



The Connected Practice – how a new outlook on technology can enable firms to adapt and prosper

Digitisation is taking our industry by storm. For firms to understand their clients' needs and improve the service provided, we have to put a digital approach to practice management at the forefront of our considerations.

Digitisation brings with it a fresh opportunity to look at how legal services should be offered and therefore how law firms should be run. The modern consumer always considers “digital” first, whether they consciously know it or not, which means that firms without a digital capability will be left behind. The adoption of a digital mind-set is one of the biggest opportunities for business improvement today. For firms that were previously at a disadvantage, due to size, resource or location, going digital can be the perfect opportunity to get ahead of the competition.

We can already see that improving the clients' experience is becoming a catalyst for business transformation. That means firms that are looking to review how they operate must start from the needs of the client and work back from there. Having a connected online infrastructure means that your firm can respond quicker and more efficiently to clients' needs. Moreover, the better a firm is at responding to change and demand, the more attractive they become to prospective clients.

In our inaugural Trends Survey, we found that 93% of business professionals believe a connected, digital, infrastructure is critical to anticipate and service client issues.

2017 is about connecting your practice and ensuring that all areas are digitally linked. Digital development is the best way to give your firm a fighting chance against the pressures of increased competition, lower prices, and continuing cuts to legal aid. A connected practice means that all departments within your firm are working together to reach optimum levels of engagement and efficiency. There are plenty of things to do on the way to becoming a connected practice – read on to see our three main suggestions.

1. The communication challenge

As a sector, we face a variety of challenges. One of the most potentially disruptive is a lack of efficiency due to a disconnected workforce and a lack of communication tools. Within the busy working day of a legal practice, it is easy to lose time on tasks that are less valuable; such as filing and general admin. Although critical,

The Connected Practice

focussing on these back office tasks leaves less and less time for fee-earning activities and building client relationships.

With a lack of communication and connectivity comes confusion in processing and duplicating effort. This is bad for business, not only because it could mean duplicated effort on activities; but also, that work could be missed. Moreover, this lack of connectivity will have a large impact on how efficient you are as a firm. High levels of efficiency means reaching clients wherever and whenever is most convenient for them.

Nowadays efficiency goes hand in hand with mobile working - which enables staff to access client information from wherever they are and at any time. Imagine having the capability to access cases at the touch of a button whilst also being able to see and post reports, view account ledgers, documents and emails – all on the go. This form of efficiency allows clients to receive the best level of service whilst enjoying the convenience of quick updates and case progression.

That 'always on' attitude can help drive productivity in the simplest of ways - a 'yes/no' reply sent from a mobile in response to an email may progress matters far quicker than waiting to return to the office. In some circumstances it can even be seen how this level of 'micro-communication' may actually help to reduce the workload burden rather than increase it. The simple fact is the more the firm communicates within itself and with its clients; the more productive it will be and the better the experience for all involved. Modern technology is all about communication – whether it is the recording of data or the sharing of it – it is a tool that the modern law firm cannot afford to be without.

2. Think beyond the PCMS

Communication and connectivity is one way to get ahead of the competition whilst simultaneously engaging and assisting clients and employees alike, but it is not the only way. Although having a Practice and Case Management System (PCMS) in place is essential for the daily challenges your firm faces, there are plenty more technology tools at your disposal.

One such example is considering an integrated system that connects your businesses HR needs with your payroll software. This integration in

itself can help with efficiency and management reporting but it only requires a further connection to your PCMS to see quickly how these tools combined could help track an individual's performance and manage bonus payments. Take for example an HR system that has deep integration (with your PCMS) – any fee-earner who is on leave could have matters and tasks automatically redirected to another team member, continuing the positive experience the client receives that we spoke about earlier and simultaneously ensuring new activities are not dropped.

Additionally, the power of a connected digital infrastructure means you can take advantage of your marketing and business development data (CRM) to ensure you offer your clients what they want, and importantly, more than what they expect from a traditional firm. Surpassing expectations is a tried and tested way to increase customer satisfaction and give your firm an added boost. Moreover, the detail such a system could provide, combined with your PCMS, gives your firm the chance to increase interest before a drive for cross-sell opportunities. Clients often only take advantage of a small portion of what a firm can provide.

The capacity a CRM system has to manage and analyse a client's interactions and data throughout the customer life cycle allows us, as legal professionals, to improve business relationships; thereby boosting client retention and driving growth from reduced turnover and increased cross-sell.

