



## IT news



➤ [News](#) ➤ [IT news](#)

### Why outsourcing law firm IT works

Thursday 02 November 2006

**From IT specialists in India to getting local computer dealer to fix your PCs, outsourcing has many opportunities solicitors may not have considered, argues Bill Kirby – and firms of all sizes can benefit**

Outsourcing. This emotive word conjures up many an impression: call centres in India, business process (or part of a business process) run offsite at a specialist or with specialists onsite, through to getting IT completely offsite and all the way down to just asking the local computer dealer to look after your installation.

Surveys say, without being too definitive, that outsourcing has declined over the past few years, but this is not what the evidence suggests when it comes to IT for law firms.

So why are so many solicitors' practices considering outsourcing IT at the moment? And why is it not something just for the big boys? In fact, there is a case for it being more relevant for small and medium firms without large IT departments.

Law firms are in existence to give advice to individuals and companies about the law. This service is supported out of necessity by human resources, marketing, accounting and IT. None of these is the core business of the firm, but all are nonetheless essential components of the business. However, it is not essential that any of those services are part of the law firm.

IT is essential for every law firm today – compliance, efficiency, productivity and communications cannot be achieved without it. But with IT come problems of security, virus protection, multiple operating systems, multiple applications, networking, resilience, business continuity and disaster recovery, to name just some of the challenges.

These require investment in hardware, software, communications, security, replication and resilience. So now you have those, you need multiple skilled individuals available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Finding the skills, keeping those skills up to date and covering for leavers, sickness and holidays can be a nightmare in a section of business that probably changes faster than any other, and is not where you are earning your money. In addition, the space taken up by computers and IT people is expensive compared to that used by fee-earners.

Outsourcing models can solve these problems. It does not matter how big or small you are, the same issues exist – it is just a matter of scale.

To me, a major concern is a firm's ability to continue working after, or at least recovering quickly from, an IT failure. If a firm is out of commission because of a destroyed server or broken communications, the cost is immense – there is lost fee income but a big problem is the inability to achieve the service level agreements agreed with clients, as well as a loss of credibility.

Increasingly, clients want to know and see proven a firm's business continuity arrangements. This can even be a deciding factor in winning or losing business. Outsourcing can provide a means to resolve that issue without in-house resources or skills maintenance being necessary, so it should at least be a consideration.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, which in some ways makes outsourcing easier to consider. An additional advantage is that, in many cases, costs can be organised on a per-user per-month basis, easing cash flow and making clear, for budgeting purposes, the cost of hiring additional staff. Some studies suggest that many of the additional benefits from outsourcing can be achieved without real incremental cost.

There are savings on staff to be made with outsourcing, particularly in support and infrastructure management, but it can also be of benefit in freeing staff to add value to the business and client relations, especially in developing more effective application use.

There are several options:

- Using an outside firm to design, configure and support infrastructure to agreed service levels.
- Using an outside organisation to audit IT and infrastructure, bring it up to date and then maintain and support the system to agreed service levels.
- Taking IT, except terminals and printers, completely offsite to replicated secure environments, leaving the firm with no servers, no responsibility for communications, plus security, resilience, replication and disaster recovery with guaranteed uptimes, is a service offered by managed service providers.
- An application service provider can do the above while offering application support as well. The firm could also limit the offsite element to replicated backup.

In short, there is a growing number of law firms of all sizes that are taking advantage of these services to a greater or lesser degree. The potential benefits mean outsourcing should at least be considered by any law firm before the next big IT decision is made.

*Bill Kirby is managing director of Professional Choice Consultancy*