

Case study: Holdens Solicitors

Holdens Solicitors drives quality led business transformation with BigHand Professional and BigHand Speech Recognition



Efficiency gains: driving internal change with technology adoption

Overview

Holdens Solicitors has been providing legal services to clients in Lancashire, Cumbria and beyond for over 170 years. Its teams of experienced and dedicated professionals offer expertise in a diverse range of legal specialism, including crime, commercial and family. Over the past few years, Holdens has seen its business profile shift, moving away from high volume legal aid cases towards more commercial and private family work.

In a time of significant change, Holden's commitment to Lexcel, the Law Society's legal practice quality mark for practice management and client care, has been a core foundation for business improvement and transformation. Lexcel's flexible, supportive management framework is designed to help practices develop consistent operational efficiencies and client services, manage risk effectively, reduce costs and promote profitability – and Holdens is now a Lexcel flagship practice.

Quality Drive

In 2012, Holdens Solicitors embarked upon a wide reaching strategy to use technology to drive internal change for efficiency and effectiveness, building on its existing investment in BigHand Professional by adding BigHand Speech Recognition to further enhance the efficiency of dictation services.

While Holdens was keen to achieve the additional efficiency gains offered by the intuitive voice recognition technology, the firm had a far more ambitious objective: to leverage the additional time freed up as a result to drive organizational excellence and business transformation.

As Susan Rutherford, Practice Manager, Holdens Solicitors, explains, "Law firms recognize that BigHand Speech Recognition and BigHand Professional can deliver significant improvements in productivity but few firms have recognized that it is also an important driver for improving core quality standards."

Efficiency Gains

With 19 attorneys and 12 secretaries using BigHand Professional and BigHand Speech Recognition, the way in which dictations are handled has changed fundamentally over the last few years. Almost three quarters (72%) of all dictations have been sent to BigHand Speech Recognition since roll out, and usage is as high as 99% with some users.

The implication for secretarial resources is very significant, with secretaries spending 47% less time playing back BigHand Speech Recognition dictations. For attorneys, this means rapid turnaround, with speech recognition dictations completed 43% quicker than ordinary dictations.

It is this additional time that has been key to Holdens' quality improvements, releasing secretarial resources to undertake a range of best practice procedures, from file control and file management to conflict checking and assessing aspects of administrative risk that are essential to the Law Society Standard.

Susan Rutherford explains, "Deep understanding of the structure of Lexcel is required to appreciate the level that legal secretaries are now engaged in the whole cycle, from statutory risks through strategic planning to all of the different policies relating to IT – including cyber essentials – right through to the way in which clients are handled and files are managed. Legal secretaries at Holdens are very involved in the quality commitment, from strategic planning to engagement in billable tasks and billable hour targets; indeed, each secretary must spend a mandatory two sessions a year minimum on the Lexcel process."

Influencing Outcomes

A key aspect of the successful adoption of the speech recognition technology was Holden's inclusion of secretarial influencers up front. In addition to strong communication regarding the goal of the technology led change, Holdens was also able to take a number of senior secretaries to BigHand's User Conference prior to the implementation, to provide a far broader insight into the power and potential the technology could offer.

As Susan Rutherford explains, "The secretarial resource is a critical part of the delivery of the organizational strategic plan – from the optimization of billable hour capacity and the strength of the business, to achieving quality objectives. The combination of a strong narrative with a demonstration of the ease and simplicity of BigHand Speech Recognition created a very strong commitment to making the change."

She adds, "I think achieving early buy-in and having a driver for change that goes beyond simply applying the technology led to the commitment and levels of usage that we now enjoy."

Enabling Growth

In common with other professional services firms looking to leverage technology to drive efficiency, Holdens has reviewed the way in which secretarial and resource services are allocated across the business. While the firm has discovered that retaining a direct attorney to secretarial relationship works better than creating a single pooled resource, the use of BigHand Professional makes it simple to prioritize activity and reallocate urgent work across the company as and when required. This ensures workload can be managed flexibly and in line with clearly defined priorities.

In addition, with attorneys able to use BigHand both in the office and when working from home, the technology is supporting Holdens' flexible working policies and underpinning its business continuity and disaster recovery strategy. The ability to rapidly allocate work across the secretarial resources as required also ensures effective response when individuals are away from the office, such as on vacation or unwell.

Critically, the technology has delivered the efficiency and agility required to respond to business change. Over the past few

years the firm's profile has shifted from a high volume of legal aid family and crime work towards private family and commercial. This volume growth and redistribution of work has been easily absorbed by Holdens' existing secretarial resources as a result of the widespread adoption of BigHand Speech Recognition.

"Holdens has optimized the use of secretarial and admin resources through the use of BigHand Speech Recognition to support attorneys in increasing revenue despite the loss of an attorney in this area."

- Susan Rutherford, Practice Manager, Holdens Solicitors

Customer Focus

Holdens is now a flagship Lexcel firm and key to that achievement was the original vision that time freed up by improved resource utilization and productivity could be reallocated to drive quality. Indeed, so successful was this vision that within six months of adopting BigHand Speech Recognition, the firm, in conjunction with BigHand, was short listed for a Law Society award.

Since then, Holdens has continued to improve its quality commitment year on year, rising from six best practice processes in 2012 to over 25 in its last Law Society audit. The firm is now extending its use of technology to drive change by extending its focus on customer experience. While a 98% minimum client care satisfaction goal is in place, Holdens is now planning an analysis of on-going time utilization, with the goal of putting an additional 10% of time into customer care and understanding how that affects the business, processes and the customer. This will underpin another year of change for the business and add another dimension to the Lexcel audit for next year.

Susan Rutherford is now president of the local law society and is a strong advocate for speech recognition technology as a foundation for business change. She concludes, "BigHand Speech Recognition can deliver so much more if it is looked at holistically as part of strategic planning. I don't think we could have grown, redistributed the business and been so successful in driving up quality without BigHand."

