

## **BigHand Digital Dictation Improves Workflow**

**By Joyce Hamel**

Rusin Maciorowski & Friedman, Ltd. (Rusin), with 75 users in three Illinois-based offices, is a specialty law firm focused on representing employers and their insurance carriers in all aspects of the workplace injury, including Workers' Compensation, OSHA, and personal injury. The firm has been consistently using technology as a key component to providing modern legal services. It is with this focus on service, productivity and efficiency gains that Rusin recently undertook a re-evaluation of its existing stand-alone digital dictation technology.

### **DIGITAL DICTATION SELECTION: ART OR SCIENCE?**

As part of my role as Firm Administrator, productivity lags, as well as bottlenecks and workflow issues concerning flow of information and documents, are all brought to my attention — sooner or later — and obviously require swift action. We were faced with a big challenge when we began to rate the efficacy of our existing dictation technology and best practices of delivering dictations. It was time to make a change, primarily based on the following factors:

- Tapes were an old and arduous mechanism for producing documents leading to transcription delays; loss and breakage was a major issue; and worst of all, a distinct lack of mobility alternatives and flexibility severely limited collaboration options;
- Our standalone digital system quickly proved very slow (based on bandwidth restrictions), and

---

**Joyce Hamel** has been Rusin Maciorowski & Friedman's Firm Administrator for eight years, with responsibilities for day-to-day operations, human resources, work flow, supervising support staff and facilities management.

was essentially insecure (confidential files were open to access by anyone), presenting a severe security challenge;

- The existing application was not designed to be used on a LAN network (and network utilization was poor), resulting in manual and cumbersome installation; and
- Scale was also a major concern since the standalone system could only support four to six users at one time, quickly limiting us and, as a result, costing the firm more and more staff hours and IT resources to support.

### **GETTING (A) BIGHAND?**

While we had plenty of reasons to transition away from our standalone system, we did not really know all of our options when it came to an enterprise solution. We ended up narrowing our search to a few qualified vendors (the pool was small considering we wanted someone with vast experience in legal implementations). I had dedicated a year to searching for significant change and my criterion was to team up with a company that has a track record of technical expertise and customer service. In the end, after I was satisfied that I had completed a qualified research, we turned to our peers within the industry, and when receiving validation from other firms, we opted for BigHand, a Chicago-based digital dictation provider with the track record we were looking for — over 600 successful law firm implementations worldwide. Beyond track record, the main reason we opted for BigHand focused on its reputation as a legal workflow system designed specifically for attorney and secretary relationships. In addition, the workflow options provided for our support staff, especially when it relied on sharing transcriptions and dictations, was phenomenal. Our ability to customize and create a unique software interface that was most compatible with our users' way of working greatly increased adoption and firm-wide use.

From a direct return-on-investment and tangible measurement standpoint, BigHand provides several savings that have further increased the

technology's popularity within our firm. First, the software's compatibility with various hardware dictation devices enables the firm to use existing devices and save on additional hardware investments, typically \$300-\$500 per unit. Clearly, productivity gains have had the biggest impact on us, not only from a workflow perspective, but also as a means of effective cost control. For example, we are now able to guarantee document turnaround times of 24 hours or less, compared with 48-72 hours with our old dictation methods. The quicker we can set documents in motion, the faster we can complete our client work and initiate the billing process. The overall administrative productivity gains have been measured at roughly 25%; that has translated to zero document-specific bottleneck issues when it comes to secretarial absences.

As a result of efficiency, the firm has been able to compensate for the departure of three support staff members. The savings equated with this were estimated at more than \$100,000. The biggest contributor to a more efficient process has been the support staff's ability to readily access dictations that need to be worked on (regardless of whom they are for), and increased visibility of who is working on what, via productivity and workflow reports. Also, attorneys who have not dictated before are now dictating and are more productive with better quality of output. For example, using BigHand workflow, a new attorney can easily get assigned a more experienced secretary who can standardize and improve the quality of document output. Senior attorneys can also listen to the dictations of junior/new attorneys, while they focus on other tasks, to ensure the legal advice being given is correct.

