

WHEN IT HITS THE SCAN



Claire Henry, records manager at Elkington and Fife, on creating an online filing system with EzeScan to help deliver competitive benefits to clients

Competition. Law firms with corporate clients know it well, since most of their expertise is geared to helping clients get a market lead – but to do that, they must also offer a competitive and quality service.

Claire Henry, records manager at south-east intellectual property boutique Elkington and Fife, says her firm's main goal is to help clients attain an edge, which it can only do by offering high-quality legal services. The firm sought to progress that aim in 2016 by finding cost-savings and driving efficiencies.

"I was tasked with reviewing our systems and processes to find out how much money we were spending and on what. One of our biggest outlays was physical file storage, which isn't surprising since IP is quite paper-intensive. We estimated that we could save about £40,000 a year on overheads by getting rid of them, which could then be reinvested in systems development."

She adds that the firm approached EzeScan to help digitise its files onto a digital database so that its physical document stockpile could be destroyed, and to ensure that all documents could easily be scanned into it in the future.

"We've digitised about 70% of our files so far, and we now have a high-resolution scanner in the office which puts files straight onto the server. EzeScan gave us an initial assessment and helped us integrate all of that into our IT infrastructure. I was surprised in the end how few GBs you need for the system – it's fewer than are needed to run my smartphone."

CASH IN THE SCAN

A key consideration when investing in a cost-saving solution, says Henry, is how long it will take for that money to come back to the firm – and document digitisation was pursued because it offered a substantial and fast return on investment.

"The cost of getting a scanner into the office and installing the right software was about £5,000 and we've saved £20,000 in less than a year of doing this. It's a very quick return, and by the end of 2018 it will be even more because we will have completely shed our storage costs." She adds that having documents stored on computer also negates the cost of transporting to and from the storage facility.

"Anybody in our business can now get access to files instantly without having to spend time requesting them and incurring the cost of locating and transporting them."

The firm isn't just focusing on what it can save in storage costs now, but how it can reduce compliance costs as well once the EU's General Data Protection Regulation comes into effect.

"The GDPR's requirements mean that having physical files could be very expensive after May 2018. Many firms will likely be inundated with data subject access requests, and providing that data will be very costly if they have to constantly ferry files back and forth from storage."

But the key outcomes of this cost-saving measure, says Henry, is that the firm can afford to invest in technologies that will bolster productivity.

"Elkington and Fife has an ethos of using technology to fund technology and we are planning on investing in a document management system – which will help the firm become considerably more efficient and GDPR compliant in the future.

"Our project with EzeScan is also getting people ready for DMS technology by getting them used to a paper-light system, where filing is faster, documents are more accessible and collaboration is easier."

FASTER FILES

Henry says that while a DMS could make the firm more efficient, the firm's processes have already been



LPM FIRM FACTS

Elkington and Fife

Revenue: £11m

Corporate status: LLP

32 fee earners, 78 total staff

Offices: London, Sevenoaks

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EzeScan is focused on developing highly automated document scanning capture solutions that address business needs.

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streamlined by its digital filing system. The practice now uses a Kodak i3250 – selected for its quietness and ease of use – to scan documents, which are then registered in the back end of the firm’s CMS.

“The scanner, leased to us by EzeScan, produces a superior image quality of document even when the quality of the original is poor. It also uses optical character recognition technology to register every word in the document. So, not only is it easy to get hold of documents but to search them as well.” She adds that, as such, fee earners find it much easier to find the relevant files when needed.

The process of filing documents has also been improved. Henry says that categorising and storing physical files was a time-consuming task that could have been simpler.

“We digitally converted our internal reference numbers into barcodes, which enables the scanner to save it straight into the file we need – little input is needed.”

But perhaps the key productivity benefit the firm has reaped from this technology,

says Henry, is that it enables staff to work remotely.

“The library is accessible from anywhere with an internet connection and it’s enabled our fee earners and consultants to work much more flexibly – whether because it saves them carrying enormous files around with them to see clients, or if they need to work from home or even on holiday.”

And these process improvements make the firm’s service considerably more competitive. Henry says: “It takes a lot of chargeable time to wait for physical files to come out of storage or to be reviewed or simply to search for the right file. This system saves us an enormous amount of time and effort, which translates into a higher-quality service – which, in turn, benefits the client by helping make their business more competitive.”

Providing a high-quality service is enormously important for firms looking to deliver competitive advantage to clients – and creating a paper-light digital filing system is an easy win for firms looking to save money and drive efficiencies. **LPM**