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LEWIS SILKIN LLP

3E EMPOWERS STAFF WITH REAL-TIME DATA TO BETTER MANAGE FIRM

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PROVIDING PROACTIVE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE WITH 3E

The partners of Lewis Silkin LLP have always believed that investing in relationships with clients and employees is the fastest route to success, a philosophy that has served them well. For the second year running, the 53-partner, 257-staff commercial law firm based in London has made the Sunday Times "100 Best Companies to Work For" list.

So when economic conditions were less than ideal, management wanted to leverage its most important resource: its people. That meant empowering fee owners to better manage their clients, matters, and own performance, which required a forward-thinking technology strategy.

"We wanted a more proactive business intelligence suite of client information that could integrate with all of our core technology platforms," says Edward Gordon-Hall, Director of Finance & Administration. "Furthermore, we needed a system that could handle our growth trajectory from a staffing and office location perspective, plus demands from legislative changes."

The finance department's extensive system evaluation process led management to 3E®, a core financial and practice management system with built-in application development capabilities delivered through a consistent Web-based user experience. "We have undoubtedly gained a system that works for us, not the other way around. We can easily customize 3E to support our procedures and protocols and therefore support our strategic objectives. Within the first implementation phase, we have the ability to provide real-time business intelligence throughout the firm," shares Gordon-Hall.

The 3E platform provides an integrated development environment that allows Lewis Silkin to be more responsive to client needs and enables more changes to its business processes. This includes data exchanges with other core systems, such as document management and CRM, which provides comprehensive workflows and reporting capabilities. Built on the Microsoft .NET technology, 3E offers the stability and scalability to help the firm gain a competitive edge now, while establishing a foundation to support firm-wide ambitions.

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Director of Finance & Administration

PROVEN PROCESS FOR DATA CONVERSION SUCCESS

As with any system upgrade, data conversion is one of the most important steps in the implementation process. Martin Hakiel, Project Manager and known as "Mr. Elite" at the firm, worked closely with the Thomson Reuters Elite Data Conversion Team to move through a series of phases that ensure data is converted into 3E within the agreed timeframe.

Data cleansing was the biggest hurdle during the phase. Shortcuts were previously allowed when inputting data, resulting in a lot of incomplete transactions. The 3E format is stringent about data collection to ensure valid data is available for any comprehensive analysis. Hakiel and the team started the conversion process by modifying past transactions so as not to lose any historical data.

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Founded The 53-partner commercial law firm is based in London with an additional office in Oxford, and practices law in five departments— Corporate, Employment & Incentives, Litigation & Dispute Resolution, Media, Brands & Technology, and Property, Housing & Construction. According to the Legal 500 and Chambers, the firm has a higher proportion of legal experts than almost any other leading firm.

CHALLENGE

To deliver real-time business intelligence data to individual users and enhance business processes.

WHY 3E?

3E offered flexibility and scalability in a Web-based environment that would offer access to information that was never before possible.

BENEFITS

- Better management of the firm at the partner, department, and fee earner level
- Enhanced business processes to improve efficiency
- Improved discipline and more proactive self-management

"The conversion process was fantastic, and we've had no issues at all."

Martin Hakiel
Project Manager

Another benefit from the conversion process was the chance to analyze business processes and challenge current assumptions. The team reviewed client and matter inception, billing processes, AP, and collections. In these initial stages, they were able to identify new workflows for client and matter inception and lay the groundwork for several changes in the future. Analyzing internal procedures has also assisted in future manpower planning.

The strategy included a clean transition from the previous system in both office locations. "We went dark for one week and then went live on 3E the following week," says Hakiel. "On day one, the staff had access to client and matter information on their desktops and was capturing billable hours, and the finance department was fully functional and even drawing checks. By day two, we had no internal Help Desk calls."

Hakiel believes that the main success factor for the conversion was two-fold. "The Thomson Reuters Elite Data Conversion Team was very knowledgeable about the process, and there was a constant flow of communication, so we understood what was happening and when it was going to happen," explains Hakiel. "The conversion process was fantastic, and we've had no issues at all."

The Lewis Silkin team took a very comprehensive approach to training. In the months prior to the go-live date, all staff had 3E training sessions. In the first weeks in which the firm was live on 3E, trainers "walked the floor" to immediately address any issues or questions. In addition, the firm offers mini desktop training and a specific session for new employee orientation. "We are really pleased with how quickly our user base has adapted to 3E. We've had people tell us that it is a major advancement for them," adds Gordon-Hall.

MANAGING WITH REAL-TIME KPIs

"Where 3E has made the biggest difference thus far is enabling better management of working capital by fee earners. By providing easily available and intuitive information to lawyers, who are on the ground working with clients, we have gained a number of efficiencies," explains Gordon-Hall.

Previously, Gordon-Hall and his team would produce month-end hard copy reports distributed to the management team, but they only gave them a retrospective look at the business.

Fee earners are now able to access client and matter information, plus real-time financial data, from a customized dashboard at their desktops. Users can not only view the financial status of their matters, but also their progress on personal key performance indicators (KPIs) against targets and budgets. "Staff can see where they stand on several metrics at any point in time. We are definitely seeing an improved discipline of self-management at all levels," adds Gordon-Hall.

Access to this type of information has enabled the firm to reduce write-offs with better knowledge at the point of billing. Users are able to make more informed decisions about what they will and won't bill.

Another benefit is how fee earners have embraced the commercial approach from fee earners to manage clients. "We don't expect collections to purely rest with our credit department," says Gordon-Hall. "We are empowering our staff to have these conversations with clients by providing easily-available and accurate information."

HIGHLY FOCUSED FINANCIAL DEPARTMENT

While desktop access to client information and KPIs is very valuable for fee earners, it is a significant improvement for the finance department. They no longer have to manually generate month-end reports or field requests for even the most basic reports.

For example, before 3E, the finance department had to scroll through Work-in-Progress (WIP) reports to make sure nothing was astray, which was time-consuming and prone to error. Now they can view aged WIP with a one-stop click. "We've been able to remove hard copy reports out of our standard operating procedures. This enables us to focus on the exceptions in the system," explains Gordon-Hall.

Now when the department receives reporting requests, they are highly specific and require a more fine-grained analysis tied to a business objective, such as whether to invest in a certain practice area by reviewing amount of fees billed for a specific work type.

The finance department can also positively affect client service with enhanced processing of transactions. Bills are far easier to customize based on client preferences, and templates allow for better quality output.

Finally, it is the integration of 3E with core firm applications that enables the comprehensive view of firm performance and client management. 3E has already been integrated with the firm's time recording, copy capture, and document management systems. Upcoming plans include integrations and new workflows with its CRM and HR applications, as well as the Microsoft® SharePoint® server.

MAKING 3E WORK FOR LEWIS SILKIN

Thus far, 3E has helped the firm meet its initial objectives, which include implementing a far more stable system that pushes real-time data to fee earner's desktops, as well as allowing seamless integration with core applications. The result is a level of business intelligence the firm has not experienced before. "3E helps us manage ourselves, our firm, and our clients in a proactive way that other systems can't," says Gordon-Hall. "We believe that 3E will continue to drive efficiency throughout the firm, improve client management, and ultimately increase profitability."

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To learn more about 3E or for a global list of office locations, visit **elite.com**.

Lewis Silkin LLP was interviewed in June 2010.

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