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Achieving 'Voice Productivity' with Digital Dictation Software

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Although Whyte Hirschboeck Dudek S.C. ("WHD") is based in the Midwest (offices in Milwaukee, Madison, and Manitowoc, WI), the firm's clients and their business interests extend around the world, challenging the firm to continually create higher standards for client delivery, as a function of increasing staff efficiency, firm collaboration, and enhanced mobility.

The firm's IT group is a 14-member centralized team that is charged with the responsibility of pursuing value-added technology solutions for the staff and its clients. With this overriding mission in mind, Anna Boll, the firm's IT project manager, and I began our pursuit of selecting and rolling out a new dictation technology to our staff.

EVALUATING BUSINESS NEEDS

From the outset of our evaluation, we quickly realized that the technology of dictating had rapidly progressed — from an antiquated, manual "dictate to tape" process to a "voice workflow"

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scenario focused on delivering strategic IT and administrative objectives such as controlling equipment costs, enhancing attorney and staff productivity via mobility, and encouraging inter- and intra-office teamwork.

Initially, one of our biggest drivers to making a dictation system change was the limited future availability of dictation tapes. Besides being an inefficient capture method, we always had to deal with tapes breaking, lost dictations, tape repairs and the inability to efficiently get tapes into the right hands for on-the-fly transcriptions and processing. We quickly realized that digital dictation workflow was the answer, both from a cost and return-on-investment/efficiency standpoint.

During the selection process, we paid a great deal of attention to the potential product's overall ease of use — the end user interface would need to be intuitive so that support staff and attorneys could easily access and use the technology. We also wanted to team with a market leading technology with a strong legal following and reputable track record.

SELECTION DECISIONS

What we realized after our thorough technology evaluation, was that BigHand was the best digital dictation product for us, based on extensive market and product research from lawyers and IT support professionals — a critical factor in selecting a legal-specific system.

We also looked at Verdatum's and Nuance's dictation/transcription sys-

tems. The most compelling reason for choosing BigHand was that in addition to a great sales team, they provide a stable, easy to use product that will provide immediate benefits. So many solutions are over-kill and miss the target when it comes to providing the most basic requirements of the software. BigHand does a great job of making the software easy to use while coexisting nicely in any networking environment.

BigHand allows firm users, approaching 200 out of our total 300 member staff, to dictate using a handheld recording device that syncs the dictation files with the BigHand server or transcribe using a headset and foot pedal through an office PC or via the Web through a Citrix connection. In terms of usability, BigHand offers total visibility in one window, real-time tracking and pop-up alerts (to let secretaries know when a dictation is ready for transcription).

THE ROLL OUT

After starting with an initial pilot group, we rolled out a fleet of new Olympus (DS4000) digital dictation devices to the staff, and quickly completed desk-side training and troubleshooting, usually not exceeding 10 minutes per user. We also made sure that our department would be capable and available to field all technology and usability calls, and produced a flash digital dictation training video available on our intranet to further assist with training.

We also decided to add dictation

stores on servers in our Manitowoc and Madison offices to allow files to be stored locally in each office, though the BigHand server resides in our Milwaukee headquarters office.

In addition, we wanted to ensure remote capabilities via Citrix. To accomplish this, we asked our users to download a BigHand driver and run through a quick configuration in order to have Citrix recognize their Olympus dictation recorder or transcription foot pedals on their home PCs. This worked great.

In those instances when we require outside troubleshooting help, we have been able to fully rely on BigHand's Chicago-based support desk and technical expertise. BigHand has also included us in its future product development plans and will work with its North American clients (much like it has with its 500 or so European sites) such as WHD on incorporating feature/function input into future product releases.

BENEFITS REALIZED

WHD has now been effectively using BigHand's digital dictation software for less than six months, but the benefits and positive feedback have already been plentiful. Here are several examples:

Happy Attorneys. Utilizing BigHand's digital dictation workflow system enables the firm's attorneys to delegate dictations in a streamlined and automated manner, leaving them more time to focus on adding more legal value to clients. Although still in its infancy, we have already received glowing feedback from attorneys on our BigHand selection.

Security. Privacy, confidentiality and security are paramount to the nature of a law firm's work. Why risk having a lost tape or .wav being listened to or somehow obtained during the process of being delivered, sent, or stored? BigHand compresses and encrypts dictation to ensure that a law firm's need for total confidentiality and security is addressed.

Mobility. BigHand utilizes a combination of Citrix or Terminal Services (Web access), Olympus dictation

devices, and in the future, potentially BlackBerry compatibility (now available) to enable dictation to be sent back to office support staff immediately and remotely.

Teamwork. A system such as BigHand can create "virtual" teams, where secretaries in a department band together to turn work around quickly because they can see all the outstanding work tracked on screen.

Management Reporting. The BigHand digital workflow software gives us total visibility and tracking of management information across our users, departments and sites. Reports such as the number of dictations completed daily, number outstanding at the end of the workday, secretarial performance over time, are available to management.

Legal Systems Integration. BigHand can be integrated with our DMS so users can save precious time in the document creation process.

Overhead Costs. BigHand will save WHD valuable overhead costs due to the fact that dictations can be easily pushed to any available resources, regardless of location, work and vacation schedules, or sick leave.

Thin-client Support. The Citrix platform is increasingly popular within our firm as a remote connection solution and also as a way of bringing down IT support costs on a firm wide basis. BigHand's ability to reliably transfer voice over thin client infrastructures via Citrix has been a major selling point for our IT group and entire staff.

OUR VOICE PRODUCTIVITY FUTURE

Overall, the rollout of BigHand has had a significant impact on our firm and our clients. Secretaries make fewer mistakes as the sound quality is clearer, document turnaround times are significantly improved due to increased mobile and automated delivery methods, and attorney's spend more time billing and on relationship management, and fewer hours creating their own documents.

I believe the product will continue to provide better workflow efficiencies and begin to utilize voice to text conversion capabilities with a simple user interface ("UI"). Using Blackberries as a digital recording device has many benefits including lowering hardware costs associated with digital equipment (*i.e.*, don't have to carry two devices) and increased mobility with immediate transmittal of dictations to the home office (while on the wireless data network). The key is to continue adding useful features while keeping the UI simple and easy to use. I am confident BigHand will continue to perform in this manner.



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About BigHand Inc

A Microsoft Gold Partner and BlackBerry ISV Partner based out of Chicago, London and Sydney BigHand is the leading digital dictation vendor in the global legal sector, maintaining the five largest sites at international law firms and with more legal installations in total than all other suppliers combined. BigHand3 was nominated as "Best of Breed System of the Year" at the Legal Technology Awards 2007. Additionally BigHand was voted "Best Legal Office Technology System 2004" from votes from over 14,000 lawyers and IT managers across the legal sector at the LOTIE Awards. BigHand's leading product also won the Society for Computers & Law IT Award in 2003 for "the most outstanding application of information technology to the law." Further information is available at <http://www.bighand.com> or email inquiry@bighand.com.