary.* ”



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# STURDY SYSTEMS



Susan Glenholme, managing partner at Debenhams Ottaway, says Quiss provides the firm with the stability and responsiveness needed to better service its clients

It's no question that the SME legal market, and wider legal market in general, is being hit with disruption and challenges - from client demands to demands from staff for improved legal services and means of delivery. Among all of that, law firms need to do more than just win the hearts of clients in order to be profitable.

Debenhams Ottaway's goal is to keep growing - hoping to become a £10m business by 2020. Managing partner Susan Glenholme says that's one of the firm's main priorities and technology plays quite a big part in that.

"With Quiss, we have a provider that we feel can look after us. It is people-friendly, understands what we're trying to achieve and knows how to deal with our users when something isn't working."

## STABLE AND RELIABLE

She says Quiss is ensuring that there's a stable, reliable environment to which Debenhams Ottaway's systems are built. And having Quiss manage that for the firm means that there is a lot less downtime, which they used to have quite a lot of.

"When we went to the cloud five years ago, we wanted to make sure that people could work in a more flexible way and that we can service our clients better with technology. And that is still our aim today.

"We brought Quiss along for that journey - we felt that it caters to firms of our size, which are looking to grow in the same way, and could cope with our systems and requirements. Quiss has great customer service and helps us better deliver our legal services."

Glenholme says her firm is constantly looking at the technologies on the horizon. With the continued hype in the market around artificial intelligence, she mentions that there is some fear from lawyers about what AI's capability means for the future of their work.

As such, quite a big challenge for the firm at the moment is recruitment. "We need to be able to offer our staff something that is different to

what other firms have to offer. People want that flexibility and better work-life balance. And clients are similar as well - they want that flexibility and new ways of case delivery."

Clients look at cost, quality and the flexibility of seeing a lawyer when and where they need to, she says - gone are the days where clients automatically use a lawyer that their parents used and only come into the office to see us.

"They've evolved their methodology. They search for answers and case studies online, double check information and negotiate costs. And it's much more IT focused - they want service delivered in a different way. And Quiss provides us with that capability."

A big part of keeping on top of client demands, Glenholme adds, is keeping on top of updates to technology, no matter how seemingly small. And, she says, Quiss updates the platform with the firm and advises them on how to keep on top of advancements and changes to systems and ways of working.

"Quiss opens us up to the different world that clients are now expecting. We can't deliver work to them in a more streamlined way without the stable environment Quiss provides.

"Clients come to us because of the service we provide. What I found, particularly working on the private client side, is that it's the technology that people want to be able to use and work on. We now offer Skype meetings. In order to do that successfully we need to know that there won't be any glitches."

## AT ATTENTION

Having a stable and reliable environment is the bread and butter for a law firm's ability to meet client demands, and also the ability to attract and retain staff. But technology and tech teams also need to be responsive.

"Quiss is very responsive as well, which has been very useful for us. Having a close working relationship is very important to us and we feel that their ability to respond to our needs has

### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Debenhams Ottaway**

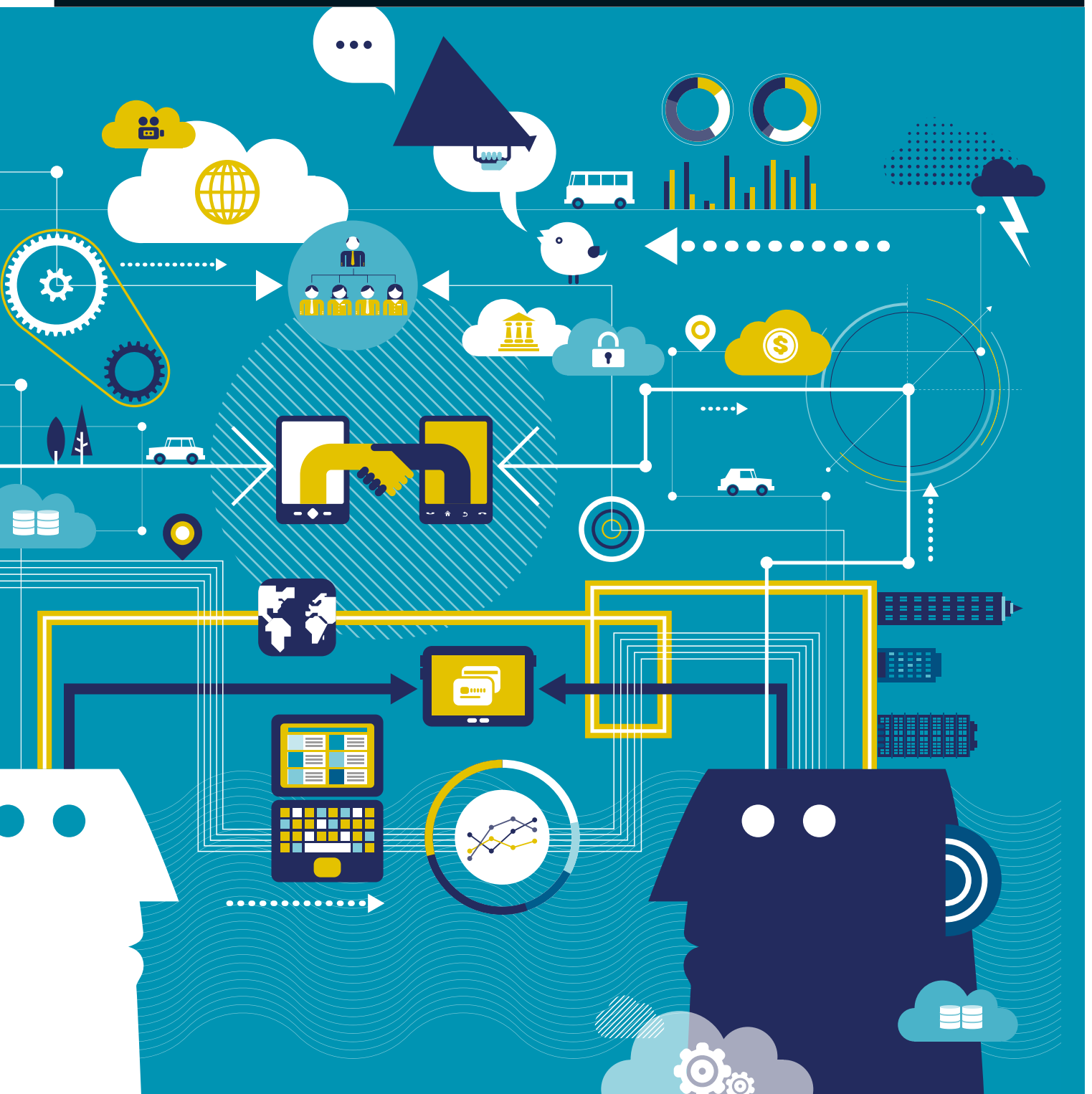
**Revenue: £9m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**112 total staff,  
62 fee earners**

