

SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PAPER and ENHANCED MOBILE WORKING

Real Innovation

I have gone on about the benefits of agile and mobile working and certainly see it as an essential way forward. Until recent research I have probably been underestimating the benefits of collaborative working with colleagues and clients.

Collaboration is clearly related to AW (agile working) and ABW (activity based working) but is more a change in the way people are and want to work and communicate – just look at social media and things like Wikipedia. You don't need people in the same office to communicate, collaborate and do some very creative things..... as long as you have the technology to enable it!

The progressive benefits available to law firms identified below are proof of this and we cannot afford to allow the cynics or “Luddites” to prevail.

Some research has identified:

- 40% actively working towards a collaborative approach and are budgeting for it – including the ROI
- 55% of desks are often empty but its hard to get meeting rooms or the people in them
- 17% of floor space is used to store paper
- 50%+ businesses report productivity gains from collaboration
- 25% believe that internal and external communications issues hamper productivity
- 85% + of staff declare they would be happy to work flexibly
- Only 32% believe they have the right tools

Any progressive firm needs to take early account of this.

Electronic Paper

In today's market more than ever law firms face the challenges of competition, client demands, compliance, efficiency and cost reduction

One major contributor to this solution is potentially that the future of the “office” continuing to change into a highly mobile, connected digital workspace where all the information of the business, certainly his caseload is at the lawyers fingertips.

We can all benefit with a move towards a paperless environment

- Information on our desktop to save the time and the frustrations of searching for files in a mixed digital and paper scenario
- Cutting the cost of storage which for many firms runs into 10s of thousands of pounds either with third parties or using up expensive local storage
- Lawyers being able to work securely from anywhere at any time adding to efficiency and productivity through agile working and hot-desking

Many firms understand the need for this but are put off by the scale and timing of the challenge. It cannot all be done in one go and a strategy is required and the development of an archiving policy

- Many of use our case management systems quite well for document management including the storage of papers from other parties sent electronically but in some cases we still struggle with inbound hard copy
- We then have mixed files because of the age of the live matter
- We then have closed and archived files that may need referring to or re-opened but have to be retained for compliance purposes
- We then have archives that need to be retained for long periods and maybe only on one further occasion need to be recovered but holding them physically is costly and inefficient – let alone forgetting where they are.

Until improved methods are brought forward that convert the paper on the desk into information that is instantly accessible anywhere & anytime, organisations will be forced to continue working in two separate worlds - paper and digital.

MLS Advantage member – Docutech www.docutesolutions.co.uk – through collaboration with leading vendors such as Microsoft, Ricoh, Case and Practice Management Suppliers and if required secure and compliant UK data centres are now in a position to assist firms to bridge that gap through the use of MSS (Managed Scanning Solutions).

Docutech is to introduce a consulting service supplied by experts in the sector to assist law firms to develop a phased strategy and an archiving policy. This service is planned to start by taking stock and then look at the short, medium and long term, requirements to cost effectively manage a programme to provide the cost reductions, mobile/agile working, efficiency and compliance. It is anticipated that this strategy will incorporate the identification of “low hanging fruit” for speedy return.

This service is so much stronger than the perceived selling of scanners and printers and will include newer technologies such as “follow me print”, proximity cards and pin codes add so much to security, lack of waste and agile and effective working.

- Print costs an storage reduced
- Time spent searching for information can be significantly reduced,
- The work place more fast and efficient, more secure and a regulatory compliant.
- The ability to share, store and retrieve documents especially as more firms are developing agile and hot desking. Real cost saving and enhanced efficiency.

Helping Overcome the Cultural Scepticism – Hot Desking and Agile Working

Last month I wrote about the scepticism and potential Luddites that cannot be afforded.

“by providing flexibility, can assist firms in the management of their key staff in terms of attracting good people, enabling retention and supporting an increasing demand for work:life balance. Another advantage of effectively a large proportion of mobile workforce is that 100% of staff does not require office space and desks. The latter saves a great deal of premises costs and the former enables imaginative use of

skilled people and more time dedicated to generating revenue rather than travelling and other diversions”

I was encouraged to follow this through and examine the technology available and in use in some progressive firms available from MLS Advantage member – Viewpoint www.viewpoint-av.com

We are ahead of the game in the North West as referred to in previous months and the benefits are still underestimated

- Collaboration systems – Combining some or all of the above. People can work (view and annotate) on the same document in different locations and see each other at the same time. Client interface and reduced travel time
- Video conferencing – Not just for meeting rooms, but for use anytime, anywhere by all employees and invited guests – such as clients and prospects
- Interactive displays – Essentially interactive LFD's but the software choice and operating systems are important as is the responsiveness of the screen. Particularly useful in training and learning environments.
- Resource Booking systems (Room and desk booking) – Enables organisations to manage their rooms, desks, car parking spaces etc.
- Presentation systems – Large format displays (LFD), projectors, control systems (to make it very easy for users to use the technology). Wired and wireless display systems.
- Audio systems – Speakers, microphones etc. Can be for meeting rooms, auditoriums, lecture theatres, or general round the office

Client experience and new enquiry conversions - Agile working with Hosted Telecoms

There are few firms now without the challenge but if a firm is looking to develop existing clients potential or have multiple practice locations, work remotely or engage associates to work as a 'virtual' law firm whether having 5 or 500 staff, adopting intelligent call routing across telecoms, mobiles, laptops and client databases is a huge benefit.

We almost now take as read that Hosted IT is a great aid to agile working but haven't spent a great deal of time looking at the benefits that hosted telecoms can bring. Simply translated the service enables partners and staff to use the device they find easiest (whether a desk phone, PC, Laptop, tablet or mobile phone) to receive and transmit all communication with staff and clients exactly the same, purely dependant on location at the time....remaining completely in control at all times.

Such solutions are available from MLS Advantage supplier Matrix247 www.matrix247.com

The idea is that a firm's telephone system, client records (Practice / Case Management system and / or CRM), Microsoft Outlook and partner's mobiles are all linked together and talking to each other. Rules may then be set up to route clients calls to the most appropriate person, client handling team or receptionist whilst presenting the most appropriate previous client correspondence, their client record and the required persons current status at the same time.

Clients can be profiled into categories and dependant on who they are, what matters they have engaged with previously, or if prospective clients, the opportunities they offer across the firm, you may choose to route calls to high-touch business development staff or receptionists or both....all the while ensuring they are aware of opportunities and have a means of measuring opportunities. In addition, partners and associates that are working away from the office can appear to clients as in any location you wish.

Investment? Again like the move to a paperless office Matrix 247 can start an installation at a basic level and can move forward at a pace to meet the firm's demands for **agility**. Remember it is a per user per month contract as it is with hosted IT. This helps greatly in levelling the technology playing field for small and large firms

So the project can be phased in perhaps starting with a very simple connection of existing mobiles, client databases and MS Outlook to the telephony platform – potentially a cost neutral move.

Security – as demonstrated with our recent months of Cyber coverage telephone security in a traditional sense is a big issue.

Steve Pritchard MD of Matrix 247 has assured me that *“Hosted and cloud based telecoms are also a lot harder to attack by potential telecom system hackers looking to generate call theft at a firm's expense due to the far more complex encryption built into telecom/ IP border controls as opposed to far simpler engineering PIN numbers set up by traditional on-premise telecom manufacturers connecting via traditional digital ISDN lines. These need EXTRA investment in Telecom Firewalls to provide this extra protection from Telecom 'Phreaking' hackers”*

As we have discovered before not always implemented

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