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Bamberger, Foreman, Oswald and Hahn, LLP Leverages BigHand Voice Software to Increase Staff Efficiency

CASE STUDY

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By Terry Farmer, Managing Partner, Bamberger, Foreman, Oswald and Hahn LLP

They say necessity is the mother of invention. Although our firm's decision to replace and upgrade dictation technology was on our technology to-do list, we did not anticipate the overwhelmingly positive response from the user base, our clients, and the favorable impact on the firm's bottom line. The prospect of exploring new digital dictation technology was initially introduced and endorsed by IT and firm management. However, the fact that BigHand became a catalyst for better teamwork between support staff and attorneys, increased the firm's ability to produce documents and deliver work product, and resulted in a complete return-on-investment within three months of rollout exceeded our wildest expectations.

With 41 lawyers and 45 support staff members located across six offices in central and southern Indiana, Bamberger's ability to effectively connect support staff with attorneys in order to produce high-quality client work was tested with the firm's aging Olympus dictation system. With the evaluation and selection of a new-and-improved digital dictation system, the firm also wanted to stay true to its mission of providing staff with tools to make jobs easier and more efficient. Speaking of efficiency, all IT aspects of the new system, including planning, implementation, and user training, were managed directly by Bamberger's IT administrator Gerald Duncan.

Out With the Old ... In With the New

In deciding to upgrade systems, we quickly realized that our current dictation system would not be able to handle existing document production and workflow demands, let alone any planned growth or future expansion. In evaluating digital dictation options and eventually selecting BigHand, we knew our ability to manage workflow across all our offices, observe the entire process at a glance, and proactively drive the process would be critical to success. Although Olympus worked well for what it could do, BigHand impressed with its ability to allow you to assign groups to outstanding dictations, make these document workflows visible to all groups, and enable ad-hoc collaboration to get the outstanding work done. We found this very critical for our remote offices with less support staff.

Bamberger selected BigHand at the end of 2008 and had a test group up and running by mid-February. The firmwide rollout was completed by the end of March 2009. End-user training focused on our support groups, as opposed to individual support staff, and lasted 30 minutes per group. Attorney training took 10 minutes, resulting in virtually no downtime or work interruptions, something that cannot be said for most enterprise-type software implementations.

In terms of everyday use, BigHand software has now been installed on desktops and BlackBerry Smartphones across the firm's Evansville, Indianapolis, Mt. Vernon, Poseyville, Princeton, and Vincennes offices. This enables attorneys to record, edit, and send verbal files or tasks to office-based support staff. Voice tasks, instructions, and dictations are sent on-the-go via BigHand, then instantly entered in the office workflow, and tracked via status updates, priorities, and alerts. This allows our smaller offices to be supported centrally when resources are stretched, which means we have a stronger overall infrastructure producing a consistent quality of documentation.

Technology As a Catalyst for Collaboration

From the beginning of the rollout and training phases, we made sure to involve the entire firm in the upgrade to BigHand digital dictation, rather than treat it as an IT or admin pet project. As a result, we were able to address any concerns related to potential staff reductions, and clearly share our vision to facilitate team building among support staff, and link certain attorneys with various secretaries they did not have access to before.



To support this open door policy of sharing information as well as implementation milestones, we briefed all attorneys that a dictation upgrade was in the works and what it would mean to them. For the initial pilot, we rolled out BigHand to a practice group that is very tech savvy and comfortable with digital dictation, resulting in a very smooth kickoff and great buzz surrounding the potential of BigHand. We gave each support team the complete authority to manage their own workflows and encouraged knowledge sharing as it related to optimal dictation techniques, as well as streamlined forms and processes. Overall, BigHand software has been a great tool in promoting team culture and encouraging work sharing. Our support staff has formed virtual teams—with names such as Digital Divas, Busy Bees, and Awesome Assistants—and really embraced the technology in an effort to expedite client service. They are in complete control of the document production workflow and realize the accountability that goes along with it. On top of that, the BigHand project has taken collaboration among support staff, IT, and the attorneys to new heights. Administration has gone from worrying about support staff bandwidth and resource challenges to being able to manage effectively and focus on more strategic initiatives.

The Proof Is in the Savings

Overall, BigHand has helped our attorneys get more work done, expedite the document production process, reduce support staff time, and improve client service. Although direct cost savings was not a key objective in the original project scope, we have found that rapid return-on-investment was an unexpected byproduct of the reduction of secretarial overtime promoted by BigHand software. In addition, due to the workflow optimization and resource management features it offered, the firm has not had to replace assistants who left of their own accord.

Making the BigHand decision however, was not a no-brainer. In fact, we first rejected the IT committee's recommendation to bring in BigHand, because it looked a little expensive when compared to our existing Olympus software, but the ability to manage our resources more effectively and genuinely boost mobility proved too strong a case in the end. Looking back, we are very satisfied with our decision to opt for a more robust, strategic technology: the BigHand software has paid for itself in record time. Beyond hard data, seeing how our attorneys now collaborate with support staff in any office, utilize their BlackBerry BigHand Mobile application, and view the live progress of specific client documents via their Work in Progress interface, demonstrates overall project success.

Beyond these benefits, increased teamwork and collaboration enabled via BigHand has resulted in less overtime worked by the support teams, and more efficiency during regular office hours. Since the rollout, the firm has put a new staffing strategy in place by making support resources available to all of our offices, and giving administration lots of options with staffing levels. New workflows, enabled by BigHand's functional flexibility, are allowing the firm to get client work done anywhere, anytime, regardless of geography.

Digital Dictation Futures

Bamberger's positive experience with BigHand's digital dictation solution paves the way for continued creativity when it comes to addressing firm efficiencies and ratcheting up client service. We will continue to invest in the "attorney-focused future," with an emphasis on getting various practice groups to agree on workflow and form standards as well as more reliability on mobile applications—ultimately getting even more out of our technology investment while exceeding our clients' expectations.

About the Author

Terry Farmer is the managing partner at Bamberger, Foreman, Oswald & Hahn, LLP. He began his career in Ohio at a time when a good mortgage rate was 17 percent and the major steel and rubber industries in that part of the country were facing huge layoffs. Terry went to Ohio to be a trial lawyer. Circumstances made him a bankruptcy and creditors' rights attorney. Since then his practice has expanded significantly but also remains grounded in commercial, banking, and corporate law. Within these areas his work has tended to concentrate in areas of business disputes and high-end transactional work. Accordingly, Terry's time is about equally split between the courtroom and the negotiating table.

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WWW.BIGHAND.COM

CHICAGO

125 S. Wacker Drive,
Suite 300, Chicago
IL 60606, USA
T +1 312-893-5906
F +1 312-893-5505
E inquiry@bighand.com

LONDON

27 Union Street,
London SE1 1SD, UK
T +44 (0)20 7940 5900
F +44 (0)20 7940 5901
E enquiry@bighand.com

SYDNEY

Level 14, 309 Kent Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia
T +61 2 9994 8933
F +61 2 8569 0393
E enquiry@bighand.com

TORONTO

WaterPark Place, 20 Bay Street,
12th Floor, Toronto ON
M5J 2N8, Canada
T +1 416-216-4609
F +1 416-214-2043
E inquiry@bighand.com