**Office locations: St Albans,  
Radlett**





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definitely strengthened our relationship,” she says.

Glenholme adds that a key part of Quiss’s responsiveness comes from its understanding and relationship with the firm’s other vendors and applications.

She says Debenhams Ottaway is getting all the suppliers to work together where possible so that the firm can get a better service all around. “Quiss’s helpdesk has been a fundamental part of evolving our experience with technology and relationships with suppliers. They’ve been a huge help – very friendly and polite, but most of all, efficient.”

Quiss is always available when the firm needs it, she says, and they come to the office fairly regularly. Debenham Ottaway’s head of

operations is monitoring the evolution of those relationships.

“We wanted to work with a firm that would look after our technology environment and that understood the legal market. A big part of why we chose Quiss was because it understands what lawyers are like.

“We want to work with people who do their job, while we do our job, and everyone works together.”

She says it’s also more cost-effective working with Quiss rather than providing everything in-house. Generally, Glenholme says the firm has been pleased to work with Quiss – it keeps Debenham Ottaway informed, provides a stable and reliable environment for their systems and is available when the firm needs. **LPM**



# THE PROBLEM WITH DATA



Nick Hayne, head of professional services at Quiss Technologies, talks about managing data effectively through analytics tools to improve your business

Without accurate data all you have is opinion. The problem with data is that it is everywhere and nowhere.

While most businesses recognise its growing importance and real value, knowing what data is important and how it can be used to shape future strategies is crucial.

What is now needed are analytics tools that deliver deep insights across your business, connect all the relevant data sources, turn the data into useful information, and allow valuable dashboards and reports to be created and shared with colleagues.

## WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

Managing data effectively is not a unique issue for law firms, but knowing what data is important and what is needed to help the decision-making process is a challenge. Getting at the data, analysing it and presenting it quickly is another challenge entirely.

Currently, this can be a difficult and time-consuming task, but business intelligence (BI) dashboards offer a cost-effective solution without the need for proprietary software. Most of what is likely to be needed is available on subscription from Microsoft and the technical expertise is available on a project-by-project basis.

If you are a current Microsoft Office 365 subscriber, you have access to Power BI as an out-of-the-box solution and it could help you unlock the power and profitability of your data. If you are not currently a subscriber, it is another reason to consider making the transition. And quickly.

Power BI can be used to connect to any relevant data source, including case management tools, HR systems, finance and payroll systems, bespoke legal sector apps and your own website data.

Once you understand what you want to see, Power BI helps to accelerate the tasks required to transform the complex data into easy to understand graphs and dashboards, available to anyone you choose to share them with, on any device.

Power BI offers real insights that can be delivered in real time in a way that makes it easy to absorb complicated information and make better-informed decisions.

## NO SPECIAL SKILLS REQUIRED

Power BI has an intuitive, familiar interface, which provides personalised dashboards that present complex data in an engaging format, can be easily manipulated by anyone within your firm – fee earners, marketing team, partner or compliance officer – to get the right view that you need; no specialist IT skills needed.

Importantly (once initial configuration is setup), you can interrogate Power BI in natural language – no developer coding wizardry is required. To find the data you need, simply type a question, like 'how many visitors did we have on the real estate team page this month?'

Within seconds, you will see a current chart of the results on your dashboard, and you can pin it there to save and use again to build a picture of how the website is performing.

Once you build up your data streams, you can drill down into that data to see how





many enquiries there were, who dealt with them, how long they took to respond, what the outcome was, time spent, fees billed, and so on.

Personalising the dashboard in this way creates a monitoring and reporting resource that everyone in your business will find increasingly valuable.

### SHARE AND INFORM

Setting key performance indicators (KPIs) is important, but understanding how every element of your business is performing in relation to them is critical to your success – you have a major problem if a client is the first to raise an issue.

Power BI allows you to create a proactive reporting structure. If any of your KPIs are out of tolerance, a notification highlighting the problem is immediately sent to those who can resolve it.

It doesn't just have to be a KPI, but can be any target, like hours against fees on a fixed fee matter. When a target is reached, predicted to breach or missed, a timely notification ensures the situation is managed before it becomes a difficult conversation with the client, or unrecovered fees.

Dashboards empower every member of staff, irrespective of their role at the firm, allowing them to view and manage their own performance in real time. This helps drive a positive culture of accountability and performance, resulting in increased billable hours, quicker billing and more

effective collections.

IT and finance teams will have the ability to do ad hoc analysis, ensuring fast and accurate responses to questions being asked by partners – results based on data, not opinion. Role-based dashboards provide targeted information for management, partners, fee earners, and so on.

### IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

Power BI-driven dashboards will significantly improve the way law firms handle client matters, enabling existing matters to be found more easily, with role-based dashboards ensuring partners are informed of actual performance against forecast outcome.

Matters that are overrunning or forecast to overrun can be easily identified, with time to resolve and protect the firm's profitability. The dashboards will also help identify top-performing matters by revenue and time while showing matters in the context of overall firm, department, and team profitability targets.

The emphasis is now all about the client experience and ensuring longevity of the relationship. Dashboards offer the ability to quickly create accurate matter plans and proposals that improve the service provided to clients, which will help retain existing business and win more new clients.

### FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE

Dashboards are scalable, and the solution can be extended to include data from many separate systems, including external third-party systems like Oracle, Dynamics, Facebook, Salesforce, Twitter, Sage, and so on.

Making relevant, current and important data readily available to the people who need it ensures they have the insight and confidence to make the right decisions more quickly.

They can plan ahead, allow for busy periods and divert resources as appropriate to help improve the service the firm offers, increase utilisation and grow the business.

Recent months have seen big changes in how firms operate in relation to personal data, thanks in a large part to GDPR.

Building dashboards that reflect how that data is stored, used and shared allows firms to quickly assess their ongoing compliance and address any issues highlighted.

### GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

The benefits to the efficiency and profitability of any law firm are clear, but there remains one tricky obstacle to the successful implementation of a data-driven approach to the provision of

legal services: who does the driving?

Typically, those who understand the potential of interrogating large volumes of data do not understand the problems that need to be solved, or the questions that need to be asked.

And those working with the problems know the questions they want to ask, but do not fully understand just what benefits a data-driven approach can deliver.

Big data is not an IT project. Similarly, it is not a subject to be approached without technical help or ignored for lack of support. Striking the right balance between a business and technology partnership is critical to the successful adoption of a data-driven approach in the future.

Law firms have to ensure that the people who understand the data and the people who understand the problems the firm is trying to overcome, or the objectives they are trying to achieve, are in the same room and share the responsibility of delivery – whether that's in-house or external resources.

The sponsorship for big data starts at the top and trickles down. Senior management must buy in or lose clients and opportunities to leaner, more agile firms that have recognised the true potential of all the data they can consume – within their business and without.

## POTENTIAL AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Successful implementation of a data-driven approach will deliver new and exciting legal insights. Even small law firms will possess significant quantities of data, which can be accessed and analysed, from past cases and legislation to transactions and client contracts – to say nothing of email conversations and phone records.

This ability to review previous performance on

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“Dashboards empower every member of staff, irrespective of their role at the firm, allowing them to view and manage their own performance in real time.”

matters and have important data visualised – like actual hours spent against predicted, or fees charged against cost – can all help to inform better, more accurate decisions on future matters of a similar nature.

Power BI allows this data to be retrieved and reviewed quickly, so firms can not only respond with more accurate pricing, but do so more quickly, in full confidence the data on which the response is based is entirely accurate.

But remember: if a data-driven approach to the future of your law firm is a new concept, then it is important to not try running before walking has been mastered.

It is critical to a successful implementation of a data analytics strategy to focus on developing it first in specific areas of your business that directly impact revenues. This will deliver quick, high-profile wins that demonstrate potential future success and ensure buy-in from across the firm.

## SQUARING THE CIRCYL

The only limit to the data solutions driven by Power BI for every part of a law firm is the imagination of those involved in operating and managing it.

Dashboards offer an opportunity to get under the skin of your own business like never before and allow management teams to make decisions based on accurate information, not opinion.

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# CREATING CULTURES

How is a law firm's culture formed, what effect does it have on staff and service delivery and who should be in charge of fixing it if things go wrong? Lucy Trevelyan reports

A law firm's culture is difficult to define, but is something that permeates every aspect of what it does and how it presents itself. From how it treats staff, delivers services and makes decisions, every firm – whether it likes it or not – has a culture, and a failure to carefully maintain and manage a positive culture can have a devastating effect on staff, client satisfaction and retention, and ultimately its bottom line.

Traditionally, law firm culture was defined as just “the way we do things around here,” says Andrew Chalkley, chief executive and partner at Boyes Turner. But now there is a tendency to formalise the culture more by seeking to define it through stated

values and more rigidly defined practices.

“How defined values and practices are enacted is what creates the culture. In smaller firms, with less rigorously enforced hierarchies, you can find CEOs who are employees of the partners they notionally manage. This can create interesting issues. Alternatively, you can find CEOs or managing partners who are more ‘first among equals’ – dedicated to managing the firm, but with no greater ‘vote’ than the other partners. This can lead to a ‘fuzzier’ culture, with trends emerging rather than being set down as clearly defined principles. Culture becomes more what is acceptable to the majority, and can be clearly defined as ‘what we have in common.’”



## CULTIVATING CONSENSUS

Andrew Chalkley, chief executive and partner at Boyes Turner, provides tips on building a SME firm's culture and ensuring it permeates all areas of the business and service delivery:

- Get the leadership group to explicitly agree and be clear what the firm's ambition is in terms of values and beliefs, practices and behaviours and how they want them to be presented consistently, externally and internally
- Consult and involve others at all levels of the organisation in formulating views, recognising the twin importance of buy-in at all levels, and ownership and leadership from the top
- Ensure that what is agreed is 'real and possible', not some fanciful aspiration
- Communicate the ambition and educate what it really means to everyone within the organisation and externally to clients and other key stakeholders
- Reinforce and refresh the messaging regularly
- Be prepared to adapt and change it only when necessary as the business evolves, not on a whim
- Enforce it: carrot and stick (though hopefully more carrot than stick).