Every day law firms are responding to the pressures of the market and the demands of their clients. In essence, these demands and pressures create the structure and day-to-day working style of entire organisations, therefore it is key to make sure that the information they use to operate is as accurate and data driven as possible. In light of that a solution that incorporates Business Intelligence (BI) within your connected infrastructure, that can turn data from multiple sources into actionable intelligence and can streamline your ability to implement logical strategic action, will propel your business to greater profitability whilst providing real detailed insight into the firms past performance that helps you plan for the future.

The Connected Practice

The ability to optimise technology such as a HR system and a CRM platform alongside Business Intelligence will equip your firm with all the relevant information to streamline processes and centralise focus on what really matters. The market rewards those that respond well to pressures and clients seek firms that actively display an understanding of their demands so if the firm can get ahead of this, (with the use of technology) they will survive and prosper.

3. Embrace the cloud

Increased digital access and exposure in everyday life means it's no longer acceptable for firms to lack a digital presence. If you want your firm to bring in the best talent, you need to be offering attractive digital options. A connected firm makes sure that processes and productivity are still continuous when away from the office. For example, when in court you need to make sure you maximise the mobility and productivity of staff. Mobile access to servers mean that whether on or off site, information can be securely accessed and uploaded. This enablement will propel business agility and flexibility due to the scalability and ease of the solution, regardless of geographical location thus making your firm a stronger, more connected organisation.

Cloud services promote collaboration throughout the organisation and provide security even while offering the ability to work remotely. **In our 2016 Survey we found that 84% of business professionals believe real-time information allows for faster, more informed decision making.** Such a large figure depicts the importance of having access to relevant business information wherever you are.

To further support the importance of digital connectivity within your firm, you can see examples of firms working to digital expectations such as Scott-Moncrieff & Associates (ScoMo). ScoMo is one of the world's first 'virtual law firms,' providing lawyers with the freedom to practise remotely whenever it suits them. ScoMo's digital capacity means that it has no need for a desk-based office - saving money and time, whilst giving independence. At Advanced, we provide ScoMo with their cloud-based and desktop management system

enabling them to serve clients efficiently. In addition, although technology is central to their operation, it does not replace face-to-face interaction, and consultants can still meet as often as they want via meetings or socially.

The dexterity and digital ability of this firm is the epitome of the digital generation. Whilst such a drastic digital network isn't necessary, the importance of digitisation that ScoMo impressively displays is relevant for us all. Moreover, the absence of a large physical presence provides a firm with a national reach as lawyers all over the UK can join the firm and bring in clients from their area. The technology displayed here is both money saving whilst simultaneously increasing your business scope.

With 86% of UK business professionals believing the most important attribute in a business leader is the ability to re-imagine your business (found within the Advanced Trends Survey 2016), taking control of your digital portfolio and investing in the future of your firm is essential in attracting clients and employees alike. So the question now becomes, how do I execute the next steps for my firm's future?

Thinking about becoming a connected practice?

Try these steps to help you along the way:

> **Make a plan:** Think-where do you want your firm to be in five years, what services do you want to offer? Where do you see growth? What will your clients demand? How do you see client interaction changing because (or despite) of your strategic goals? What do you need in place to make this plan a success?

> **Find a solution:** Although there are a range of software providers on the market you need to partner with a business (or businesses) that will put you at the forefront of their agenda and develop an integrated solution expertly designed for your firm. Ensure they can grow as you do and have the foresight to offer solutions that will help in the future and not just in the "now."

The Connected Practice



> **Assess your firm:** Work with your solution vendor to go through a firm assessment. Look at your overall business processes. How can things be improved? Where can efficiencies be made? Look to strategise how simply, quickly and efficiently any technology integration required can take place. If necessary, plan it alongside your technology investment cycles and look beyond just the next 12 months of investment. This may well not all happen at once.

> **Develop a project plan:** With your chosen partners develop and refine the technology you intend to deploy to ensure you are able to continue to work at optimum rates before during and after any go-live take place.

> **Manage the change:** One of the biggest challenges will be ensuring the rest of the firm embraces the change. Work with departments and teams to ensure they each understand the benefits any new technology will bring to them. Get an adoption 'champion' in each key area to help drive adoption.

More information

w oneadvanced.com
t +44(0) 8451 605 555
e hello@oneadvanced.com

Ditton Park, Riding Court Road, Datchet, SL3 9LL

Advanced Computer Software Group Limited is a company registered in England and Wales under company number 05965280, whose registered office is Ditton Park, Riding Court Road, Datchet, SL3 9LL. A full list of its trading subsidiaries is available at www.oneadvanced.com/legal-privacy.