

McCarthy Tétrault's Dictation Workflow Finds a Helping Hand

By Marin Feldman

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McCarthy Tétrault had a problem. Many of its lawyers rely on dictation devices, but with analog technology quickly becoming obsolete, McCarthy's IT department sought a product designed for this century rather than the last one. The 600+ lawyer firm first tried stand-alone digital software, but found it slow and inadequate to meet its administrative and workflow needs. Thom Oakes, McCarthy's Director of Information Technology, explains, "We were also restructuring the legal assistants into teams. We had been trying to use a standalone product to scale up to manage workflow, but we found that we had to move up to a more robust product."

Workflow Management Drives BigHand Past Its Rivals

Enter [BigHand Digital Dictation](#). Developed by BigHand, a voice productivity software company with offices in Chicago, Toronto, London, and Sydney, BigHand essentially works by transferring encrypted .wav and .dss files to an internal firm server, and routing them to the appropriate source such as an available transcriptionist. Eight hundred firms worldwide currently use BigHand, including 100 in the United States.

McCarthy chose BigHand over digital dictation competitors such as Crescendo and WinScribe because it found the interface more functional from a transcription perspective and preferred the robust administrative

features. It also felt Big-Hand better addressed the primary problem — workflow management.

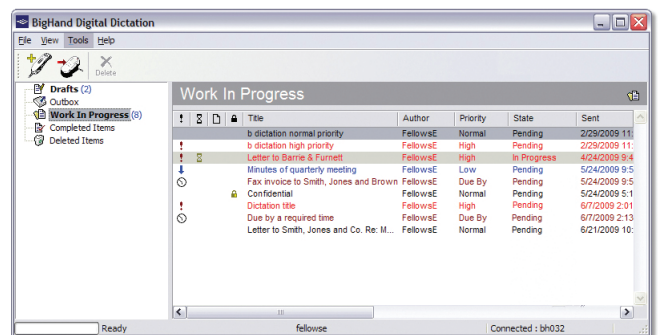
McCarthy first rolled out the new technology in March 2008 and implemented an upgrade in November 2008. For remote access, the firm uses BigHand's telephony module rather than its Blackberry app. Lawyers simply call a number and dictate via telephone. The roll-outs, according to Oakes, "went very smoothly" and required minimal training for attorneys and secretaries.

BigHand Gets Thumbs Up From Dictation Veterans

More than a year after the initial roll-out, Oakes reports that BigHand is "heavily used" by McCarthy personnel. The application provides a level of workflow visibility that many in the firm find helpful.

The lawyers like it because they can send dictation files directly to their secretaries for transcription and can see their files' positions in the network queue. Deal and litigation team leaders like it because they can evaluate team member performance and monitor workload. And administrative managers have restructured deployment of their staff to optimize practice groups, per the firm's original objective.

But BigHand has not converted keyboard jockeys. McCarthy has not seen



a general uptick in use of dictation since BigHand arrived. Also, Oakes says that it is hard to tell whether attorneys use BigHand's remote capabilities, which is one of the benefits over standalone digital recorders.

Oakes does not characterize Big-Hand as a cost savings initiative for McCarthy given BigHand's price, which can range from \$300-\$500 per user, depending on firm size. Still, Oakes is more than satisfied with his firm's choice of BigHand. "As far as other deployment projects have gone, BigHand went smoothly, quickly, and with overall user acceptance. I can rate it a 10 out of 10. No real complaints from anyone. We're very happy with the entire project."



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