

Integrated IT helps top 250 law firm Hay & Kilner grow profitability and size

Top 250 firm Hay & Kilner has grown in size and profitability through the use of Linetime's integrated management software. Now that the firm offers clients access to live information on matters, the firm is even more efficient and focused on client service.

Hay & Kilner can only offer this kind of high-value client service because its IT system works as single integrated structure, a set-up that allows for many key efficiency benefits at the firm.

Linetime supplies the bulk of Hay & Kilner's legal practice systems, providing a consistent experience for the firm's users, as well as a single database from which all information is sourced. Hay & Kilner uses Linetime's case and practice management systems, debt recovery software, online case tracking and electronic interface to PCOL (Possessions Claims Online).

Having an integrated system covering everything the firm does drives efficiency in a range of ways, from ensuring compliance in the practice all the way through to planning strategy, by providing the data to analyse fee-earner and department performance.

As Tim Bennett, Hay & Kilner's partnership secretary explains, operating in this way creates efficiency and allows the firm to grow the amount of work it can deliver. "Without these integrated systems, we wouldn't be able to take on the volume of work we have."

Put simply, he says, using integrated software "enables the users and fee-earners to have all information they need on their screen, at their fingertips – everything from the accounts records on a particular matter to the case records of that matter".

This works particularly well with debt recovery, says facilities manager Philip Mabon: "Having a highly developed CMS that Linetime has developed, everything's there that you need when working through a debt case and it's fully integrated with the practice management system. So you've got all your cheque requests and your billing all integrated, and it goes straight onto the PMS."

Centralised data means better control

Because the firm is holding all the information it needs in one place, it can access the right management information with ease.

"If I want to compare current WIP, say, with six years ago in the same period, I can generate those reports at the touch of a button," says Bennett, "and we can create our own reports and get pretty much any management information we want out of the system."

This is at the heart of how integrated IT can make a firm more efficient and, if used strategically, can also deliver strategic benefits.

"We can make better business decisions on the information that we glean from it, that directly or indirectly gives us an edge over our competitors," says Bennett. Hay & Kilner applies this by using reporting to analyse profitability for any department and highlighting weaknesses and strengths therein. Partners and management can then tell departments if pricing is wrong, which helps the firm work out future charging.

More immediately, great reporting means Hay & Kilner can "decide we're putting too much effort into certain sides of the practice for margins that aren't that acceptable, and transfer resources elsewhere", he says.

Efficiency has had a very important practical result: it has helped Hay & Kilner ride the recession. In terms of cost collection, Bennett says, "we've used reporting to tighten up our own credit control, get the money in faster".

"We've been using reporting to see where the lock up is, and set targets to reduce the level of aged debt and to increase cashflow. Cash has always been king for us, and the reporting we do has assisted in controlling it."

Reducing unnecessary spend is a major benefit from using integrated IT. And, as Mabon explains, cost savings through increased efficiency happen in a variety of ways.

"There's a cost saving because it's all from one supplier, but as far as cases are concerned, it's about the ease of accessing information and checking information before procedures are run - we can check certain values are correct before we embark on a case."

Enabling the client

Insightful law firms are looking ever more at ways they can add value to the client relationship. Having an integrated system allows Hay & Kilner to do exactly that by giving certain clients access to live case information. This is a major benefit to the client of the shift from driving efficiency for cost saving to driving efficiency for adding value.

Hay & Kilner delivers this service using Linetime's B2C Online Case Tracking solution, giving clients access to information and the ability to submit and receive instructions.

"We want to offer this because it gives us a competitive edge over the competition, and some of our clients demand it," Bennett says. "Clients are able to see the state of progress on matters, print out reports for their own use, and they don't need to phone our people for reports, so everybody benefits."

As Mabon explains, the firm can tightly control what clients can and cannot do. "The web portal links straight into our case management system, so we can define what information the users can see. They can access the case progress, they can view any notes that have been made and documents that have been scanned in and received – they can even see post that's been received and scanned in this morning."

Bennett estimates that Hay & Kilner has saved "tens of thousands of pounds" a year using Linetime's B2C Online Case Tracking module, which also creates "a more cost-effective service to the client", he says. Those efficiencies are realised in two forms: removing client enquiries that the online case tracking system can field, and greater fee-earner attention to detail, because it is known that clients can see into the system.

This is not pre-empting a market need. Bennett says the firm has won clients – banks and large institutions – by being able to offer this service. In fact, he says, "we wouldn't be through the doors of certain clients without this technology, because they demand it".

Tomorrow's clients will benefit from the needs of today's. "Some of our larger commercial clients may be interested in it, the sort of clients we do a large volume of similar work for," says Bennett. "If we were undertaking work for a major introducer of conveyancing, we could offer a conveyancing service and let them see clients' progress. There's certainly going to be more demand for that in the future." The firm is also considering offering this service to individual conveyancing clients, so this is not just something for major commercial clients.

Adding this value to the client relationship grows out of making the firm more efficient, but it also creates efficiency. As Mabon explains "It keeps the pressure on those doing the work to make sure that everything's up to date. The system tells you if you've left anything out, so the user is conscious where they're up to on a certain matter and gets reminders to make sure things are carried out. There's more concentration on getting the work done, because it's more customer-facing."

Practice-wide benefits

A more efficient firm is, generally, a more compliant firm, so running a tight ship in terms of IT translates directly into compliance.

"Because case management is an automated system, which prompts the user to carry out and not overlook tasks, it facilitates the compliance process and it's less likely you'll overlook a potentially disastrous omission," Bennett says. "The more efficient a practice is, the less likely it is to have negligence claims against it. We're LEXCEL accredited, and without these systems we just wouldn't have these accreditations."

Ultimately, by making Hay & Kilner more efficient and effective, Linetime's IT solutions have helped the firm grow.

"We merged with a practice seven years ago because they didn't have the resource to service a growing area of work. We introduced the technology to them, and that part of the practice more than doubled within a six-to-seven year timeframe – without that technology, we couldn't continue to service those clients.

"Without this technology, we wouldn't be the practice we are today. We wouldn't be the size we are without the technology, we wouldn't be as efficient as we are and we'd not be able to offer as many services as we do'."