



Press Release

Providing a Single View

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Most large law firms have some or all of the components necessary to collaborate more closely with their clients than they do. Clients need and should demand a 'single client interface' says Mahshid Rafizadeh. Here she outlines what this means in practice.

Law has generally lagged behind business on the technology front, but law firms can no longer rely on the loyalty of the client. Clients' perception of 'value' is driving the move away from the traditional cost-plus basis of billing to a perceived value for the service they receive.

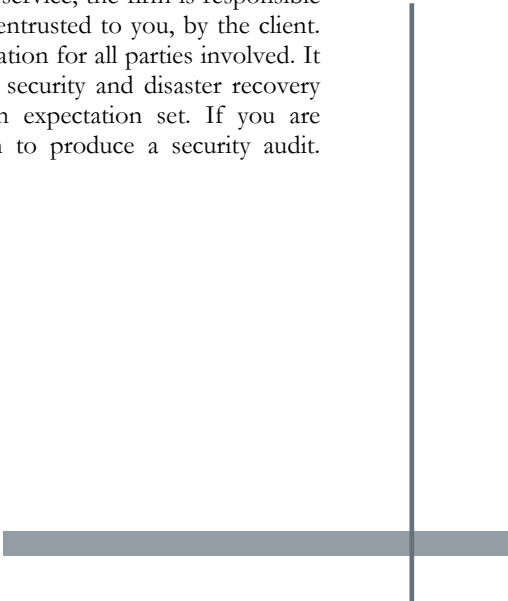
It is now a fact that some forward-thinking clients are becoming more and more demanding in terms of services they expect to receive from a legal firm. Law firms are no longer just measured on their reputation, but the level and delivery of services they provide.

To meet these increasing demands and to survive in this competitive climate, law firms have no alternative but to closely integrate technology within their working practices. Most large law firms already have some or all of the components necessary to enable them to collaborate more closely with their clients than they do today.

For the technically-minded, these components include document management, a form of know-how system, case management, client relationship management, internet, intranet and some form of extranet, e-mail and in some cases even web content management.

What most clients need — and should demand — is the seamless integration of all these various technologies in order to provide a single, personalised view of all the matters belonging to the company, no matter how many different law firms are on the company's legal panel. This is known within technology circles as a 'single client interface'.

This single client interface should, in reality, be a virtual working environment where information is pushed as well as pulled. The success of any such system largely depends on ensuring a number of key points. Also, by being the custodian and source of such a service, the firm is responsible for safeguarding and protecting the information that it has been entrusted to you, by the client. Loss or unauthorised access to information can have major implication for all parties involved. It is imperative that the firm has in place a very strict and reliable security and disaster recovery policy that is reviewed regularly to ensure its compliance with expectation set. If you are particularly nervous about security you should require the firm to produce a security audit.



To provide all of these elements requires a great deal of thought and consideration, not only in terms of cost, but also in terms of changes that the law firm has to undertake, culturally and procedurally. Of course, law firms need a large amount of input and help from its clients to ensure that the system works and genuinely meets all of these requirements.

In today's climate of technological advancement nothing is impossible; however, the cost of providing 'everything' can at times exceed the potential revenue that could be generated as a result.

So the best approach is to think big but start small. Simplicity is undoubtedly the key success factor of any IT project. All those involved in developing law firm-client interface systems should concentrate on the areas that will meet with low resistance and deliver high benefits. Once a system that works is in place, you can build on it gradually, systematically and logically.

There are many organisations, both within the profession and in the wider business environment that have forged ahead and installed the latest technology without much consideration or real measurements of the real benefits it can achieve. Newer technology does not necessarily mean better technology, and to design a good client interface it is necessary to take into account much more than just 'pure' technology.

It is always advisable to first review what resources your law firms already have and how these can be adapted to enhance their services before adding more bells and whistles. After all, the amount of money that they waste on ill advised IT projects will be reflected in your bills!

This article is an extract from imus white paper, Client Centric Portals — A Way Forward.

About imus

imus is an independent London based management consultancy and technology organization, specializing in Intellectual Asset Management. **The comprehensive management of knowledge within an organisation is our core business.** With a clear grasp of the challenges faced by organisations today, imus is able to provide all the services required to help our customers manage and retain their intellectual capital by delivering and deploying a Knowledge Based Solution successfully.

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