

This Month

- **Key Data delivered to the hands of the accountable**
- **Critical People Engagement**
- **Up your firm's marketing and profile whilst saving money**
- **Alternative Funding for Covid Response**
- **Pii renewal – start now and get ready for April 21**

Key Data delivered to the hands of the accountable

Our PMS/CMS suppliers have varying capability to provide essential management information automatically to the people that need it sometimes on a daily basis. Much of the key information is there within the system but it requires someone to often run a report, which could be firm or department wide, spend time breaking down (and formatting) the information prior to distribution. The information is usually distributed in a numerical/tabular form – loved by accountants but not always appreciated by lawyers). This, gains added complexity if there is key data sitting in a CRM or HR system relevant to the objective trying to be achieved.

Again, the evidence of this has been witnessed through the last six months with people working remotely and consequently key data is behind and so is supervision in many cases affecting clients as well as the ability to close files and get the billing done. (key point here – supervisors need information – in the absence of visual queues as to what work is being done by who, they have started to rely more on hard data to provide that information)

A number of months ago I referred to <https://www.katchr.com/> an application that can sit on multiple databases or just one to ensure that individuals and teams automatically receive the key data (daily, weekly or monthly) to enable focus on core measures and responsibilities which may be housed in different databases within the firm.

The Enterprise version, the initial focus is in 10% of the top 200 firms and in a large number of others down to c£2million billing. The is now www.katchrexpress.com an out of the box version providing an effective facility to smaller firms for c£300 per month. Just think just one to two more billable hours.

Critical People Engagement

In the recession back in 2008 there was a massive impact on staff morale, much of it dependent on the way that partners treated staff during the difficult times and the style used for some inevitable redundancies. It had a big impact on some of the remaining high-quality performers and in some cases their inevitable departure from the firm as soon as jobs became available again.

It could be that there may be a similar situation coming up but with even more complex additions to the equations. People development and retention and attraction are critical. The added dimensions being – mobility and agility of the workforce, varying demands in management and communication styles for different generations.

In <http://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/December2019.pdf> I discussed the generation differences and then in January <http://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/January2020.pdf> I introduced <https://www.weekly10.com/> specialists in the provision of the right kind of engagement and management <https://www.weekly10.com/legal-employee-engagement>

Over the last few months they have conducted a significant fact finding survey <https://www.weekly10.com/uk-legal-sector-state-of-the-workplace-2020> hopefully published by the time this article hits the press with some fascinating findings and some views on where we are going from here.

- Findings
 - 81% of staff home working in some capacity during the past 6 months
 - 83% were as (36%) or more (47%) productive than when working from the office
 - We know the flexibility offered in remote working is great for employee engagement more generally, but this supports previous findings re: productivity
 - Communication is key, with those reporting increased levels of comms with managers being the most productive.
 - Furloughed workers saw a reduction (unsurprisingly) in communication and support from employers
 - This seems to have increased the likelihood of some (38%) furloughed staff looking to leave their current firm/employer with c50% seeking to work from home or non-office locations
 - 21% of staff were furloughed and 60% of those were support staff
 - Out of sight, out of mind maybe – with 64% feeling a lack of support and 67% reporting reduced communication
 - 38% of furloughed staff because of lack of communication did not see a long-term future

The New Normal - It is important that managing partners and firm leaders open up pathways that allow staff additional scope for remote working. As we have said over the last few months though it has to be done properly. Direction, communication, clarity of objectives and performance, the right kit, the right systems and infrastructure

Save money and up your firm's profile and marketing capability

So often when I look at law firm web sites, their blogs and news are so out of date and not reflecting the current challenges to their clients and potential clients and the benefits that the firm's services can offer. It is the same with social media such as LinkedIn and general marketing material.

It is a challenge for partners in firms to write such things and it takes time – a couple of hours can easily be lost perhaps involving a billing opportunity of £500. Also, during the lock down professional lawyers have been so busy working on files that the extra bits contributing to essential business development have just not been happening. Some turn to external PR and Marketing agencies (this can be expensive) and it is a sacrificed essential to others.

www.legalrss.co.uk will soon be joining us as the newest member of our MLS Advantage group has an answer that can help many – and it is a tremendously cost-effective solution.

