

Briefing

June 2016

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

BACK IN BLACK
Co-operative Legal Services
explains what has changed
to return it to profitability

GET BETTER SOON
Why law firms may need
to improve management
of wellness at work

EAST MEETS WEST
The team at Michelmores on
how helping out a Chinese firm
is also helping them



Flexible futures

*Is Allen & Overy's Peerpoint a signpost to a happier
future for clients and contractors alike?*

INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

One for all

The business of legal technology is better when firms and providers are in it together, says David Espley at LexisNexis

W

e hear a lot in **Briefing** about the productivity-boosting power of collaboration – between business services departments and between firms and their clients – but another collaborative channel worthy of consideration is between firm and legal technology provider.

This, says LexisNexis UK technology director, David Espley, is the single biggest factor that could make a difference to one of a firm's biggest potential competitive advantages (and challenges) – getting new systems used to their full potential.

“Vendors, IT departments and the people using the IT need to spend more time together working out what innovation looks like,” he explains. “At the moment, the balance between internal focus and exploring what technology could do (and is doing elsewhere) is skewed to the former – and it's for the providers to manage to fix that.”

Agile's working

Since arriving at LexisNexis, for example, Espley has encouraged the adoption of an ‘agile’ approach to software development, especially for LexisOne.

“The way we're managing major development is by breaking things down into much smaller projects, often a matter of weeks, and giving people the opportunity to use it in the office environment and provide tangible feedback that shapes the next phase,” he says.

“Instead of going dark for a year to reinvent the wheel, you can keep wheeling the latest version back. There's no need for the first attempt to be the final solution.

“A small investment in an individual's time releases huge amounts of information that can be filtered and factored into improvement almost in real time.”

Something for everyone

But Espley says getting momentum behind agile product development has also required partner law firms to accept change.

“It has been more common in other industries, but we're now finally finding firms willing to join us in our Centre of Excellence in Leeds, for example, for two days to help build things. They're seeing the benefit, and even proactively asking for such meetings.”

And that's people right across the firm. Multiple roles want to be involved. “We've welcomed everyone from cashiers to managing partners. Lawyers are smart, quick-thinking people – and they want to see how good things can happen in faster cycles. Of course, that involvement also means opportunity to find new practical ways to develop how they do their own business every day.”

If not compulsory, he says, firms should certainly make it very clear to employees that this is a company-wide offer.

“The more people partake with their different perspectives, the more likely they are to both benefit from the result and appreciate that benefit.

“It's the vendors doing this on a regular basis, however – so we should be helping to structure, even championing, that internal communication process. In all industry sectors we see implementation investments fail where people don't use applications, but that's almost always because they don't understand why it's more beneficial to use it than not.”

Predicting wins

LexisNexis is investing heavily in the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, linking the so-called big data analytics with what's happening day to day.



“A small investment in an individual’s time releases huge amounts of information that can be filtered and factored into improvement almost in real time.”

The arrival of AI may provide competitive advantage in the long term, but the quick wins in driving adoption are around clarity of management information and more immediate predictive data, says Espley.

“It’s things such as which business to take on and which to reject, and the limits on how profitable that could be. Or accurately logging what you’re doing today, so you can analyse it today, predict what will happen next, and decide how to change that.” The most significant thing about the Microsoft Azure cloud platform (LexisOne is built on Microsoft DynamicsAX) is the potential for real-time business intelligence, he says. “That’s one version of the data, updated in minutes – and it will influence machine learning, of course, because you’ve more useful information to feed it.”

Having one version of the truth, meanwhile, means that more people at the firm are likely to trust in its technology – and therefore have confidence to use it and make better decisions.

“The managing partner can have a dashboard flash up on their smartphone, the finance director has something far more detailed, but both reports roll up into the same number when both are in the board meeting,” says Espley.

All that’s left is to place trust in the cloud – which may be approaching its own moment of truth.

“I do sense a tipping point. In future, the client may well need to be convinced their data is safer if it’s hosted by the firm rather than a specialist provider armed with every security vetting procedure.

“And that’s data accessible anywhere, continually available, updated in real time, no downtime, and everywhere in the world. Microsoft has a team of almost 100 solely focused on tracking regulatory changes in different countries, updating as needed for the next business day.”

Business change doesn’t get much more agile than that. ▲

For more information, visit:
www.lexisnexis.co.uk