### LEADING FROM THE TOP

Culture has to come from the top, says Greenwood's GRM managing partner Robert Dillarstone. "The views, actions and decision-making of those in senior roles tell everyone within an organisation all they need to know. Whether information is shared openly or only on a need-to-know basis, whether unacceptable behaviour is tolerated or tackled, and the extent to which poor performance is managed or left unchecked will all have a powerful impact on culture."

You can't leave culture to chance or assume your senior team will always be the role models you need to influence behaviour, he warns. "Think about what's important to your organisation, what it values and how it behaves. You can't decide overnight, however, that your culture is going to be something new and expect people to embrace it without question. Look at the core of what makes your organisation tick, build on the great stuff, and make a plan to change or 'manage out' what you don't want. It's everyone's responsibility to deliver, but those in senior roles must take the lead."

There is a misconception that anything to do with culture falls under HR, but recruitment experts say this couldn't be further from the truth.

It is the role and responsibility of those who occupy the top table within the firm. The firm's leader cadre creates and communicates the vision and values of the firm and these are what shape the culture of the business itself. When it turns sour and culture begins to impede performance, the buck stops with the senior partners. Managers and practice heads are responsible for putting the vision and values set by the leadership teams into practice, they say.

There's a definite trend in many firms to engage all staff, giving them a genuine say over the drivers that influence and shape culture, says Chalkley. "This is particularly so where it comes to issues such as the working environment, working practices, and corporate social responsibilities. That trend can only continue. The millennial generation will demand more engaged cultures like this, and if they don't see them they'll vote with their feet."

### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The culture of a firm makes a significant difference to the retention of staff, but less so to recruitment, says Marie Dancer, managing partner at Richard Nelson. "When recruiting staff, those involved in the recruitment process tend to portray the firm and how they want it to be seen, and a candidate never really sees more than a snapshot of the firm's culture."

However, argues Dillarstone, knowing 'what you're about' as an organisation makes it much easier to sell opportunities to candidates and for

both candidates and the firm to ascertain whether the fit is right. "Similarly, for those within the organisation, strong cultural alignment is a key retention tool. It is so much more difficult to say 'yes' to that recruiter's call if you value the culture of your current employer and share its values."

Chalkley says people place a great deal of importance on matching their personal culture and beliefs to those they work with – perhaps more so now than ever before. "In SME firms the competition for clients and good staff is huge. Culture has definitely become a critically important differentiator in many cases. As a driver and indicator of productivity and efficiency, and ultimately on the profitability and sustainability of the business, I'd say it is right up at the top of the list for modern firms."

### SERVICE DELIVERY

Different cultures will appeal to different clients, says Mark Briegal, partner in the corporate and commercial team at Aaron & Partners. "Some may want a friendly hand-holding approach, whereas others may want a no-nonsense, straight-to-the-point approach. Firms need to accept that their culture will not appeal to all potential clients and target those whose culture is complementary – that leads to great relationships."

Most clients, says Dancer, form relationships

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Aaron & Partners**

**Revenue: £9.6m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**77 fee earners, 131 total staff**

**Office locations: Chester, Shrewsbury and Manchester**

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**QualitySolicitors**

**Howlett Clarke**

**Revenue: £2.5m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**Staff: 23 fee earners, 22 support staff**

**Office locations: Brighton, Southwick**

with the individual solicitors they are dealing with rather than necessarily with the firm as an entity. "However, if a client is cross-referred to different members of the firm to resolve different legal issues, a client may find it unsettling to find that different members of the firm have totally different approaches, rather than a common cultural style."

Culture influences and shapes behaviour, which, if done right, should have a positive impact on service delivery, says Dillarstone. "Congruence is key. Everything has to work together. You can have a stylish, edgy brochure but if your offices or staff don't match that vibe you just leave clients confused as to what you're really about. We focus on being 'lawyers you'll enjoy working with'. Every aspect of our operations must ensure we deliver. We are driven to achieve it. And clearly it's a strong guiding principle for recruitment."

Business development is also a culture issue, he says. "Our business development director has harnessed culture to embed business development activity into the fabric of the firm. The culture here shows everyone that business development comes 'as standard' in every role. It's not just the preserve of 'rain-makers' or partners."

### FIXING CULTURES

Maintaining or fixing a firm's culture, says Dancer, needs to be led by the top. "Fixing a firm's culture requires the firm to identify what their current culture is, followed by identifying what they would like it to be. A strategic plan is then necessary to enable the firm to strive towards their desired culture," she says.

To ensure the culture permeates the entire business, there needs to be a clear message communicated to all members of the firm about the firm's objectives and the culture that the firm is striving to achieve, she says.

"Following that communication, behaviour which is not in keeping with the desired culture of the firm needs to be identified, then promptly and appropriately resolved. Some people are capable of observing a culture of a firm and will adapt to fit in. However, others struggle more to adapt, which presents a challenge for management. The choices tend to be to try to mould the person to fit, accept that they don't fit and either tolerate this or indeed see this as a benefit, or to decide they do not belong and eject them from the firm."

Skills can be taught, says Briegal, but behaviours are more difficult and where some people don't get it they need to be helped. "Coaching and support must be provided. The reward systems are key. If you say, for example, that cross-referrals are your number one priority, but bonuses are awarded purely on billing, with no reference to cross-referrals, you won't get cross-referrals. There may be some people who,

**“Look at the core of what makes your organisation tick, build on the great stuff, and make a plan to change or ‘manage out’ what you don’t want.”**

Robert Dillarstone, managing partner, Greenwood GRM

after coaching and support, still don't get or won't conform to the culture and sadly those people are best removed from the business."

