This Month

- **Adapting our working methodology**
- **Owners and Directors assuming infrastructure responsibility**
- **Lockdown issues and going forward**

The Challenge

Well, August 2020 is now with us and hopefully all firms have reviewed their strategies and planned actions for implementation to see proactive progress and performance for the next 3 to 6 months.

http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/June2020.pdf
http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/July2020.pdf and so much more

Profitability, cash flow, client relationships and of course the Pii renewal

Working methodology has had to change significantly and is likely to remain that way. Staff and clients will need to be accommodated with flexible working, mobility, communication whilst maintaining security, compliance, supervision, efficiency and the right division of labour. Some firms have identified that their gross profits have been better with some staff furloughed as they have applied long overdue efficiency steps.

Staff will need to be accommodated more – already some London law firms have had surveys and as many as 80% of lawyers do not want to return on a full time basis. Plus published in The Mail in mid July –recruitment company – Stanton House – has conducted a survey and discovered *"one in five professionals wants to work at home permanently and 54% only want to go in one or two days a week, 72% want less than 3 days in the office – there was also a gender split 20% of men wanting to work from home all the time and 14% of women"*

During the lock down this environment has been forced upon us. Staff have been working from home but the technical infrastructure environment has been challenged from a performance, continuity and security perspective and this has impacted on client relationships, business development, efficiency, profitability, working capital and compliance perspective.

With firms and suppliers that I talk to on a regular basis there have been some positive steps taken with outsourcing telephone answering and production of documents.
https://www.moneypenny.com & https://www.documentdirect.co.uk/

We will all need to introduce mobility and agility for our staff but the key is to make sure that it is done right and professionally by the right suppliers. During the lock down and home-working there is evidence of many breaches of security. One supplier of managed services has reported when doing health checks as much as a 74% of businesses show evidence of breaches.

We also have to remember that we want to retain our key high performance staff – equality, diversity, communication, management method but now the new demands for homeworking and flexibility which because of technology is very feasible.

I have been a fan of hosted IT for a long time, provided it is done right, secure and compliant and these days whether it is in the public or private cloud it enables mobile operation, smaller offices and hot-desking (saves a lot of money), working from home, costs per user per month (limited capital outlay to get the right solution as well as flexing upwards or downwards dependent on headcount) – with the right contracts some customers have had the costs of for example Microsoft licences furloughed along with their staff.

I was very interested to find out what the demand for this sort of facility has been during the lock-down so in dialogue with one supplier he identified that they had signed 7 new deals with firms of between 80 and 160 staff on multiple practice and case management systems. This is significant so I took it further and communicated with some other known suppliers to the sector to get their take on what is happening and why

The suppliers were (There are of course a few more):

https://www.nasstar.com MLS Advantage member

https://everythingthatis.cloud/

https://www.cts.co.uk/

https://www.quiss.co.uk/

https://www.atlascloud.co.uk/

All of the suppliers are in a positive frame of mind having had numerous enquiries from law firms about the route forward and also helping many out in the short term with performance and security issues and now planning for the next stage.

Observations very consistent – see below.

- Many law firms have coped with home working but are suffering from efficiencies – lack of capacity for multiple connections on servers and infrastructure. Capacity needs planning for servers and networks
- There are significant risks to security and compliance where the partial and interim solutions have been made by non-specialist suppliers. This applies to servers, laptops, mobile phones
- Firms are recognising that their IT needs to be more forward looking to enable competitiveness in a rapidly changing market – new and focussed applications have to be deployed well and quickly – efficiency, staff and client communication demands

Nasstar

Significant number bringing back furloughed staff

People often the weakest link outside of secure head office environments – cyber-attacks high %

Big interest from regulated suppliers like law firms and financial services sector especially for encryption, multi factor authentication

Security checks identifying multiple security breaches

ETI Cloud

Issues identified with current law firm arrangements

Lack of capacity planning from in house/current meaning connectivity issues at the same time.

Saturation of server resource – poor performance or no availability

Limitations in standard security/printing methods

Limitations on ability to run Team so less secure methods of conferencing being used

Home-workers broadband shortfall – front door not office or bedroom

Telephone routing not available – manual methods

CTS

A lot of short term fixes for clients during the lock down – longer term plans taking shape for firms to become effective in performance and meeting client service demands

Security a big issue with unsecured networks and personal devices. Firms have to cover all gaps while hacker just has to find one. Independent specialist audit recommended

Current short term fixed home working is not enough going forward – technology is key for file access and communication with clients and colleagues. Needs a planned solution built for mobile working model

Forward looking IT infrastructure needed to be able to apply new technology enhancements. In house IT often stretched firefighting – need time to add value

Quiss

With the disaster recovery plan needed at the beginning of lock down hosted clients migrated effectively

Business owners now likely to be the drivers for IT as has to be part of business strategy. Outsourcing key to this for business demands

Public cloud arrangements now put client into a stronger position to move managed services provider if SLAs not being met

Flexibility demands from the market to enable easier adaption to the changing market

Security issues for firms who have made the homeworking shift quickly

Atlas Cloud

Remote and homeworking has produced multiple security challenges

Internet connections not been good enough missing the benefit of solutions like Citrix

Efficiency losses, inabilities to print

Compliance a demand for GDPR with own laptops and telephones carrying client data

Hosting a natural solution for multiple office firms with multiple staff allows flexibility, security and mobile working

Priorities Reminder

Last month we reviewed

- Getting our reviewed strategy in place and all the efficiency and working capital demands
- Compliance priorities which included
    - Data protection
    - Client care and service levels
    - Staff supervision including home working
    - Financial stability
- Pii renewal – the risks of compliance as well as affordability and working capital

All receive a proactive contribution from the IT infrastructure proposition.

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