

# INTRODUCING ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING



Our decision to switch from traditional practice management systems to ERP

By Mike Giles, Finance Director at Fieldfisher



**BUSINESS**



**STRATEGY**



**ERP**



**EFFICIENCY**



**RESULTS**

We recently took the decision to adopt an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. The plan is to replace multiple business systems with LexisOne, an integrated suite of applications, which includes all the core business capabilities we need as a law firm – general ledger and legal accounting; matter planning; time, travel and expense processing; billing; procurement; purchase; business intelligence and asset management; and human resource management. In doing so, we hope to become a highly efficient business operation (of course) but, more importantly, the approach will deliver value to our clients too.

It's not a decision we took lightly – there is a strong business rationale behind it. Technology projects such as this are demanding, painstaking, expensive and business critical, so we've done a great deal of research and evaluation to ensure that our system selection is appropriate, future proof and practical.

**“We have separate HR and financial systems and it is difficult to link them”**

## The time is right

We had got to a point where our existing practice management software was no longer delivering what we need as a business. Regardless of whether we stayed with our current technology provider, a complete new software installation was required. Therefore, it made sense to evaluate the alternative systems on the market and to select the one that was the best fit for our firm.

As we began exploring options, it became evident that for our business today (and in view of how the legal marketplace is rapidly changing) a practice management system would only partly meet our requirements. We are a people-led business, but currently have separate HR and financial systems and it is difficult to link them. Traditional practice management software systems don't provide the seamless and reliable interfaces between these two vital

functions and we need the capability to undertake head count management, staff budgeting and workload planning – in addition to profit & loss related proficiency.

## Removing the integration headache

Like most law firms, we use a number of standalone technology systems for customer relationship management, human resource management and financials alongside the Microsoft Office suite for day to day document production and management. Although they

can be linked, it is not easy to fully integrate them and it's never seamless. It's a constant challenge to maintain multiple solutions and that leads to increased cost of ownership of technology.

From a user standpoint, the look and feel of the alternative proprietary systems is very different. A Microsoft Outlook style interface suits our people very well, it is simple and intuitive and makes our system feel 'joined up'.

## A step change

The key justification though for our decision to adopt an ERP approach is that it allows us to re-examine the way we conduct our business. It brings us as close to starting with a clean sheet of paper as is realistically possible.

The last time we changed our core technology system was 12-13 years ago. A lot has happened during this time – the legal landscape has changed dramatically as has our business. We've grown from a single office in London to an international firm with a presence in Brussels, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Manchester, Munich, Silicon Valley, Paris and Shanghai. Today, we have over 400 lawyers and 160 partners. The current practice management system was configured for that single office firm and the way it operated. Along the way, we expanded its use, but never really looked at how we were developing our business processes. While we have made those processes work thus far, we've reached a stage where a step change is required if we are to achieve our growth aspirations.

We need to question everything we do and how we do it in order to ascertain the most effective and efficient way of doing business. I do not buy into the deep-rooted belief that the legal business is 'different'. Like other businesses, we need to adopt best practice in our approach to pricing, matter management, resource planning and so on. To do so, we need access to a rich source of real-time data and management information. This will allow us to be creative and innovative when new business opportunities present themselves while working smarter and in a more client-focussed way so that continuous process improvement becomes standard.

Funds aren't unlimited at Fieldfisher, so we've taken a hard look at our firm and invested in ERP because, after looking at the capabilities and commercial benefits the approach offers, it makes business sense.

Technology sits at the heart of our firm and we are recognised for our legal expertise in IT industry. Our investment in ERP via LexisOne is proof that we believe in what we do, we dare to be different and our approach delivers benefits to the firm and to our clients.

## About the author

Mike Giles is the finance director at Fieldfisher and has over 25 years experience in working in professional services organisations, including 16 years working in law firms.

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