

This Month

- **Essential business challenges needing action**
- **Simple action plan following status review**
- **Cost saving and productivity available**
- **Needs some dedication and expertise**
- **Liaison with Suppliers**

The Business Challenge for Lawyers and Law Firms

Many people become lawyers because of personal desires to participate in very interesting topics, challenge others and also to provide a community and social service

There is a great deal to learning required and all the necessary steps to qualification. Once that is achieved it is followed by movement into small, medium or large firms and the suffering or enjoyment of development, supervision, communications internally and with clients reputation and image development, just remaining as a lawyer but getting to operate the processes effectively or movement into management – even ownership or business development, client relationships, specific functional expertise, commercial success of the business (profitability and/or cash flow) in a business world like so few others with the extra demands of regulation and compliance and the joy of being watched over by the SRA and having to have Professional Indemnity Insurance that is affordable and certainly limits on fines that affect cash flow and profitability and market place image.

Articles over the last six months or so – say starting with November 2023 have been dealing with the major challenges that management within law firms have to be on top of – which includes all members of the teams being aware and doing their bit.

I strongly suggest that at next month's management/Operations Board a decision is made that the IT future of the firm has to be considered and some decisions made – sub committee with a real challenge that cannot be ignored at the moment.

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The good thing is that success across the piece is certainly achievable – just needs some important focus.

In January the focus was on

- Proactive monthly management
 - Trend data and perpetual forecasting
- Key Data and strategy/process
 - The availability of the right BI, MI and KPI at the right time
 - Daily time and billing data, WIP reviews
 - Comparable business performance, systems use and efficiency
 - The right PMS/CMS plus added value HR, CRM, Client communications, on boarding conversions.
 - PMS/CMS and added value being integrated
 - Staff communications and KPIs – certainly the younger stars need this
 - Client communications and empathy
 - During matters

- Possible environmental changes needing updates – representation of firm's knowledge and care
- Cross selling
- Demonstration of firm's social conscience and environment with ESG and BCorp
- The availability and integration of added value outsourced services like document production and even book keeping (24x7)
- Regulation and compliance achievement
 - SRA and AML and ID

Unfortunately, very little of the above can be achieved without the right PMS/CMS in place along with added value requirements fully integrated. This also needs a clear relationship between the firms and their PMS/CMS suppliers and a very clear understanding of the current product capabilities along with planned enhancements and time frames.

In the may 2024 article I covered so many processes that are essential but not in place and so much dependent on IT – capability, use, strategy, plans, process and authorisation – for example a workflow ensuring that all the processes have been followed, the resultant documentation read and authorized – could save the firm a fortune by avoiding fines.

It is also critical that the right IT infrastructure is in place – enabling business continuity and availability, back-up and recovery, flexible infrastructure in terms of working locations and accessibility, security. There have been a number of failures in this area over the last year so there are increasing demands on due diligence on potential suppliers whether they be the PMS/CMS recommendations or strong third parties. My suppliers have been very good.

PMS/CMS Interface

As everyone must be aware now a number of PMS/CMS suppliers have been acquired and there are three main groups operating within the UK.

In November and March www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/November2023.pdf and www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/March2024.pdf

I covered this topic and have had constructive sessions with two of the groups and there is some movement in the realms of added value and timetables for their products and IT environment development. In the March article I suggested that firms could take an initiative in this – still important but I am also trying to get suppliers to hold use group meetings around the country to explain where they are at and where and when exciting new solutions are available.

- Strategy and timescale for product enhancement and development
- When and how will the added value necessities appear
- The proposed infrastructure solution – in house, hosted/outsourced, cloud based – if and when

One supplier has started holding group user meetings with updates – attendance will take a while.

During July I heard that one supplier was trying to charge its clients for such an update. Even heard of proposed commercial changes without any enhancements

There has been an increase in added value integrations for some of the key areas but not everywhere.

We – law firm clients, in the majority of cases own our PMS and CMS software, we have paid for support and maintenance and now need to know where and when it is going to be before decisions are made.

There are also new suppliers coming into the UK market with high technology/infrastructure PMS/CMS solutions. Again, due diligence has been very interesting and there is certainly a potential challenge to existing suppliers. With current discussions and performance this could make quite a difference

IT Infrastructure

This again is absolutely critical and advice certainly needed.

We hear very much about cloud solutions, which in principle could be absolutely great – most of the current PMS/CMS available is not a cloud product – when and of they will be is part of the essential product strategy discussion. Available with some new entrants.

Fundamentally – just about all of the current PMS/CMS solutions can operate in an IT hosted environment rather than being on site in the firm. It is a little scary but as long ago as 2013 www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/hostedIt.pdf I wrote a piece about advice on how to buy hosted IT. The world has changed but many of the messages still apply.

There have been some collapses of suppliers over the last few years but again the right due diligence and advice can be a great benefit. Getting the SLAs and the contract right is key. Specialists with experience of successfully hosting the current PMS/CMS is a good starting point with a demonstration of the capability of handling added value integrated solutions, evidence of performance with DR situations and contracts that are flexible to handle changes in say ownership of the firm, moves to different PMS/CMS. Experience with other PMS/CMS also useful

A chat with www.manchesterlawsociety.org.uk/mls-advantage/ supplier [etiCloud | Everything that is Cloud](#) supported by security adviser [Cyber Security Company | Mitigo Group | Manchester UK](#) would not be a waste of time.

Hosted IT should bring

- Flexible working
- Optimisation of Business Continuity/ disaster recovery risk
- More data security (secure data centres)
- One stop shop for support
- Cuts the need for special skills in house and allows IT function to focus on added value
- Cuts worry and management time
- Scalable
- Capital not required – costs flexible by user per month – costs reduced

Apologies

I fully understand that many in law firm management like to stay away from IT but at the moment in the UK it is critical that all firms know where they are and where they are going. Strategy, operational performance, compliance, credibility, image and finance are all dependent. We need to have a clear plan for which we need to know where we stand and where we want to be.

We have to be more demanding of our PMS/CMS suppliers and develop the right way forward.

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