

FEBRUARY 2015

LPM

LEGAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

THE ONLY
MAGAZINE
FOR LAW FIRM
MANAGERS

EXPERT
COLUMNISTS
AND ADVICE
FROM PRACTICE
MANAGEMENT



PRACTICE
MAKES
PERFECT

*Asons Solicitors'
marketing exec Mark
Slater on his journey
into legal*



Technology trends

*Is your legal business cutting
edge, or behind the curve? We
reveal the IT for tomorrow's firm*



GROUNDWORK FOR GROWTH

Jeremy Stillman of Konica Minolta talks about the content management opportunity for SME firms – and how building better practices now can aid solid growth tomorrow

There's no shortage of opportunity in the SME legal market – be it in competitiveness and growth or refining processes and creating efficiency. But smaller legal businesses may have a great opportunity to nail both competitiveness and efficiency at once, by focusing on honing content management – and other business sectors might be able to show legal the way.

By virtue of their size and management structures, SME law firms not only have fewer information headaches to overcome than bigger firms, they're also better positioned than their top 100 counterparts to integrate their operations into cohesive wholes. That's a significant opportunity for SMEs and one that smaller firms can seize – faster than the top tier – when it comes to content management, says head of consultancy services at Konica Minolta, Jeremy Stillman.

"Taking on the content challenge – looking at how to get all the disparate divisions, departments and functions to sit within one system – is something other sectors are already doing, and something smaller firms can achieve earlier."

The construction sector (every litigator's friend) is an example of an industry driving forward with content management. "Under that 'content management' umbrella come electronic document management, records management, education, compliance, and so on – a lot of information that firms have to harness."

Smaller firms have the advantage. They can organise from the ground up to see and pull information from across the business into one unified system. And they can do it more effectively than their larger cousins, says Stillman. There are numerous benefits to that approach. "Rather than having to manage so many different areas individually, there's the ability to store your content in one repository. Having a single viewing pane, as it were, introduces efficiencies by virtue of better quality information that can be accessed faster."

Even if firms have integrated practice and case management, perhaps even linked to a CRM system, moving to a content management mindset for day-to-day content gives the user the ability to access far more detail, faster. There's also a double win to be had:

increasing turnaround to the client by speeding up the document retrieval process, as well as being free to use the capacity generated from those efficiencies to focus on strategic behaviour.

CLOUD AND CONTENT

The future of content management for many lies in the cloud, says Stillman, and the advantage is that SME firms would be able to more effectively invest in IT without investing lots of capital.

"Smaller firms are early cloud adopters," says Stillman. "In our experience, large firms are less receptive." To start with, it's an easier set-up for SMEs, he says, but painless implementation isn't where firms can benefit most. It's a part of the operation that easily scales up as the firm grows. That makes budgeting for a cloud-based system simpler than a full on-premise one, particularly as up-front capital expenditure becomes increasingly unattractive in a leaner, less lending-friendly legal market. It also drives up flexibility and agility.

Unifying systems under a content management umbrella should also change behaviours, says Stillman – for the better. A change in culture can develop all kinds of positives for how people collaborate, manage workloads and become more efficient in their day-to-day operations. Those are good behaviours to instil as firms grow. "People are adopting new ways of working. That's a management challenge too. There's education and training required to get the right processes into the business, and to achieve strong user adoption."

But opportunity is ripe at firms as they get better at harnessing management information. Doing that from a central source may be crucial as competitiveness becomes more important in legal business. "Firms will then be in a position to shape business strategy beyond what was previously possible." It's increasingly vital that firms differentiate, and seeing the business more transparently can begin to make that a reality, says Stillman.

"Firms that look at their business by breaking it down into bite-sized chunks, removing barriers and opening the silos between departments, will reap the rewards in tomorrow's legal market. A cohesive and comprehensive strategy, regardless of whether a firm's



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Konica Minolta Business Solutions is a leading provider of managed print and document services, production print technologies and managed content services.

www.konicaminolta.co.uk



small, medium-sized or worrying the top 100, will benefit business." Content management binds the business together, he says: "A single source means working together as a business and pulling in the same direction."

This aids customer service, which is the central objective for many organisations, in all kinds of industries, says Stillman – and especially important in legal. "You can't achieve that at the highest level – legal included – if you're looking at different document repositories, getting outdated information, and working from different details. The real advantage is to get all content in one place, which builds efficiencies and improves customer – or

rather client – service."

A unified approach to content management, whether combined with cloud-based systems or not, can give firms a solid grounding for expansion, he says. "We see businesses outside of legal doing exactly that – and better control of their business information has meant continued growth and innovation."

How SME firms harness the power of content management may prove the decisive difference as they contend in a more competitive arena. It could be the discipline that enables more innovation and growth – and it will be those getting there earliest that stand to profit most in tomorrow's legal market. **LPM**