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Producing Documents Fast With Dictation

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MARSHALL, DENNEHEY, WARNER, COLEMAN & GOGGIN

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Marshall, Dennehey, Warner, Coleman & Goggin installed digital dictation systems and workflow using BigHand Digital Dictation. As a result, the firm can report a 300 percent improvement in document turnaround times and forecast a savings in administrative expenses of \$1,500 per attorney per year. When you add the increased mobility for attorneys and overall ease of use for employees, the firm's BigHand rollout is certainly one of the most successful IT projects in the last 12 months.

THE BUSINESS DRIVER

Like many law firms across the U.S., Marshall, Dennehey still had many employees relying on old analog tape dictation machines. This was a concern because most tape manufacturers have already discontinued the production of tape equipment and those who have not, soon will.

We were also having increasing difficulty in recruiting quality support staff, especially at some of the smaller regional offices in our 17 office network. This led to occasional document turnaround times averaging seven to 10 days. We knew we needed to take action to not only increase efficiency in this area, but to provide a workflow that would simplify our employees' ability to proactively and efficiently dictate and transcribe.

Increased mobility for attorneys is also an area we knew we had to address in order to remain competitive and offer top notch legal services. Clients now expect law firms to be mobile and productive 24/7.

WHY BIGHAND?

When we began looking for a digital dictation workflow

solution, we discovered most products seemed to be designed for the medical industry. BigHand stood out as being the only global vendor whose product was designed specifically for attorneys.

John Gonzales, shareholder in the King of Prussia office, says, "BigHand saves me time by allowing me to simply send an assignment electronically, instead of physically dictating on a tape, taking the tape to my secretary and then waiting for the tape to be returned. There is never a situation where I have to look for a blank tape and my work is completed faster and more accurately."

BigHand dictation facilitates workflow by distributing dictation assignments in discreet files. Secretaries do not have to complete an entire tape before moving to the next assignment. Gonzales says that "is especially helpful when I have a rush that must be completed immediately."

Before BigHand, secretaries would have to stop working on a tape, put the tape aside and then complete the rush. This created the possibility of error and was rather clumsy. With BigHand, however, "my secretary can simply stop what she is doing and start working immediately on the rush and complete it quickly with a minimum of disruption to her regular work flow," says Gonzales.

Technically, the back-end of BigHand3 was also very important. It allows us to manage all our employees' dictation across all 17 offices and also has proven multisite redundancy – if one site is unavailable, the content can be accessed from another site. This is important since, for many attorneys, dictation is mission-critical in terms of getting documents out the door and it facilitates our plan to provide secretarial support to remote offices.

Training was also important. Sandy Caiazzo, regional manager at Marshall Dennehey, described it this way: "We really liked the user-friendly interface, and that the workflow



LIZ BROWN

possibilities were suited to legal practice, as it was important that the product be easy to train. The results certainly supported that decision. There was no question that we posed that didn't have a simple answer."

THE BOTTOM LINE

The impact on document turnaround times has been dramatic. The way the system creates distinct, separate dictations and makes them available across the firm means that secretaries can transcribe more efficiently and share the workload easily. In our Akron office there were times when document turnaround lagged by seven to 10 days. That is now barely two to three days, and the majority of work goes out within 24 hours. We are experiencing similar results in our King of Prussia office. So we've gained almost a business week in productivity.

Overtime costs have gone down, too. We saved \$3,500 per five attorneys in Akron – so when you roll that out across the firm it does add up. Another cost reduction came in tape management. The firm was also spending \$18,000 per year just sending tapes from office to office, a cost we have been able to completely eliminate since rolling out BigHand. Travel time has also been reduced.

It was not uncommon to incur travel expenses because it was necessary to send support staff to other offices to cover a personnel shortage. For example, in a three-month period for a single office, travel expenses for support staff were \$1,006. With BigHand, Marshall Dennehey can eliminate travel costs since a secretary can transcribe dictations originating in any of our 17 offices without leaving his or her desk.

Less tangible than dollars returned – as we don't have confirmed stats – is BigHand's reduction in recruitment requirements by improving our secretary-to-attorney ratio. And, in terms of stress levels, the office is now a more efficient and organized place. Attorneys have access to anything they would want to know about their dictations and their status; secretaries can clearly see what their workloads are and office managers can distribute the work more easily and from anywhere.

We have also found an increase in the number of people who may work on a matter – sometimes three secretaries

may pitch in during a short amount of time in order to help get a high-priority piece of work out the door. Sandy Caiazzo says "it has turned into a bonding exercise and increased our sense of working for one firm. Support staff from different offices interact with each other more, and the staff at the smaller offices benefit as they can be recognized as key players by helping out at crucial times. Things like absence and maternity leave can have a real impact at remote offices so the support and saving that BigHand offers is crucial now too."

In terms of mobility, we have one attorney using the BigHand Telephony/cell phone dictation module, which has meant that he has no outstanding dictations when he returns to the office, as compared to the days when he used to return and deposit 10 tapes with his secretary. It would take days to turn around.

IMPLEMENTATION

The BigHand Digital Dictation implementation at Marshall Dennehey involved local partner Graffen Business Systems Inc. whose experience, implementation expertise and long-standing relationship with Marshall Dennehey was a highly beneficial factor contributing to the success of the project.

We are rolling BigHand out to all offices in the first half of 2008 – and with remote Citrix access on the agenda for us, we are also going to be utilizing BigHand's integration and operation with thin client systems.

Liz Brown is director of information technology at Marshall, Dennehey, Warner, Coleman & Goggin. The leading defense litigation firm provides legal services from 17 offices throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Ohio and Florida.

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