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MODERN FAMILY



Paula Jacobs Amos, practice manager at family boutique firm GJ Law, on how moving to the cloud with Accesspoint made fee earners more productive on the go

London-based Gary Jacobs & Co (GJ Law) is a specialist family law firm. Practice manager Paula Jacobs Amos says: "The majority of our instruction comes from guardians appointed on behalf of children, who ask us to assist in their public law care proceedings.

"Our work is mostly legal aid. We don't have aspirations to scale like other SME firms, but simply to offer the highest quality service we can and be the best at what we do."

She adds that with the recent cuts to legal aid, however, it's becoming increasingly difficult to make services cost bearing, and legal aid firms are being forced to find ways to become more productive.

"Our solicitors have always needed to be mobile since they are constantly working in court. They pop in and out of the office regularly – stopping only a moment to pick up files, ready to go out to the next hearing. Before we adopted Accesspoint to enable flexible working they couldn't work easily in transit or while sitting in court," says Amos.

She adds that the firm realised it was time for it to move on and become more engrained with the IT practice of the modern world – and GJ Law is able to do that using Accesspoint.

CLOUD AND COURT

Amos wanted all of her firm's solicitor advocates to have full access to the information they needed on the go – which prior to introducing new technology could only be accomplished by solicitors carrying around large bundles of files.

"I found out that Accesspoint not only supports firms with their IT but also with their case management software."

GJ Law fee earners can access PDF documents that are stored in the case management system under the relevant file via Accesspoint's cloud servers. And it also gives them the opportunity to help manage their file – ensuring that emails get pushed into the right case.

She says: "There are lots of reasons we decided to go with Accesspoint – one of them was that our server was



coming to its natural life end. But a big driver for us was that we needed to be able to work more efficiently out of the office, and being in the cloud was the obvious solution.”

Before using Accesspoint, Amos noticed many of their solicitors were trying to make use of their personal tablets in court by downloading files and then dropping them off at their desktops after the proceedings.

“Luckily, the courts are becoming tech-savvy now. They’re providing WiFi because they realise that so many barristers and solicitor advocates are actually trying to access their documents. It’s not at an ideal level but they’re becoming more digital friendly. And GJ Law needed to be with the times as well – finding Accesspoint and joining the cloud nicely joins up everything the firm wanted to improve,” says Amos.

She adds that many of her solicitors are really excited that they can manage their own files now – allowing the firm to be more productive under the pressures that come with changes in legal aid regulation.

THE CASE CONUNDRUM

GJ Law has become more dependent on the case management system and email functions due to the change in pace of care proceedings – with only 26 weeks to complete the proceedings now, it’s vital for the firm to have an organised and easy to use system to manage their work flows whenever and wherever needed.

Using the Legal Aid Agency’s Client and Cost Management System (CCMS) creates a lot of work for Amos and her colleague, so management needs to be top notch in order to keep things running smoothly for the fee earners – which is where Accesspoint helps.

“The 26-week ruling means that the pace in which we work in care proceedings matter is full on. And, when you’re getting 50 to 100 emails on a single case in one day, with all the parties being copied in and trying to resolve issues, deal with matters, expert instructions and instruction agreement – that’s a lot of email.”

But it’s not just the quantity of the emails that’s the problem: Amos needs to be able to organise and complete draft orders and file appropriately. “Since everything is done by email, we found that it had become our enemy.”

The firm was also just printing off too much paper, she says, with long corresponding emails full of email signatures

and linked emails from multiple contacts. It had become difficult to manage.

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

“The team at Accesspoint are incredibly friendly and more than happy to help. And they know the system well – many of them help design or build it – and that’s what I needed. I’m not particularly tech savvy myself,” says Amos.

GJ Law doesn’t have an internal technology department – everything falls to Amos to sort out, she laughs.

“I needed someone that’s going to take the lead, and that was a big reason to go with Accesspoint,” she says. Her support staff are also keen to be trained to become experts in the system so that they are able to help their solicitors themselves.

“We have got some gremlins in the system which we’re trying to iron out at the moment – we’re still quite new to the programme but I know that Accesspoint want to do it right for us. They’ve been super-efficient, it’s taken us less than a month to get up and running.

“We had a great team during the set up and installation – the day we went live, we had a team around us to help sort out any questions and bugs on the day. And I know I can always call them to help when I run into any issues.”

It doesn’t take long to become an expert in the system, and less so to become comfortable using it. From an initial 10 minutes training meeting, Amos was able to code in documents and create briefs to counsel that self-populate.

“It’s all down to the user and I can see that it’s going to make life better for our people as long as they put the correct information in the right place. It may be time consuming at the beginning – since we were playing catch up with all our files – but it’s all going in the right direction. A positive direction.”

Law firms have been very slow to take up and accept the change in IT and new ways of working. Amos points out that we have to embrace it – there will always be innocuous emails that will come in. She says firms need to learn to spend money on IT – build it into their budgets and spend accordingly.

Amos says: “We’re Lexcel accredited – we have to abide by the requirements to ensure that our data online is secure and that we’ve taken the appropriate risk assessments. And having Accesspoint is like having a weight lifted off my shoulders – they understand law firms and the pressures we face.” **LPM**

LPM FIRM FACTS

Gary Jacobs & Co

Revenue: £1.2m

**Corporate status:
Limited company**

Six fee earners, 11 total staff

Offices: London

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

Accesspoint is an independent legal IT specialist that consults on a variety of information technology-related issues, offering the best in IT solutions to help firms work more effectively.

www.theaccesspoint.co.uk

