



Management Matters

This column is now into its third year and feedback is still good. We would still like to receive observations and ideas for future issues. Please mail Bill Kirby at billkirby@professionalchoiceconsultancy.com or the publisher Julia Baskerville at j.baskerville@btconnect.com

WARNINGS

One – Back in the November issue I gave a warning about the state of the back up and business continuity and DR of firms and that it is important not to take assurances at face value.

However, in the interim can I strongly suggest that every firm carries out an internal audit/check to ensure their systems are as they believe them to be? Whether they are managed by your own teams or through a managed service/third party maintenance company.

During the balance of October, November and early December I am afraid that I have come across and heard of further examples of pending catastrophe. Also if you have “back up” at work that is not compliant business continuity.

Two – For the last few years we have also commented upon Accountabilities rather than being “responsible for” and this includes billing, time recording, WIP management, Working Capital management, restructuring, efficiency and new business generation. Again these Accountabilities in a number of cases have just not been seen through. It is no longer an automatic assumption that the bank will up the overdraft to cover a peak in negative cash flow. Straight away please go and check that billing is being pushed and that WIP and disbursements are under control. Not getting the cash in (potentially going bust) is one issue; paying tax on WIP that is overstated is another one.

THE CONFUSING SYSTEMS MARKET – a light in the tunnel?

In this column we have written quite extensively about consolidation amongst practice and case management system suppliers and the impact that this has had on law firm clients. Iris with multiple acquisitions (Videss, AIM, Mountain, Opsis and Alpha Law), Thomson Reuters (Elite, Pilgrim, FWBS) and Lexis Nexis (Visual Files/Solicitec and Axxia). This obviously unsettled the market has caused delays in delivery of products and a diminution of customer care and has allowed the independents to flourish (SOS, DPS, Proclaim).

New Man at Lexis Nexis

At the end of November I had the opportunity of a one to one session with Alan Fraser the new General Manager of Enterprise Solutions at Lexis Nexis. He joined in August 2012.

Alan is probably best recognised in the legal sector for his time as CEO of Workshare, so he has both industry-specific experience and broad experience across business disciplines and diverse corporate structures (public, private, start-up, turnaround, growth) in the high-tech space. *“After Workshare, I retired, but when the opportunity to join LexisNexis came along, I was excited to get back into the legal vertical. The high value of the LexisNexis brand in the legal industry was a big driver,”*

I have met with a number of managing partners that Alan has been to see since joining and he has travelled extensively to meet with customers for open exchange of views and opinions. *“Technology is viewed very differently by law firms today compared to five years ago. Today, technology is not seen as a key differentiator, but rather as a fundamental business requirement. Partners and senior executives are involved in the selection process, not just IT heads.”*

Despite the voiced frustrations of many old Axxia and Visual Files clients Alan considers that 2012 was a successful year for LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions. *“Strategically the division has stayed on course, but has rethought and revised some of its approaches to ensure a positive outcome, for customers and the organisation”*

I was encouraged in not being promised road maps but a much more realistic view of delivering first. Also at least law firms in Manchester by reading this piece will have a fairly realistic view as to what is going on.

Project Nimbus (codename), the division's new business management system (BMS) that includes practice and financial management, has been a major focus area for Enterprise Solutions in 2012. *“The business has three early adopter customers commencing implementation of the Nimbus solution in March 2013. The company is also working to secure three more early-adopter customers in the first half of 2013 and another three in the second half”*. As a business man Alan recognises that Law firms are transforming themselves into enterprises – they are recruiting more CIOs and COOs typically seen in mainstream business. *“They are also changing their business structures. These changes require technology suppliers like us to*

change too. We need to become more commercially astute and provide products that address their needs. We are therefore offering Nimbus and this LexisNexis – Microsoft collaboration is a game changer in legal IT,”

Part of the problem of course is that law firms need the technology solutions now.

Nimbus is intended to be an enterprise-level BMS that is expressly designed for the legal sector. Underpinned by workflow, Nimbus enables law firms to step outside the functional silos and operate as single, integrated businesses with cross functional workflows. The fact that the solution is powered by Microsoft Dynamics AX is of great value to law firms, given that Microsoft is the technology of choice in the legal sector. *“Historically, the legal industry has lacked the ability to attract the very large software providers to invest in this market. Through our partnership with Microsoft, we are taking very sophisticated technology, adding value and delivering a solid BMS to the industry.”*

Of significant note, Microsoft is substantially investing in the Dynamics platform on an annual basis. This not only makes Nimbus practically future proof, but also law firms' investment in the solution. LexisNexis is just one of nine global independent software vendors (out of the thousands of independent software vendors working with Dynamics AX today) to have attained Microsoft's preferred partner status for the development of a next generation, vertical business management solution.

Alan also informed me that, strategically LN has decided to discontinue further developmental investment in LexisNexis Streamline, its business process management platform.

Instead, LN is redirecting investment into the well established case management product – Visualfiles. In 2012 the adoption of Visual Files grown, crossing the 25,000 licences mark with strong interest from property law and insurance firms. A new product roadmap will be announced in March 2013 – major enhancements including .NET integration capabilities, new user interface options and training and certification and more are expected. For customers, this revised strategy is great news as in the future (should they so desire) transition from Visualfiles to Nimbus will be fairly straightforward due to the seamless integration capability of the two systems. LN will continue to support all its Streamline, Axxia and SolCase customers now and in the future; and invest in creating pathways for clients to transition to the next generation of platforms based on their business needs.

In its portfolio LN also has the CRM solution InterAction (used in a good proportion of large firms) *“continues to see robust growth in the UK, but also in South Africa, APAC region and South America. The solution is gaining traction in the private equity and venture capital sectors too. Similarly, adoption of business intelligence solution Redwood is on an upward curve in the UK, driven by the need to demonstrate profitability to investors and business partners.”*

It is an interesting time. Alan is different to other leaders in the software market. We shall see what kind of difference he can make.

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