



Practice*Evolve*[™]



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Stacks/Goudkamp

About: Stacks/Goudkamp is a Sydney based law firm specialising in Personal Injury Law. *Location:* Level 6, 1 Castlereagh Street Sydney NSW 2000 DX 144 Sydney NSW *Website:* www.stacksgoudkamp.com.au

THE PROBLEM

Within the Sydney office, everyone had their own file in a shared directory, which also stored hundreds of thousands of legal documents. A similarly huge volume of documents existed only in hard copy. Paper files could be enormous, with some matters taking up 60 bound reams.

The firm routinely endured huge costs to house hard copy files in storage facilities and to transport files to and from the office. Lawyers all had their own files of contacts, usually stored in bits and pieces in card or paper files. The office was drowning in paper.

The Sydney CBD office was stretched to full capacity, both in terms of the number of people it could accommodate and the volume of work that staff could complete.

By contrast, the Newcastle office had far more space and its lawyers were working below capacity. However, the only way that the load could be shared between Sydney and Newcastle offices was either by sending bulky physical files to and from Newcastle, or by scanning what could be an enormous number of documents onto a disc and sending it to Newcastle to be loaded

onto the local system. There were no linked file bases.

CORRECTING THE IMBALANCE

Whatever new software system the firm chose, it had to be capable of correcting the imbalance between the workloads of the Newcastle and Sydney offices. Another important consideration was that the system had to be able to run on Apple Mac computers, which Stacks Goudkamp uses exclusively.

The firm considered the available options offered by a number of legal software providers, including one which came with a condition that managing director Tom Goudkamp dismissed as absurd: "They wanted one and a half to two per cent of our gross revenue, forever. They wanted to share in our success."

In the end the firm chose the document and business workflow management system from Practice Evolve. This company is the local presence of Irish software developer Documatic, whose system has now been deployed to around 2,000 users in Europe and another 1,000 around the world.

While industry estimates suggest that about eighty per cent of new software

purchased by businesses is not implemented, or not implemented fully, Stacks Goudkamp was determined that Practice Evolve would be taken up by everyone in the firm to full capacity.

TRAINING

All staff received training in small group sessions during the implementation stage, with Sydney and Newcastle office manager Sandra Brandt attending all training sessions to acquire specialist knowledge and become the in-house software guru. Any questions that she could not answer were referred to Practice Evolve, who were committed to providing an immediate response as part of product support.

“As far as creating documents, that’s been quite easy,” says Brandt. We’re working on a set of precedents that we’ve devised ourselves. But everybody’s using the same precedents, so if somebody picks up a file, they’re all using the same document. And there’s one person in charge of updating, so it has made it a unified system.”

According to Goudkamp, implementing the new system has brought significant efficiencies to the firm: “Keeping a shared list of the contacts we use is much easier. Whereas before everyone was using their own. Now it’s on the screen and you can get to your contacts far more easily. I think preparing briefs to counsel is about ten times quicker.”

Acquiring the Practice Evolve system has also enabled the firm to reduce its carbon footprint. During the implementation, around 650,000 electronic files were transferred from the firm’s old directory to the new system. Acres of hard copy files have now been scanned and converted to electronic format for long-term storage.

ALL THE BENEFITS

“Already I can see great advantages because we no longer have to have big fat files,” says Goudkamp. “That can all be done electronically. It’s reducing the amount of space that files take up in this office. Where we’re getting to is not a paperless office, but there will be far less photocopying and printing. We won’t be paying the huge storage fees, or getting couriers to take files up to storage. We can just shred files when the matter is finished.

“It also means we don’t have to employ someone here full-time to do filing. You quite often find that filing is slow, it’s behind and it’s inefficient. Things get filed in the wrong place because people are so bored with doing it. And then you can’t find something when you need it.”

The greatest benefit to the firm from Practice Evolve has been the ability to reduce the workload in the Sydney office and to utilise the talented lawyers in Newcastle to full capacity. “For me the beauty of it is that you can work remotely,” says Goudkamp.

MORE EFFICIENT & MORE EFFECTIVE

"I wanted to engage the staff and the lawyers in Newcastle more, to make them more efficient and more effective and to work more with Sydney. I wanted Sydney and Newcastle to become virtually one office.

"We were always reluctant to transfer big files up to Newcastle, but now we can do it all electronically. So in that way we've become far more efficient because here in Sydney our in-trays are not as heavy. We're sending work to Newcastle almost every day now and they're really busy up there, which is good.

USING THE TALENT

According to Goudkamp, the change to the new system has brought with it a shift in the firm's staffing plans for the future: "People here are now changing their mindset and realising, look, we've got to use the resources we have here in Newcastle, rather than just keep employing people in Sydney where we have no space and it's expensive. Why not use the space we've got up there and use the talent?"

"So that's what I'm happiest about, really starting to see that come through. And it's making the people in Newcastle happier too. They feel more like they're part of the firm, also they're busier and they're doing more interesting work. So outsourcing to the region has been very good."

"Essentially the physical location of staff no longer matters. They can be working remotely from home or from another city just as easily as from the Newcastle or Sydney office, so it doesn't really matter where we employ them. The firm is in a phase of strong growth so I think we will need to be reviewing staffing levels across the board. We now have a new flexibility that I hope will help to shape our future staffing policies."