It is essential that appraisal processes at all levels of the organisation consider culture, values, and behaviours, says Chalkley. "The leadership team must set an example and take responsibility for policing behaviours relative to the stated culture and ensuring policies, rewards and incentives are genuinely in tune with the culture. If you're saying one thing but rewarding another, faith and trust in the stated culture will quickly crumble."

### THREATS TO A CULTURE

It is easy to lose a special culture, says Elaine Motion, chairwoman of Balfour+Manson. For example, if the most senior partner in the firm determines that they wish to move away from a supportive culture to a purely profit-driven or image culture then they could rapidly influence others to change it. "The law of unintended consequences generally brings negatives and the real lesson is to try to bring in people who buy into the culture there already. The top tip for maintaining the culture is to expand in bite-sized chunks and therefore to integrate in small numbers."

Cultures will change subtly over time, especially as firms grow, says Briegal. "The addition of new offices is particularly difficult as you want a firm-wide culture, but each office may develop a subculture of its own. It mustn't be allowed to become too distant from the main culture of the firm. A new senior person can alter the culture, and those appointments are key."

A new leader in a firm will have a significant impact on a firm's culture, says Dancer, unless the COO/CEO is an internal hire from within the ranks of a firm. "Behaviours and approaches taken from those at the top of the firm will naturally filter down, impacting on everyone."

However, Viv Williams, consulting director at Symphony Legal, says external, non-lawyer management in the form of a CEO/COO generally has a positive effect on culture. "Good non-legal businesses realise the importance of culture and an external management that truly appreciates the value of people in the business."

Cambrook-Woods agrees. "There is a growing realisation among law firms that to

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Greenwoods GRM**

**Revenue: £13m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**84 fee earners, 136 total staff**

**Office locations: Cambridge, London, Peterborough**

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Richard Nelson**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**22 fee earners, 28 total staff**

**Office locations: Nottingham, London, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol**

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Balfour+Manson**

**Revenue: £9m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**76 fee earners, 133 total staff**

**Office locations: Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow**

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Boyes Turner**

**Revenue: £13.2m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**150 total staff, 75 fee earners.**

**Office location: Reading**





## CASE STUDY: CREATING GOOD FIRM CULTURE TAKES WORK

QualitySolicitors Howlett Clarke managing partner Jackie Gillespie outlines what ingredients are needed to create a firm culture that works for staff and management, as well as for clients

QualitySolicitors Howlett Clarke had the opportunity to revamp its culture when three equity partners left in quick succession, leaving me and my co-partner. The firm is the oldest in Brighton and enjoyed a good reputation, but was very traditional in its outlook.

Both my partner and I come from working-class backgrounds and wanted a law firm that was genuinely accessible, unstuffy, and provided a service that considered the client as a person rather than a legal problem. We all know from our own experiences of dealing with some organisations how it feels to be treated as a number.

Lawyers have a reputation for being aloof, but that's not who we are. In our firm, the culture was formed by an agreed plan of who we wanted to be, what clients we wanted to attract and what type of fee earner we needed to get us there. With any change, disruption can be expected along the way. Some staff have chosen to continue their careers elsewhere, but those who've since joined the team have really bought into the values of the firm.

We survey all clients upon case closure and we look after our employees by providing flexible working arrangements to suit their personal lives as well as the needs of the business. We also supply fruit and massages, and ensure there are lots of occasions for all of the team to get together socially.

Both partners sit in the open-plan office and encourage open communication. Our previous premises was a series of offices and corridors and this led to individual silos - you could go a long time between seeing some people. Change was needed.

Feedback from the staff was invaluable to us then, and is now. We collate feedback in various forms: staff representatives, marketing champions for each department and a suggestion box in office kitchens.

Dissenting staff are few these days, but when this does occur a partner responds in the best

interests of the firm and our clients. By talking with people and also taking their comments on board, we cultivate a mutually open environment and are not above making changes where we believe positive input has been provided.

The culture within this firm has evolved over time and we have seen in the past how damaging it can be when firms with very different cultures merge and there has been no clear guidance from management on what the firm is supposed to look like.

QualitySolicitors Howlett Clarke is still evolving its culture as we become more confident in who we are and what we are striving to achieve. Top tips for building a culture would be to have a plan. Start with open questions: Who are we? What do we want to achieve? How do we think we will get there? The rest will follow.



get and stay ahead of the curve, new ideas and approaches garnered from outside the legal sector are critical. This is an industry that is growing year on year and rife with merger and acquisition activity that is seeing the emergence of a growing number of 'super' firms.

"In an increasingly competitive environment, the way things have been done is not necessarily the way things should be done, both now and in the future."

Consolidation is inevitable in the SME law firm space, Williams says, and yet more than 80% of mergers fail because of the culture clashes created by poor post-merger management.

"We have either buyers or sellers in the current market and it will be the buyer that needs to impose their culture on the firm being acquired. An early warning sign or even deal breaker would be if the selling firm were to resist cultural changes. These changes could be as simple as operating hours, but get them out early. It's an expensive exercise to change the culture of any practice but the successful firms will accept this investment and see the dividends in the mid-to long-term."

**“**It is right that the culture of a law firm should evolve over time, to take into consideration innovation and national changes in the culture of society.**”**

Marie Dancer, managing partner, Richard Nelson

## CULTURE REVIEWS

The culture of the firm needs to be regularly reviewed and adapted over time, in keeping with the objectives of the firm and the evolving needs of the members of the firm, says Dancer. "Today, there is quite rightly a significant emphasis on the wellbeing of members of a firm which, years ago, was largely ignored in many firms. It is right that the culture of a law firm should evolve over time, to take into consideration innovation and national changes in the culture of society." **LPM**

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# UP IN THE AIR



Jamie Lawrence, IT support and development facilitator at Grant Saw Solicitors, talks making the leap to the cloud with Accesspoint

A law firm today needs more than just good advice to survive in the market – clients are demanding transparency, and other pressures from regulators and government authorities continue to keep firms on their toes.

