



INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

Prioritise process

Russell Wood, commercial manager, Infographics (developer of the FloSuite professional service delivery platform), says a working transformation like no other is surely upon us

With the global health crisis heralding an overhaul in working practices, law firms have been forced to find new ways of operating. Established tools like videoconferencing, collaboration platforms and web applications have allowed many areas to continue remotely. But where corporate networks and VPNs offer the only access route to back-office platforms, these have creaked under increased load from homeworkers. Plus, managing client-facing and administrative processes that have never been fully digitised has piled another level of challenge on top.

The new normal

As remote working becomes a necessity, law firms are having to find new ways of managing processes they'd never anticipated enacting completely out of the office. The digitisation of such areas involves not only providing secure access to remote or cloud-enabled technologies, but also re-engineering business processes to suit this radically different working environment. That's a major undertaking at any time, never mind in the middle of a global crisis.

As a specialist legal supplier, we've seen major

change over the years, delivering many bespoke requirements for a variety of legal work types. We've also implemented existing solutions across areas like client/matter intake, regulatory processes, case management, and financial forecasting and billing.

But the transformation ahead of us now feels bigger than anything that's come before.

Cloud technologies and going 'paperless'

At the core of this transformation are 'paperless' solutions, ideally in the cloud. Law firms have perhaps been reluctant to adopt a workflow-driven, cloud-based approach. They have therefore not benefitted fully from accessible, agile case and process management platforms, which can be available 24/7.

So, the very sudden requirement to switch to today's 'new normal' has exposed critical gaps – both in existing business processes, and the technologies required to underpin them within a remote-working environment that avoids overloading internal networks.

Due to the current situation, there's now increased interest in digitising legal case and process management solutions, and accessing

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Russell Wood, commercial manager, Infographics

those via our cloud-managed service – rather than traditional ‘on premise’ deployments.

It's being sharply recognised that standard disaster-recovery plans are not enough; law firms need ‘anytime, anywhere’ access to workflow-driven processes and live, user-targeted performance data, to support agile working and increased resilience. So, particularly in the current climate, law firms are finding the benefits of cloud delivery outweigh perceived concern around key data and systems security. As well as 24/7 access to professional services delivery solutions from any location, FloSuite Cloud, for example, also enables a rounded, fully-managed application service, underpinned by a reliable, secure Microsoft Azure platform.

As this model eliminates the need to access cloud-enabled services via the corporate network and VPNs, it solves the current overload problem many firms are grappling with due to high volumes of home workers.

With cloud solutions, all the user needs is reliable internet access. But there are, of course, other essential parts of the jigsaw.

Process readiness and capture

Process readiness and capture is one of those. All the cloud-enabled technology in the world can't solve your problems unless you are process-ready.

Infographics has a lot of experience of helping clients capture and deploy business processes across multiple case management and internal administrative workflows. Often these processes have remained the same for many years – perhaps because systems are deemed too complex and high-risk to allow users to make direct changes.

So, underpinning transformation projects with solutions like FloSuite can help to de-risk their digitisation, ensuring the right tasks are distributed to the right people in both the front and back-office.

Law firms that have undergone this cultural and technological transformation are now in a strong place amidst the current crisis; they're

‘process-ready’, and able to work remotely and efficiently. This is further strengthened where they have flexible, cloud-based access.

That said, reliance on established ways of doing things, particularly where change involves certain user roles taking ownership for new tasks and data input, can still prove a tough barrier to break through.

But this change is now essential, and not just a matter of choice – so change is happening, and happening quickly.

Digitising proforma billing and forecasting

One area where there has historically been cultural resistance to change is within finance – specifically proforma billing and forecasting.

The established way of doing things can be an arcane hybrid of printed documents, passing along of handwritten notes and manual sign-off. Whilst this makes change difficult, it also means there are big gains to be achieved in process efficiency.

As this is clearly not a function that can be left on pause during a switch to homeworking, it has come under increased focus.

Some of our larger global clients, who were already in the deployment phase with our FloSuite proforma workflow-driven solution, have responded to the Covid-19 crisis by elevating the standing of their projects.

They are expediting and increasing the importance of implementations in this area; hastening their roll-out across multiple geographies, so they can benefit from operations continuing to run smoothly with a remote workforce.

The future

It's hard to know what the future will look like post-Covid-19, but one thing seems certain: the ability to support mass homeworking across all areas of the legal business, at an instant's notice, should be something everyone is getting fully prepared for.

Until now, this was not the case for many. Perhaps law firms will use this ‘new normal’ as an opportunity to explore and digitise their more neglected front and back-office processes, and embrace the idea of the agile workforce. ▀

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