For a small monthly fee, they make available up to 60 articles per month for different categories of law written by experienced court reporters and legal journalists. These are 300-500 word articles that the firm then has the option to leave or amend for their own interpretation and branding and then use to up their profile and marketing on the web, LinkedIn or specific mail campaigns.

Further details available from greg.best@legalrss.co.uk

They have also just launched a downloadable smartphone app where subscribers can receive all the articles on their mobile devices, with the added option to brand it to their firm's brand, and really highlight to clients and prospects how innovative the firm is.

Alternative Funding – Aid to Lock Down

Lockdown saw lots of challenges. For many, new file openings slowed down and cash flow became much tighter. To provide and maintain a degree of normality and look after clients, firms had to carefully plan how to get staff into home working environments.

Firms had to change the way they worked and forward-thinking firms started to look beyond CIL Loans to see if they could utilise the assets already in their WIP and release cash. Many banks have not been forthcoming.

<http://www.vfslegal.com/> had a client who had to implement home working. Some staff had laptops and others didn't. The dial in functionality was not robust or secure enough for the change, there were planned upgrades to IT and they needed sources of more work.

The firm had a lot of cash tied up in incurred disbursements and also lots of higher value cases that were sat with costs being negotiated.

VFS assisted them by reviewing their caseload and releasing cash tied up in WIP and disbursements.

This enabled them to put the infrastructure in place with new IT equipment and systems and revisit internal marketing. They now have a steady stream of work sourced internally by an enhanced marketing team increasing profitability by decreasing case acquisition costs.

The firm received a CBIL loan and some of their higher value cases settled with higher costs because their costs firm were allowed to negotiate the true value of the bill. The facility was repaid and the firm continues to prosper knowing they have the facility in place to use as it should be.

Back in June I did an introduction to VFS

<http://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/June2020.pdf> . Contact Rick Gregory Rick@vfslegal.com

Pii renewal – start now and get ready for April 21

Back in the July article I gave sufficient warnings for the problems needing addressing for the October round of Pii renewal. <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/July2020.pdf> I mentioned some of the consequences last month. Well done to everyone that has achieved renewal at a reasonable price. There is more to come.

During October I was in dialogue with James Brindley james.brindley@tlorisk.com of <http://www.tlorisk.com/home> a specialist professional services broker. He confirmed to me that the October 2020 solicitors season proved as difficult as expected.

Jim confirmed that what TLO saw as the pandemic unfolded was:

- Additional questions being asked in the form of additional questionnaires on the financial security and viability of a law firm and how they were managing the Covid risk within the practice.
- Finance firms offering funding of the professional indemnity insurance (PII) also tightening their acceptance criteria.
- A major PI insurer insisting on Personal Guarantee's for equity partners before agreeing terms and cover.

- Insurers increasing their minimum excess levels with many imposing a standard £5,000 excess for conveyancing firms.
- One insurer imposing a £50,000 each and every claim/claimant excess on conveyancing work involving off site/property investment work.
- Increase in rates in general, again conveyancing work in particular was hard hit so even if firms had a reduced income, they didn't see the reduction making much difference in their costs.
- There was probably generally an average premium increase of 20% to 30% this year - some firms seeing a smaller increase and others a larger increase, depending on their individual circumstances.

Jim's big warning going forward *"The pandemic has highlighted the issues faced by the qualifying insurers when writing solicitors PI in the non-cancellation clause written within the policy and the onus on the last insurer providing run off insurance. It is no surprise that underwriters this year have been far more cautious in their approach to renewing business and in particularly looking for new business this season. **I can only envisage this becoming even starker in April 2021** and it is therefore vital that law firms engage with their insurance broker and insurers earlier to have sufficient time to deal with any issues that may arise during the renewal process."*

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