Jamie Lawrence, IT support and development facilitator at Grant Saw Solicitors, says his firm is well aware of the crucial part technology is playing in the legal sector and that's why it was looking for a way to push its own IT forward.

"By working with Accesspoint we now have a company we can rely on to know about our firm's products and help us with future technology projects and generate new ideas to better our services."

## JUGGLING THE CLOUD

At the start of Grant Saw's case management project with Tikit, the firm was introduced to Accesspoint through a Tikit user group.

"It was early days for us, which meant that we still had to decide what was the best way forward for our current servers and infrastructure."

Lawrence says the firm was sceptical about moving to the cloud. "But when we met with Accesspoint it was very clear that working with a legal IT firm, with knowledge of the industry and our systems and applications, would benefit us greatly. They were able to demonstrate developments on top of our CMS project as well as reassure us as to the benefits of using the cloud."

And the pressure was on – there wasn't much time to get things done, he says. The firm urgently needed to have the servers up and running in order to keep the business operational and ensure the CMS project wouldn't fall through.

He says: "We were able to work with Accesspoint in moving our application over to the cloud while at the same time allowing our

staff to work on our existing infrastructure.

"This allowed us to work together in testing the cloud setting long before we went live – ultimately ensuring a smooth and stress-free switch to our new cloud environment."

Not only was the transition to cloud easy, but Accesspoint aided Grant Saw in two big office moves, which involved relocating its Greenwich office to a serviced office next to the O2 Arena and moving its Blackheath office to a larger space down the road.

The moves took place one week apart, Lawrence says, so there were many IT considerations to think about.

"Accesspoint was very helpful and worked with me to ensure our new firewalls were secure and that all of the necessary services were moved and updated so users could get straight to work without issue. There was minimal downtime and no stress involved in relocating servers."

And since completing two moves, he says, the firm looks forward to working with Accesspoint on another smooth office move scheduled before the end of 2018.

## WORK FAST

Lawrence says that, from a commercial and business process perspective, choosing the systems and IT partners is all about driving efficiencies.

"Costs pressures are increasing all around, so we need to perform more tasks in less time without sacrificing quality of work and customer service. We want systems that are smart and that we could train to be our kind of smart and perform things the way we want them performed," he says.

Technology today should be able to get information out to people fast and it needs to be focused in order to be effective, he says. "For example, in our line of work, we deal with a lot of external professionals, clients, referrers, work and

