

FEBRUARY 2015

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ANALOG TO DIALOGUE



Gwen Philippou of Nicholas & Co talks modernising the firm's dictation technology – and how going digital with BigHand has empowered its people

Nicholas & Co is on a drive toward leaner ways of working, and management in the firm identified great potential to change, especially around dictation. The reason: it recognised its methods were not only inefficient but also becoming expensive. The ageing equipment was causing delays and the lack of remote access was a threat to business continuity.

A worsening headache of broken equipment, costly replacements and poor sound quality led to making the switch to digital dictation a matter of urgency. The longstanding tape recorders, though familiar, were becoming increasingly unreliable, says office manager Gwen Philippou. “Not only were they defective, we were spending quite a lot of money on repairing and replacing machinery. And every now and again a long tape would somehow drag itself out of the cassette casing, which was always a disaster.”

Philippou and the management team knew the firm's dictation equipment was “archaic and inefficient”, but now it was also becoming costly. Implementing BigHand digital dictation in May 2014 made a huge difference to the firm's processes, she says – it changed the way its people could manage their workloads, it sped up document turnaround and opened up new opportunities for efficiency and productivity.

REEL TO REAL

The transition itself was made easier, says Philippou, through solid technical support and also by new hires and locums who were already familiar with the platform.

“We wanted to use software that was tried and tested in the marketplace, and I'm glad we went with BigHand. I've been involved in a lot of different bits of new tech over the years and this was the smoothest and easiest. Our people are working a lot more efficiently now and they're very happy.”

Digital dictation is driving up productivity in a number of ways, says Philippou. First, simply in audio quality: “Dictation itself is so much clearer than before.

It makes a big difference to speed of turnaround when people can better understand what's been dictated.”

For longer, urgent dictations, secretaries are now easily able to split the work to reduce the load, says Philippou. From a management perspective, that can have a big effect.

“If someone goes on holiday or takes time off at short notice, anyone can pick up where they've left off. It's become so easy to see what's been done without having to also worry about physically moving tapes around or that something might get lost.”

POWERING MOBILITY

Digital dictation is also improving visibility on people's workloads during busier periods.

“You can see other each other's work, which means you know if someone is being overloaded.” There were some reservations among the secretarial team as to that transparency at first, says Philippou, but the benefits won out. “Some weren't sure about others being able to check how much work they've done, or how long it's taken. But it's helping us overcome blocks in productivity.” If, for example, everyone becomes slower doing someone's dictations, she says, it can help management identify and address the issue.

Resistance among users, too, has ebbed away as ease of use, efficiency and client value have won the day. “There were some who were attached to the cassette tapes because it's what they knew, and what they were comfortable with, but that's changed now.” Turnaround on work improved significantly with digital dictation and is also having an impact on client service, helping fee earners deliver to clients the quality and expediency of service they expect. Fee earners also now have the capability to work anywhere, anytime.

Remote access has had a telling impact, says Philippou. “One of our partners recently went on holiday to France – where his car broke down, and he was stuck because the garage couldn't get the parts.” His saving grace, she says, was packing his tablet –



LPM FACT FILE

Nicholas & Co

13 fee earners, 28 total staff

Offices: London

Specialisms: Commercial, property, dispute resolution, family law, wills, probate and trusts

which had BigHand on it. "He could distract himself from the stress of being stranded, get on with some work, and dictate some files to his secretary back here which was great."

AUDIO AUTONOMY

Reliability underpins many of the benefits that BigHand digital dictation has brought to Philippou's practice. Those benefits are also making people more productive, efficient and working more autonomously, now that tape has gone for good.

Nicholas & Co hasn't looked back since opting for the 'new model' equivalent of dictation software. By not having to re-record over the same pieces of tape, Philippou says the firm has been able to become more systematic about how it works internally, files dictations and retains records. "With a tape, you'd lose the

recording and never be able to access it again. Now we have it all at our fingertips."

Not only that, digital software is getting the firm's people excited about the future of dictation. "We had some of our team go to a recent BigHand user conference - they came back very enthused about new developments, around treating tasks as separate to dictations, as well as the software predicting how long something should take to do. Those are exciting, not only as management tools but also for our people to manage their own workloads even better."

As well as cutting down on mounting maintenance costs, by going digital with its dictations, Nicholas & Co has scored an easy win for its efficiency drive. What's next for the firm will be taking it further into new digital territory - and it's doing it with one less headache. **LPM**

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BigHand is the leading digital dictation and speech recognition company, providing software that improves productivity, efficiency, utilisation of resources and, ultimately, profitability.

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