

## **The selection of a Case Management System**

There are a host of law firm case management systems available in today's market, all promising to transform your business and enable you to run more efficiently and profitably.

The implementation of a case management system, or a change to an existing one, is a significant and fundamental decision for any law firm, regardless of size. Getting your choice of system wrong can, and will, have a devastating impact on your firm.

A firm must ensure they do not simply buy from the best salesman. The system must fit the firm; there should not be a requirement to alter procedures to adapt to the system.

The fundamental mistake that law firms make when choosing a system is not taking the time to establish what they want and expect from their case management system and if compromises have to be made, (often due to budget) these should be understood before implementation.

The following steps will help ensure that your firm chooses the right system and importantly, understands what they are buying.

### **1. Current issues**

If the firm already has a case management system and is seeking to change it, there will be very obvious reasons as to why – this is normally centred on functionality. If it has been decided that changes will be made, it is likely the reasons for implementing such change have been discussed. Ensure you speak to the staff that use the current system, compile a list of the issues and record them properly.

### **2. Requirements**

Again, speak to the staff in each department; understand what they want the system to do. What are their expectations? Most users will be very happy to tell you what they want and what they need from a system. As people provide feedback ensure that it is tracked and correctly documented.

### **3. Request for Proposal**

The answers from the first two points will enable the firm to develop and submit a proposal, setting out in detail what you require from the new case management system. It does not matter if the requirements are vast, it is important for the firm to outline what it needs. As proposals arrive you will gain an understanding of what can and cannot be achieved.

### **4. Budget**

How much do you want to spend and what funding options are available to you? Most suppliers will have a finance structure to make the acquiring of the system financially viable but make sure you set a budget and remain realistic. There are likely to be upfront costs along with migration, development, project management and installation. All of these need to be understood and sit within your budget.

### **5. Research**

The internet is awash with information about case management systems, making detailed research much easier. If you are still not sure who to approach, then ask an

expert. Companies such as 'The Strategic Partner' have extensive knowledge of case management technology and can provide independent and impartial advice. This will support the firm in building a short list of candidates and even help pull together your Request For Proposals (RFP).

## **6. Understanding**

Ensure you understand the difference between the various solutions:

- a) **Case Management** – Storing of data on clients and case history. Key functions and tasks such as diary control, accounts interface, document generation, file history and communication tools with clients.
- b) **Work Flow** – Not all systems and firms have or need work flow. Work flow enables a firm to set a pre-defined path for cases to follow, which provides greater levels of supervision and consistency of handling. These work best for volume environments, where the steps of a case tend to be similar.
- c) **Document Management** – These systems will hold documents so you can create a case history and store correspondence. They will have limited case management functionality.

## **7. System Architecture**

What are the hardware and software considerations? Every system will have different ways of interfacing into third-party products (Microsoft, applied etc). Does your chosen solution have any limitations and what version of third party software do you need to be running? From a hardware perspective, do you need to upgrade machines or servers and what is the cost of doing so? The costs associated with upgrades and new equipment can be significant and need to be factored into your budget.

## **8. Accounts**

Most case management systems have an interface into an accounts package. Be aware of what this package is and if this works for you and your firm. One of the expenses you will face when changing systems and accounts packages is the migration costs which can prove expensive.

## **9. Engagement**

When engaging with the chosen providers send them the RFP and ensure they answer all of your questions. Ask them to clearly outline how their system can and cannot meet your requirements. When they have provided this information invite them in for a demonstration and ensure that you have the right people present. Do not just accept the sales agent to come and see you. Ask for a technician to be present or at least on the phone to answer technical questions.

## **10. Questions**

Standardise your questions so you can compare the results in a simple matrix.

## **11. Testimonials**

Ask for testimonials from similar firms to you. If feasible, ask for a site visit to a comparable firm.

## **12. Time**

Ensure you leave time during presentations to ask questions. Do not be tempted to cut meetings short and ensure that you involve the right people in the meetings and allow them to ask their questions.

## **13. Written Proposals**

All RFPs must be submitted to the firm in writing. If they tell you that their system can do something and it does not, you have a formal document to refer back to when challenging the provider. If answers are not clear, ask for further clarification until you understand the response.

## **14. Pricing**

Ensure you understand exactly what you are buying. Ask for a full breakdown of immediate and ongoing costs through the duration of your agreement and what happens at the end of the term. If you require more users as time goes by, what will this additional cost be?

## **15. Communication**

When you have chosen your system ensure your staff understand what the system can do as well as its limitations. Providing the staff that will use the system with information is essential to ensure you gain their full buy in and support. Where there are limitations (which there will be) they will understand why and be more likely to accept them.

## **16. Implementation**

Plan your implementation properly. The pace of implementation needs to be dictated by you and not your system provider. You will be introducing a significant change in your business. Ensure you have a change management programme that provides staff with the necessary training and information they need to use the system properly. Launch the system when you are ready and not before.

## **17. Post Implementation**

Monitor and invite feedback. The system's installation is likely to require refinement. Ensure you have the needed support from your provider to fix issues as they arise. Understand the support they are providing you and the response times. Once live they should have a representative in your offices to ensure the implementation goes smoothly with the ability to respond to any issues.

Choosing a case management system is a lengthy and technical process and one that needs careful and considered management. If you're considering a new case management system and would like to learn more or take advantage of our extensive knowledge contact us on 0207 842 1825, email us, or make an online enquiry. You can also visit our website, [www.thestrategicpartner.co.uk](http://www.thestrategicpartner.co.uk) to see what we do.