### LPM FIRM FACTS

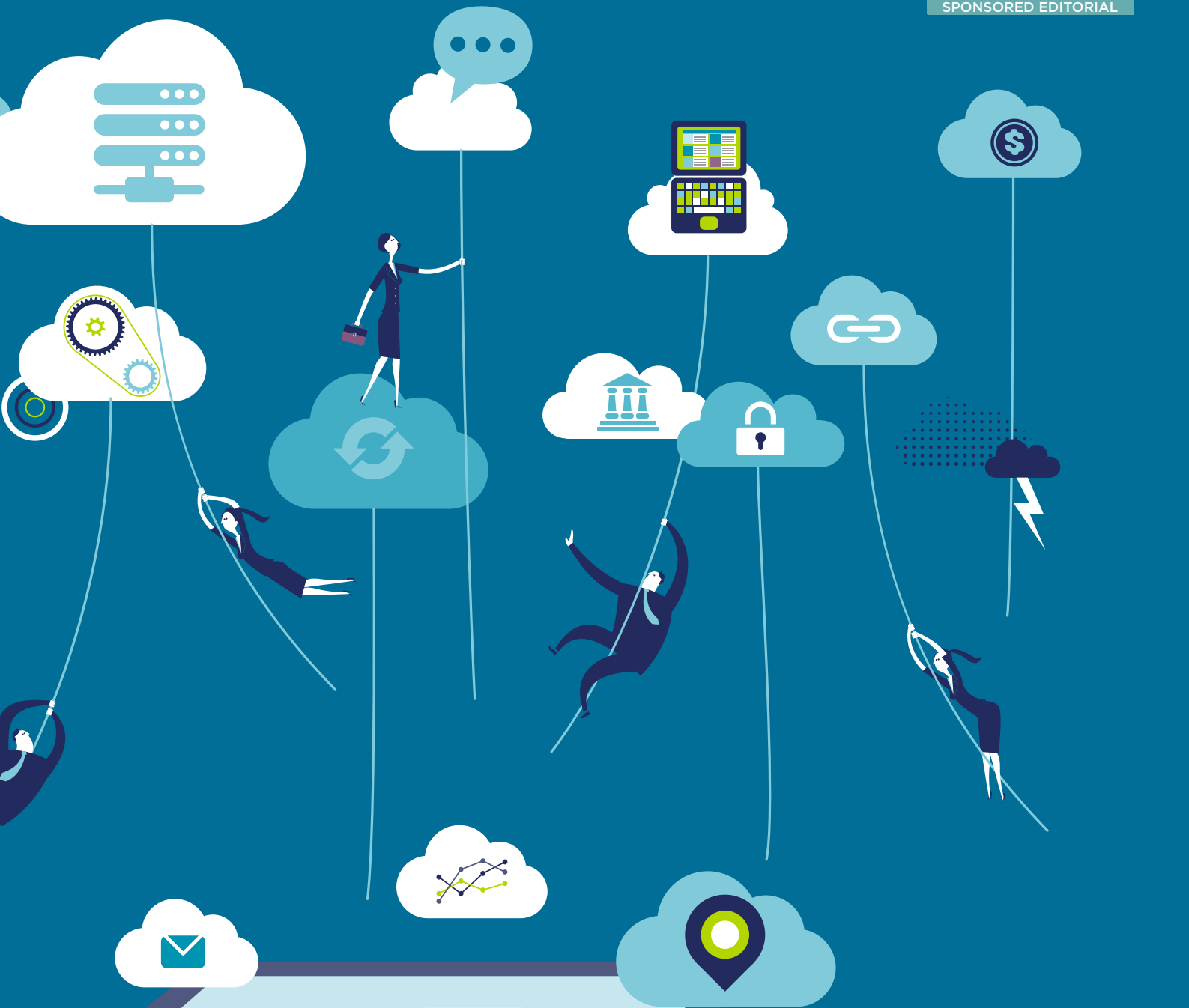
**Grant Saw**

**Revenue: approx £1m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

**44 total staff,  
28 fee earners**

**Office locations: Greenwich,  
Blackheath**



#### ABOUT THE SPONSOR

**Accesspoint** is an independent legal IT specialist that consults on a variety of information technology-related issues, offering the best in IT solutions to help firms work more effectively.

[www.theaccesspoint.co.uk](http://www.theaccesspoint.co.uk)

**Accesspoint**

Group Holdings

so on, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach.”

Getting information out to people in a fast and efficient manner is important, but it’s crucial the firm’s security can handle the job, Lawrence adds.

Grant Saw worked with Accesspoint to improve the firm’s firewall security – with the addition of two-factor authentication for safer remote working.

“We moved our applications over to Accesspoint’s new, state-of-the-art servers. This allowed us to manage our applications and user profiles in a much more efficient and secure way.”

Not only that, but Lawrence adds that Accesspoint provided staff with end-user training for their new CMS and gave some recommendations based past experiences with the software.

He says: “They also offer a lot of development work, ranging from case flows to specific reports and features tailored for

the users’ needs.

“Accesspoint’s customer service has been great so far. From past experiences with other vendors, you often get ‘special treatment’ at the beginning but once you sign up you become just a number, which can become frustrating. Thankfully we haven’t had that experience with Accesspoint and our account managers are always in touch to make sure we are happy.”

Lawrence says the relationship will only continue to grow. The firm already has a day scheduled to meet the managing director and technical directors and to tour Accesspoint’s data centre.

“We’re also looking forward to sitting down with their platform specialists to discuss our ideas and decide what’s next for Grant Saw’s IT.”

Increasing capability and efficiency for the firm will open doors for future growth and, more importantly, will provide improvement to delivering services to clients. **LPM**



# UNDER THE WEATHER?



Bethan Sayle, head of risk and compliance at Rliance, discusses the importance of developing an effective risk management framework

**R**isk management can be a contentious issue for law firms, as it's one more added pressure that doesn't seem to relate directly to the firm's core business.

## HARD-HITTING RISK

Various organisations have already found out the hard way that a failure to deal properly with risks can have devastating consequences. For instance, Enron, with assets worth US\$63.4 billion, suffered from the largest insolvency in US history, having fallen foul of credit and audit risks.

Risk management is important because some risks are inevitable within any progressive organisation that is seeking to grow and succeed. This is particularly applicable to firms in the legal sector, which encounter risks every day. Being aware of these risks also raises awareness of the need for good risk management. This shouldn't be seen just as a necessary evil. Indeed, if companies are more aware of both the threats and opportunities they face, and know how to manage them, they're likely to gain a significant advantage over their competitors.

So far, the legal sector has fallen behind others in this area, as law firms have failed to approach the running of their companies as a business activity. This is partly because many lawyers are suspicious of technology and believe that they don't have the necessary time or ability to focus on such issues. This, of course, is nonsense, as a good system will be easy to use and, once implemented, will save much time, trouble, and potential expense. Despite this, too many professionals still see risk as something that isn't their responsibility and this is an attitude that needs to change.

So, why is the development of effective risk management systems so important and how can it be seen as something beneficial rather than an onerous duty?

**1. A better performance.** Good risk management can enhance your firm's performance against its objectives by helping it to avoid many unexpected problems. It should also lead to a lower cost of capital.

**2. Better use of resources.** A strong risk management framework will help your firm to use its resources more effectively and manage contingent and maintenance activities more efficiently.

**3. Less risk of fraud.** A real-time, automated risk management system will reduce the risk of your firm becoming a target for money laundering or other fraudulent or criminal activities.

**4. More powerful strategies.** Risk management also has an important role to play in the development of new change initiatives and other innovations; and in the development of both internal and external strategies.

## A FRAMEWORK TO DIE FOR

For firms in the legal sector, the SRA has produced some guidelines about the key elements that are required from a risk management system. These include:

- A clear view of the risks in relation to the regulations and the firm's exposure to these risks
- An ability to show where the most significant risks lie
- The development of controls that will address these risks in a 'proportionate and effective manner'
- Clear governance arrangements that ensure that any risks will be escalated appropriately and that there is accountability for the effective management of the risk.

One approach you could take in order to achieve these objectives is to develop an interactive risk register. This will enable you to show and monitor identified risks and the actions that need to be taken to mitigate them. This is where technology becomes essential - there's little incentive for legal professionals to spend their time on paper-based or spreadsheet systems based on the minutes from a risk management meeting. This is because monitoring, evaluating, reporting and developing such a system is time-consuming and dreary.

As a result, many of the necessary improvements or changes that need to be introduced fall by the wayside. Risk management



becomes a start-stop process that's pushed by management meetings and minutes but that has little impact on the culture of the firm or on the development of more effective policies and procedures. According to UK regulators, this is a recognised area of failure in terms of achieving best practice in risk management, which needs to be a continuously evolving process.

### TECHNOLOGY'S PART

In contrast, a technology-based approach to risk management is both simpler and quicker to use once the initial system has been set up. Numerous risk management frameworks and practices have been developed in industry and by regulators to help to define best practice. These include specific approaches that take into account the type of risks involved (for example, operational, credit and so on).

