



Briefing Industry Interview

Staying a step ahead

Maintaining momentum with Microsoft opens doors for law firms to change their data ways, says David Espley at LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions

Photography: Jonathan Goldberg

In legal, familiarity does not breed contempt. The key to persuading busy professionals to adopt any new ways of working – behaving differently, communicating proactively or doing more with data – is to present them in contexts they already understand and value.

That's central to the rationale for LexisNexis basing its LexisOne answer to the traditional practice management system on Microsoft Dynamics enterprise resource planning (ERP) software – a move which won it the 2015 Microsoft Dynamics UK independent software vendor of the year award this August.

“A platform that looks and feels like a Microsoft system is a more gentle transition to a world where lawyers and managers make better use of information,” explains David Espley, new UK technology director for LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions. “All our customers are already well accustomed to working with documents in Word and Excel, for example. The idea is to take that simplicity, but give it the power to do much more for a business. A greater range of data gifts a firm competitive advantage in developing pipelines of both future business and future talent, as well as continuously improving working efficiency.”

That’s especially true of firms managing a process of international expansion. “One of the main benefits of any ERP system is that it’s built to work across, and can help to build, business in multiple geographies. A real-time status change in Singapore is also visible in London immediately. Reporting of real-time work in progress allows people to move on important decisions faster.

“If you want to do some parts of a matter in one continent and tie them up in another for reasons of convenience or cost, appropriate data can be handed around to manage that process.

“We looked at how other sectors plan and run their businesses – such as using a world time map, for example – and it’s areas like that where Microsoft’s investment has made a huge difference to the result. Then we invested in adding the more legal-specific features that can benefit alternative business structure and forward-thinking firm alike.”

Cloud sounds

Another common element in the development of both Dynamics and LexisOne is commitment to delivery through the cloud. At some point, both companies will offer public and private cloud-hosted versions of this data accessibility for even greater flexibility, says Espley.

“Cloud enables people to interact with real-time analytics more cost-effectively, from more devices, in more places,” he explains. “Documents trigger a workflow, which triggers payment for that particular set of work.

“You can view – and act on – complex data dashboards from the comfort of your home. You can link in Skype for business and record a real conversation

against a matter. There are lots of exciting developments that will arrive with cloud enablement – and both our businesses are right on that roadmap together.”

He says: “The challenge for the legal market will centre on whether it decides to adopt public cloud and relinquish control to large vendors. We want to take our customers with us in exploring the advantages of using very secure, stable, large-scale infrastructure, which any of us would find it hard to replicate individually.”

In some cases, it’s really the understanding of what constitutes tight security that could be the obstacle, says Espley. “Of course everyone wants the confidence that their choices are impenetrable. But even if someone manages to break in, data protection is now at a stage where decryption is almost impossible.

“The prime public targets of data attacks that make the headlines often haven’t followed best practices surrounding issues such as encryption – and it’s interesting that some law firms feel they would fare better investing in that protection on-premise themselves than they would using a security expert.”

Others don’t feel that way. Investment banks, for example, have harnessed cloud processing both to crunch data for a defined period and to share it quickly for that much sharper identification of the next opportunity. “Hundredths of a second can confer a trader competitive advantage, so data agility is clearly key,” says Espley.

Another useful counterpoint comes courtesy of the retail sector – which uses data analysis to get closer to customer requirements and preferences, costing and planning in light of changing circumstances in real time.

That’s not to mention the internal customers – the lawyers – who want simpler ways to search for information and manage matters in their working lives no less than in their private time.

“There are lots of safe but exciting opportunities for firms to use IT in new ways – and it’s the people trying them first that reap the best returns in efficiency and engagement before that practice later becomes commonplace,” says Espley.

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