

Case study: Fletcher Day

Levelling the playing field: mid-sized firm gains competitive edge by maximising operational efficiency.



Fletcher Day drives cost savings and increases administrative efficiency with BigHand Now

Overview

The familiar trio of 'People, Process, and Technology' play a role in every business. However, this is particularly relevant within the legal industry. As medium-sized law firms increasingly compete with larger firms for clients, it is processes and the use of technology that is shifting and levelling the playing field. Not only is there a significant opportunity for an agile firm to gain traction, medium-sized organisations that are open to the adoption of forward-thinking technology can now hold their own and successfully compete with some of their larger counterparts.

A glowing exemplar of such a firm is relative newcomer Fletcher Day. Established in 2009 with two offices in London and Manchester, Fletcher Day's 60-strong team comprises approximately 50 fee earners covering seven practice areas including insolvency, residential and commercial property, private client, dispute resolution, employment and family, as well as a number of consultants that cover a range of other areas. Fee earners are supported by a small team of paralegals, legal secretaries and administrative staff.

While the firm has always been progressive in its adoption of legal technology and centralised administrative processes, in 2017 Fletcher Day identified a number of issues around the growing demand for reduced turnaround times of work versus the need

to keep overhead costs to a minimum. The firm also wanted to ensure that solid foundations were in place to support ambitious future growth plans.

Increased Visibility

For Fletcher Day, a review of the way administrative support was being provided to - and consumed by - the business, revealed a number of challenges regarding the visibility and management of tasks. While the firm already had very lean 'fee earner to secretary' ratios in place and a centralised email address for fee earners to submit administrative tasks, they had no visibility that tasks assigned were being carried out by the most suitable person. In addition, Fletcher Day identified a significant opportunity to provide greater visibility to fee earners of the status of an assigned task - and to ensure that all fee earners were benefitting equally and optimally from the centralised administrative support.

Karan Yearwood, Practice Manager at Fletcher Day explains: "As a growing mid-sized company, reporting is key to make sure that we scale in the right way, at the right pace. While we have always been advocates of using technology to cut down on inefficient processes and challenge the traditional structure of a law firm, moving forward without visibility of the actual work being undertaken across support teams was no longer an option."

Robust Task Management Solution

Fletcher Day's centralised administrative structure comprised one single email address that lawyers would send files to - from sound files, to letters, tasks or instructions and even specific work types such as specific property searches.

However, the firm's manual processes for flagging who was dealing with each task didn't always work, especially with staff spread across the firm's two offices. This lack of clarity could at times lead to duplication, potential delays, and a suboptimal allocation of resource.

A long-standing user of BigHand's digital dictation and mobility software, Fletcher Day made the decision to upgrade to the latest version of BigHand to enable access to the delegation tool, BigHand Now. This decision was made to help streamline processes and foster a 'right task to the right place at the right time' approach. In addition, the firm introduced BigHand Speech Recognition to a subset of its fee earners to increase self-sufficiency and help further automate certain types of document production.

One of the key drivers was to get the right people doing the work types they were best suited to complete, while also gaining better understanding of capacity issues and put in place management information to help guide future growth.

"The adoption of BigHand Now is giving us the task assignment capability that we were lacking, and has introduced a lot more organisation. We can now assign specific tasks to specific teams, paralegal work in particular, that previously might have been done by a secretary - can now be billed."

- Karan Yearwood, Practice Manager, Fletcher Day

"In addition, BigHand Now has introduced transparency across the whole firm: fee earners can see exactly who is doing what work and what the status of a particular task is, which helps with client expectation management and, importantly, an equitable allocation of resource." says Karan.

"Moreover," she continues, "the feedback is unanimous. The secretaries love it because they can look at work and delegate it to the relevant team if it's not something they should be doing. From an administrative perspective it's also been hugely insightful as we have visibility and control over what is actually happening in the business."

Wider Benefits

Beyond better insight into the firm's operational efficiency, which is a key factor in Fletcher Day's growth strategy, BigHand Now has helped it achieve substantial, tangible benefits, including improved turnaround times on work and significant cost savings.

As Karan explains, "Through the combination of BigHand Speech Recognition, which is starting to make our fee earners more self-sufficient, and BigHand Now, we have seen the average task turnaround time drop from over 30 hours to just 12 hours. This has had a huge impact on the business."

Indeed, Fletcher Day used to have a dedicated outsourced secretary based in South Africa, who would dial into the system and pick up work on an ad-hoc basis. The transparency BigHand Now has given, proved what was previously a gut feel: the firm did not have sufficient work going into the system to warrant that extra resource. "It was a direct cost saving," Karan says.

Moreover, despite - through natural attrition - Fletcher Day's secretarial team reducing in size by 50% since the go live of BigHand Now in May 2018, the improved workflow has meant that the firm has not had to hire replacement resource, but has maintained a comfortable position with existing staff.

"For an SME, these types of numbers are huge," concludes Karan. "The legal industry is increasingly competitive, so being able to stay lean as we grow could mean the difference between winning new business or not. And we're not standing still; our investment in technology will continue with the aim of ensuring we maintain that cutting edge."

As the playing field levels, it is firms like Fletcher Day, who have the vision and the understanding of how technology can support them to deliver the business of law as efficiently and effectively as possible, who will gain the upper ground.