In order to fully appreciate how a technology upgrade such as BigHand literally changed our users' perspective, we took time to talk to the frequent users of the dictation technology — legal secretaries and our attorneys. The support staff loved it immediately for its ease of use and convenience, as well as the simple fact that transcription and

*continued on page 4*

---

## BigHand

*continued from page 3*

dictation errors could be corrected with a click of the mouse versus having to erase tapes. The staff appreciated the team-working aspect of the system, especially the ability to work with others on specific dictations and easily transcribe a collection of pending dictations regardless of location.

An even greater impact was felt by many of the firm's attorneys who previously struggled to provide dictations to their support staff once removed from the office or on client business. According to Daniel R. Egan, a Rusin partner who often is working remotely, the system highlight was the instant ability to download his dictations to the office, allowing his support staff to transcribe material for review, either via an e-mail attachment or an electronic file on the desktop. In turn, his clients, and all of the firm's clients for that matter, now have quicker access to flawlessly prepared briefs and documents they need.

### A MOBILE SOLUTION

While Rusin has greatly benefited from the full feature set provided by BigHand, the single most significant change has been brought about by the robust mobility options now provided our user base. Like most mid-size firms, we have several locations in our office network, so effectively communicating and working with colleagues in other offices (especially if you are the one managing the administrative side) is essential. In addition, we have a growing number of mobile attorneys and in our part of the country, inclement winter

weather often dictates how mobile (or not) our staff can be. Now with BigHand, we can take advantage of all of the mobile functionality to remove any previous barriers to meeting client demands. Here are some general best practices scenarios of how mobility solutions such as BigHand greatly improve productivity as has been the case at our firm:

- **Handheld savings.** Mobile digital dictation software for BlackBerry and Windows Mobile improves availability by enabling anytime, anywhere collaboration and communication between attorneys and their support staff. Instead of paying for a \$300 or \$400 professional dictation handset (which you have to wait until you get back into the office to dock), attorneys can now simply use their existing wireless BlackBerry or Windows Mobile Smartphone to record instructions or notes when working remotely and submit them immediately to office-based secretarial support. If needed, relevant digital pictures taken using either device can now be sent back to the office at the same time, together with essential accompanying voice notes, accelerating the document creation process.
- **Connecting and collaborating impacts the bottom line.** Legal practices are becoming larger and more varied, resulting in attorneys working anytime of the day or night. Getting support is not an option; it is a must. Rather than experience a major peak of work after returning to the office, work filters through im-

mediately regardless of where that attorney is at any particular moment, removing any time delay. Since the dictations arrive in regular intervals instantly, secretaries can stay on top of workloads more easily, especially since many also support other attorneys.

- **Client satisfaction.** Using a voice mobility tool can allow you to spend more time with your clients by communicating more effectively with your office-based support. A successful legal practice means meeting clients' needs, and lawyers are being asked to act as an indispensable business partner to their clients. This means less time typing and drafting a document yourself, and more time speaking to clients. Also in terms of profitability, the disparity between lawyer billing rates and secretarial costs means having your personal assistant do your administrative work, is far more cost effective.

### FUTURES

We have had great success introducing a new technology, in this case BigHand digital dictation, to our law firm. Success has been defined by rapid user adoption, a much improved document production workflow process, remote access and remote mobility options that did not exist before, and tangible and measurable return on our software investment. Moving forward, Rusin Maciorowski & Friedman, Ltd. will look to add more mobility options by embracing a broader BlackBerry dictation rollout initiative.



---

## e-Mail Management

*continued from page 2*

### PICKING A STRATEGY

All firms are not the same; the need for risk management and collaboration at each firm is different, depending on the practice areas and types of clients serviced. Some lawyers work independently while others work in larger teams, and this difference determines how important collaboration is for that par-

ticular firm. When it comes to risk management, some firms face significantly greater risk in their practice based on the clients they service or type of work they perform.

There are four strategies that a firm may use to select the right e-mail management approach. These strategies are intended to balance the needs for risk management versus collaboration.

1. **Archivers.** Archivers are organizations that have very little risk

of litigation or investigation. The need for lawyers to work in teams and collaborate on matters is minimal. An investment in e-mail archiving will reduce collection and response costs in case of e-discovery.

2. **Collaborators.** These are similar to Archivers in that the organization has a low risk of litigation. However, Collaborators need the ability to share some

*continued on page 8*