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GUIDING HAND



Geraldine Collier, finance and practice manager at Dawson Cornwell, tells LPM about outsourcing IT support with Accesspoint Technologies – and how it's leading to better client service

London firm Dawson Cornwell doesn't have plans to scale, but wants to be the best family law provider in south-east England. The firm's finance and practice manager, Geraldine Collier, says: "Dawson Cornwell's key business objective is to be the best at what it does and provide consistently high-quality service to clients. The firm is well known for its expertise and has this year been shortlisted for Citywealth's magic circle awards for matrimonial firm of in 2016."

But, she adds, the firm is constantly looking for ways to improve client service – which is why it sought to revamp its IT systems last year.

"We realised that we needed to adopt new technology and transition into the 21st century if we wanted to improve client service – but we needed help."

To start its journey, the firm chose to outsource its IT help desk to Accesspoint Technologies, which would provide advice

and fix IT problems remotely.

"But Dawson Cornwell is a firm with a lot of personalities and we wanted someone to come and work with us in-house – so Accesspoint technicians now work in our office and have become an integral part of the business," says Collier.

But Accesspoint's mandate at Dawson Cornwell has evolved considerably since then, and they're now helping the firm to implement a new practice management solution. "The firm has long wanted a new PMS to drive efficiencies and help the business improve its client service – but the leadership team wanted to be sure it was investing in the right solution that would cater to the business's needs. Accesspoint has been holding our hand through the process – their advice has been vital and we wouldn't be able to do it without them." She adds that the firm's new PMS, due to be implemented in August 2017, will make the firm more collaborative and efficient, and

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Accesspoint are independent legal IT specialists who consult on a variety of information technology-related issues, offering the best in IT solutions to help firms work more effectively.

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where people make the difference

LPM FIRM FACTS

Dawson Cornwell**Corporate status: Partnership****30 fee earners, 40 total staff****Offices: London****Specialisms: Family law**

help it in its mission to be the best family legal services provider in the south-east.

NEW SOLUTIONS

Collier says that Dawson Cornwell's staff currently draft matter-related documents and financial reports in Microsoft Word and Excel and are stored on servers.

"This can make files difficult to find and access if staff are out of the office. It also means that the finance department doesn't have the ability to produce ad hoc reports – and creating them wastes a lot of time that could be used to improve areas that affect client service." She adds that matter files are also often incomplete because emails aren't properly saved to them – which could create issues in the future.

"Having a new PMS is going to revolutionise the firm from the ground up. Everything will be in one place and fee earners will be able to access files remotely – which will help lawyers progress cases and interact with clients on the go."

She adds that there are numerous other advantages to having a new PMS solution, including instant ad hoc financial reporting.

"There are some enormous challenges to setting up a PMS, and since my understanding of IT is limited, Accesspoint's advice has been vital in helping us choose the right system based on our needs, and helping us integrate it into the business."

She adds that perhaps the most important service Accesspoint provides to the firm is training.

"The problem of any new system or process is the level of disruption it causes to the business. Accesspoint will help us deal with this by providing our staff with high-quality training – not just in how to use the new system but advise on new cybersecurity precautions to take and inform us on areas where mistakes could easily be made." She adds that she's very much a believer in 'teach a man to fish', and that this training will help the business become more self-sufficient and tech savvy. Though adopting a new PMS solution is challenging,

says Collier, Accesspoint's ability to listen and adapt to the firm's needs is making the process significantly easier.

"Some IT consultancies just tell you what to do, but Accesspoint actually listen to our concerns and work with us to find the best solution.

"For example, when said that having a remote IT help desk wasn't working for us they didn't just say 'well, too bad', they sat down and worked out how they could better serve us and came on as in-house outsourced consultants. In that capacity, they helped us network our printers and continue to be a vital part of our implementation of the PMS."

She adds that the software firm's response time is also excellent – which is particularly important for any SME law firm manager who wears many hats.

"As a small firm manager it's enormously helpful to have the excellent level of support Accesspoint provides. In larger firms you might have a finance director, HR director, facilities director and such – but I'm the key point of contact for all those things at Dawson Cornwell, and knowing that I have someone on-hand for our IT needs is a relief and would be for any SME firm manager."

But aside from the software firm's excellent service, Collier says, perhaps the greatest advantage of outsourcing the firm's help desk is the cost-saving benefits.

"We can increase and decrease the amount of time they work with us as needed, which has significant cost-saving benefits over hiring an in-house technician."

Though technology can help firms drive efficiencies and improve client service, it's important for them to have the expertise behind them to help them make the right decisions. Plenty of firms invest in solutions without thinking about whether the solution is right for their firm – or how the firm will adapt to the new system. According to Collier, firms should acquire the expertise of knowledgeable people, such as those at Accesspoint, to ensure that they know what they're doing and have someone on hand in case anything goes wrong. **LPM**

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