

LEGAL INDUSTRY DATA CLEANSING CASE STUDY

vision within a solution

Client Profile:

A medium sized UK based law firm with some 500 staff in its 5 offices. They provide a full range of legal services to the corporate, commercial and public sectors and to private clients in the UK and abroad..

Driver:

Though invariably a sore point in any organization, Document Archiving and cleansing remains crucial in a law firm. With an incoming electronic based document and knowledge management solution, it was deemed the appropriate time to undergo this exercise to ensure that 'junk' was not carried into the new system.

Challenges:

- *Encourage all users to identify documents that would be necessary to maintain*
- *To adopt a strict, yet effective, process for document migration and cleansing of existing and future documents*
- *Ensure that the archiving solution is reliable and not too complex to be used by the support staff*

***“Junk in means
 junk out. A
 clean and structured
 document repository is
 both effective and easy
 to maintain”***

In most medium sized law firms, the secretaries and WP will on average create between 50 to 200 new documents everyday. These documents could be based on boilerplates or precedents, or could be client specific such as memos, correspondences, court documents, and others.

Cleaning a document repository is a very laborious task, and not one that is readily undertaken by the fee-earners and their associates. For these individuals time spent on sieving through and cleaning is time lost on earning revenue. However, this is a catch-22 scenario since more documents are being fed into the repository and as a result there is inevitably more to clean and hence more potential revenue-earning time lost searching for documents and duplicating work.

Solution:

There was already an innate structure in the existing document repository at the client's various offices. The tasks at hand were: to understand documents that were and are created; understand where specific documents are stored; create a structure that would be used for future storage; inform users of the change process; have a cut off date; migrate the cleansed documents; consolidate repositories and create an archive section and process.

The first two tasks were relatively easy to achieve as some time had already been spent on understanding the information flow within the organisation. A separate section already existed for storing client specific documents, internal documents, knowledge documents and other correspondence. As a result the next task was to evaluate if the existing structure was aligned with the introduction of a DMS. Having determined that it was, an additional folder was added for each level of the existing structure to accommodate the cleansed documents.

All users were given a window of a month in which to identify documents that they owned and/or shared and used. Additionally, they were notified that any documents not identified would be removed from the system. Over the same period the respective clients' and also internal documents were identified so that they could be added to the knowledge documents repositories.

Over a long weekend, all the identified documents were transferred into the new structure and an archive section was created where all the un-identified documents were transferred to. The respective network drives were mapped appropriately to ensure that the users would not be affected by the change. The last task left was to create a process for the archiving. The reasoning adopted was that if a document had not been used for over a year then it was not likely to be used. This reason-coding was implemented resulting in any document older than 2 years being transferred to the archive section, and finally any document older than 5 years in the archive being transferred to an off-line archive. This process was then transferred to the DMS system where there was a library for internal documents, customer documents and archived documents. This exercise ensured that the users were more aware of their document lifecycles and would be able to find them easily. The end result was a major cut back on the enormous maintenance task that had been carried out to-date.