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# LPM

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## LAW FIRM PROFILE

*Blacks Solicitors  
shows the legal  
market a thing or  
two about social  
networking*

*The housing  
market is in  
recovery –  
but will keener  
competition  
mean eviction  
for high street  
conveyancers?*

**CONVEYANCING**

**UNDER  
THE  
HAMMER?**

BUSINESS INFORMATION FOR EVERYONE IN PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

# AT YOUR SERVICE?

Nigel Williams at Lexis Visualfiles asks whether your conveyancing system is fit for purpose, how a future of growth will impact how you do business in future – and how to win more clients

It would appear that the conveyancing market is finally turning a corner – a much welcome return to growth, following possibly one of the deepest recessions in history. Surviving firms now face an even more demanding customer – one who demands greater transparency and accessibility to their conveyancing transaction in keeping with today's 24x7x365 world where everything is visible and immediate and driven by smart technology.

Unsurprisingly, in the dark days of the recession many firms were forced to cut back on their investments, including personnel and systems. Now, with the housing market picking up, firms are realising that they need to offer (at the very least) the pre-recession level of service again, but that the technology landscape has moved forward in the interim. The systems they deploy must complement current business needs while allowing for inevitable future improvements to processes and communications. They must meet the expectations of a new, tech savvy breed of customer. And, for multi-service businesses, systems should facilitate integration between the conveyancing service and the rest of the business (now or in the future) to take advantage of an evolved market. Firms cannot afford to operate in isolated islands, but must share information and processes in the way that clients also have no boundaries.

The most successful conveyancing firms recognise the need for this type of technology. A recent survey highlights that 60% of firms are looking to improve their systems and processes this year – potentially as a measure to protect their position in the market and ensure they are not left behind.

There is no dearth of technology for the conveyancing sector, as it has always been at the forefront of automation. It wouldn't be far-fetched to say that many of the workflow systems in the legal sector today potentially have their origins in conveyancing given this practice area's dependence on process efficiencies.

Nonetheless, its different strokes for different folks – choosing a solution that best meets the needs of individual firms is critical. There are the traditional systems of course, but now with the advent of cloud

computing (whatever that might mean) many suppliers are developing and launching sector-niche solutions that are quick and cheaper to deploy on the face of it. So how does a firm decide what is the best and most cost-effective solution for its business?

Firms must carefully evaluate the workflow and case management systems available – separating and clearly extricating the glitz from the practical reality. Implementing a system is invariably the easy bit – making it appropriate for the long term so that it evolves with the changing (and often expanding) business requirements is the challenge. What is suitable today may not be a good fit the day after tomorrow – the market changes, new rules and regulation are regularly introduced, customer expectations alter and therefore the chosen solution must develop in tune as well.

Before firms take the plunge, here are some areas to consider:

- Departmental versus integrated? Many solutions today are essentially departmental, isolated solutions, so if a firm is simply focused on conveyancing and is of a certain size, they may work. However, will an 'island strategy' work in a wider or growing business? Aspirations to deliver greater operational levels may dictate the need for a larger solution with perhaps more robust functionality. It's highly likely that any reasonably sized conveyancing firm will require its core conveyancing case management solution to integrate with other technology systems such as finance, marketing and the like. A niche, standalone solution can cause a firm's IT department a fair number of headaches should the need arise in the future to amalgamate technologies.
- What kind of conveyancing firm do you aspire to be? It's imperative that a firm clearly understands what kind of conveyancing practice it wants to be – a volume conveyancer, a niche conveyancer for certain types of properties, a high-value services provider, or any other. The firm's aspiration must determine the type of system to deploy – based on an understanding of the service being delivered today and the aspiration for future provisioning.
- What value will the system deliver in the long run? Technology investments must be evaluated as enablers



#### ABOUT THE SPONSOR

**Lexis Visualfiles from LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions** is the most widely used legal workflow and case management system in the UK.

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of growth. Adopting a solution that is cost effective initially, but costs a fortune to adapt to future requirements or that is unable to meet future demands is akin to being penny wise but pound foolish. Implement a system for short-term objectives but with long-term vision. It should be possible to adopt out-of-the-box solutions today for current business needs, but then leverage the software's development capability to add new features, functionality and business applications that support new business requirements cost-effectively and easily.

- **Transparency:** Successful conveyancing relies on excellent communication and transfer of information between multiple parties. In today's always-on, mobile society, there is an immediacy with which information needs to be shared with customers and other organisations. This ability is becoming increasingly important to

conveyancers and even a key differentiator in this low-margin marketplace. It's considered best practice. For example, the Conveyancing Association's Best Practice Guide suggests that conveyancers give estate agents access to online tracking in order to improve communication between the two sides. The case management system must have the capability to extend this service to end customers too.

- **Track record of the supplier:** Here longevity in the market is vital, but alongside it a reputation for continuous product development. Invest in a solution that freely allows the firm to evolve the system, without the need for firms to even request vendor involvement to make changes.

Conveyancing needs to be a personalised and (as much as possible) a seamless service across all facets of a transaction. The right technology can facilitate this. Firms will do well to invest with the future in mind. **LPM**