Ultimately, however, any risk management approach will only work if it becomes part of the corporate culture and is embraced and supported by the firm's leadership team. It needs to be carefully implemented and administered, with a clear reporting structure. This should ultimately involve reporting to the senior leadership team – and the lack of such a structure is where these approaches often fail in the long term. Risk managers must have direct and unfettered access to senior managers and the board of directors.

Law firms are increasingly using technology for many operations, from promotions on websites right through to storing information in the cloud. However, the legal sector lags behind other industries as it is still heavily dependent on

paper-based processes rather than using the latest technology to streamline its activities. This is particularly true for risk management, even though this is an area which can really benefit from technology and automated processes that can save legal firms time, trouble and money.

For instance, technology can help through benefits such as: automated risk registers, better quality, real-time results, central visibility and control of risk management, task-driven processes, the delegation of compliance tasks, and the development of a new, risk-focused corporate culture. Of course, care must be taken when changing a company's systems and culture. There needs to be proper training and an approach that doesn't compromise the security of existing systems. However, technology can still make a huge difference to your ability to manage risk effectively.

### ESTABLISH BEST PRACTICE

Some of the measures you'll need to take involve the development of a risk register, audits, processes for reporting any breaches and so on. There will also need to be a risk committee that will be responsible for managing risk within your businesses and which reports to senior management. The risk committee will also oversee the continuing evolution of risk management within your firm. This will include updating the risk framework to reflect such issues as the changing business environment, risk appetite, new business objectives, and so on.

This might seem very daunting at first, but help is at hand! To enable firms to migrate more easily to an efficient, technologically-based approach, Rliance has developed a cloud-based risk and compliance management platform. Once you've identified the risks inherent in your business, we'll help you to implement central planning and mitigation strategies. With our risk management framework, you can record and categorise your risks and delegate the operation and review of the mitigation strategy to specific employees.

So, risk management has become a vital issue that needs to be embraced by law firms. It won't just go away; every firm should have a good risk management strategy in place, hopefully aided by technology. If you need further help or advice on this issue or would just like to know more, please don't hesitate to contact us. [LPM](#)

#### ABOUT THE SPONSOR

**Rliance** specialises in providing market-leading risk and compliance solutions, innovations and support to the legal sector.

[www.rliance.co.uk](http://www.rliance.co.uk)



## Day in the life

### JOANNE HOLBORN HEAD OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING, PARTNER AT BAINES WILSON

Holborn reviews a day of running around offices, putting on workshops, and running around town



#### 8am

I don't do breakfast, nor do I have a set time to get up – it doesn't take me long to get out the door and straight into whatever I happen to be doing on that particular day. I could be out at an employment tribunal, with a client, or at our Lancaster or Carlisle office.

I work in a very agile way – I certainly go out more than anyone else in the office just because of the nature of my work, but also I like to get involved in many projects. And the business allows me to do that, I can remote access all of our systems.

If I'm in the office, the first thing I do is go through the emails that have come in overnight. I keep my eye on those throughout the day via the preview window that pops up when something new comes into my inbox.



#### 12am

Mostly I take the day as it comes, especially as I only provide employment law advice for businesses. I could plan to do something one day and then someone will ring up with a difficult grievance or disciplinary issue or whatever it happens to be, and I need to deal with it there and then. You need to react very quickly in this sort of work because you can't keep someone waiting a couple days for the type of

advice I give. So, planning my day in the traditional sense just doesn't work.

We're pretty unusual as far as Cumbria and the North West generally is concerned because we're a niche commercial firm that looks after clients both locally and nationally, we also don't do any high street stuff. We are also very fortunate in that the team is a mix of home-grown talent and lawyers that have worked for City firms and seen the light. We therefore have people who genuinely want to be here and also some who can bring experience from larger firms.

Many people wouldn't think Cumbria was necessarily the best place to start a commercial law firm, but we are actually very well placed, as there are some amazing and diverse businesses in the area, many of which traditionally went out of the county for legal support, which they can now get locally. Similarly, there are national firms that prefer the way we work and our competitive fees. And we don't just do transactional employment law work, we also do a lot of in-house training and deliver open seminars – which I'm heavily involved in.



#### 3pm

Recently we've been busy training on the General Data Protection Regulation, and that's been every week for a few months now. As more companies get settled with GDPR, we'll do more of our usual topics – most of the

training we do is around discipline, grievances, performance management and absence.

Right now I'm planning our next set of employment law update seminars, which will run in October.

With tribunal fees being scrapped, I've got quite a lot of tribunal work on at the moment as well.

It's always a juggling exercise with my fee-earning work and management responsibilities. There's obviously a series of planned meetings every week – that could be with clients or appraisals or interviews, and everything else I do works around those meetings in the diary. I also deal with recruitment for the firm – and when we're recruiting for employment lawyers, we ask them to do a presentation. Because of the workshops we run, the people we hire have to be confident enough to stand up and hold a room.



#### 6pm

I was a keen windsurfer for a number of years and for my 40th birthday, my other half bought me a kitesurfing lesson. I was hooked on that for a while until I broke my wrist doing it one day, so I've gone back to occasional windsurfing!

After work I enjoy running in the fells and mountain biking in the Lake District and Scotland. I also do a lot of hill walking and at the moment I'm doing the Wainwrights, which are 214 hills in the Lake District. It's a great way to clear my head and explore new areas where I live. [LPM](#)

**“** You need to react very quickly in this sort of work because you can't keep someone waiting a couple days for the type of advice I give. **”**



#### ALL ABOUT

**Joanne Holborn**

**Works in both offices**

**Likes gin**

**Dislikes cucumber**



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