

Briefing

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SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

TEAM TRIUMPHS

Alex Hatchman, chief operating officer at
Fletchers, on successfully keeping score

PLATFORM AND SUBSTANCE

Christie Guimond from Bird & Bird cracks
open a new network for women

BOOKING THE COOKS

DWF on the process of helping
people discover the inner innovator



Stick with it

Law firms and their clients surely can't be poles apart – but are the latest advances in legal operations and collaboration as attractive as they think?

INDUSTRY CASE STUDY

Come the evolution

The support of Blue Car Technologies keeps legacy software running smoothly at the same time as introducing bespoke enhancements to internal efficiency, says RPC head of business applications Adam Munns

There is so much excitement surrounding ‘innovation’ in the legal market in 2019 (often linked to – although not exclusively a question of – new technology), that it can be easy to underestimate how much work goes into maintaining systems, many years in the less glamorous updating and evolving.

For example, law firm RPC has been supporting its legacy case management system (CMS) for some 15 years, says head of business applications Adam Munns.

“This is an internally developed solution that’s critical to a large part of our business – it manages both the process and the complex financial aspects of the insurance work we undertake on behalf of our clients.

“It’s widely used, and in many ways highly regarded, even when compared to some more modern applications. However, business requirements, such as for regulations and compliance, will inevitably change over the years – never enough to warrant a full rebuild, but the system still needs adapting.”

Then the challenge becomes recruiting and retaining people who will happily do that technical

work – or even people with the knowledge to do it. “Sometimes the skills necessary for technology that has been around for longer aren’t even taught today, so the talent pool is quite limited,” explains Munns.

The solution in his case is still a very human one – its now four-year relationship with an external provider that specialises in such an area of work, Blue Car Technologies. “Effectively, we have a trusted outsourced relationship, which means that we don’t need to keep recruiting and retaining people from that challenging, limited pool. Blue Car takes on full responsibility for an IT project instead.”

Building bespoke

But this is also a relationship where the value to RPC has expanded over the years, he says. “In addition, the Blue Car team has the available resource and skills to manage an entire bespoke development as an engagement,” explains Munns. Two examples of that are efficiency-enhancing applications for a number of its intranet sites, such as helping to search the staff directory, and updating document templates in line with either changing business needs or brand requirements.



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reconciliation; and an online application to capture court filings and alert users to them based on requested criteria.

“The bottom line here is that we are a law firm, not a specialist software house. At the same time, however, there are also a lot of fairly dramatic peaks and troughs in our development workload.” This again can be a challenge for the recruitment and retention of high-quality employees.

All about the experience

The arrangement clearly frees Munns’s teams to focus on other, perhaps otherwise competing, priorities – perhaps client-facing technology or supporting fee earners in work more directly.

Less well supported, however, and the firm’s proud legacy CMS could present more of a business risk than a long-invested-in asset. “You could find yourself in a position where a business-critical process wasn’t working. At the most fundamental level, Blue Car is ensuring that the system remains available at all times,” he says.

“And whenever anything like a red flag has been raised, the team has always been very responsive, got straight onto the problem, and resolved it very swiftly.”

Of course, RPC has a stringent testing procedure of its own designing. But he says that Blue Car has also brought some of their long-developed best practices to the table, as well as industry-standard ones such as OWASP (Open Web Application Security Project) for application security. “In some cases, they have presented certain ideas to us and we have passed them on to our own clients in turn,” says Munns.

But most valuable of all, he says, is the ease of the arrangement with a partner that also has decades of experience seeing legal technology evolve, with all its pivots and pain points.

“They have experience right across the full range of technologies and disciplines that have evolved over many years in law firms, from practice management to document management. It’s just like having your development team onsite, but with none of the pain of training people up to productive familiarity with the products.”

“Many of the systems that Blue Car supports are specific point solutions to explicit business needs,” he says. “For example, there’s a lot of .NET web development and document management integration work, as well as a number of internally written Word templates, which require updates to aspects such as headers and footers.”

Other examples include: managing the end-to-end billing process, from requesting a billing guide to providing access to the final bill and credit control; creating and managing purchase order approval; bank statement conversion for system

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