

Enabling change – delivering 21st century legal support

A top 50 UK law firm commissioned Intelligent Office to review its secretarial and office administrative functions. At the time, the firm's support consisted of PAs, secretaries and administrative assistants plus central office services such as print, mail and archives. The ratio of secretarial support to fee earners was about 1:2.5. According to PwC's annual law firm survey, the average ratio within equivalent sized law firms at that time was 1:3.8.

The firm's support structure had grown organically and was managed locally within practice groups. As a result, service varied across the firm. It had become tailored to meet individual fee earner need and demand, leading to inconsistency and inability to use support resources to maximum effect.

Set against this was the firm's drive to modernise: to ensure that it could compete on service and on price in a climate where clients demanded 'more for less'. The firm wanted its support services to become more professional, modern and be structured cost effectively to ensure the firm continued to improve its profitability.

Our task - to create legal support services that would:

- Ensure a scalable structure to meet current and future need
- Create a culture and platform for change
- Deliver 'best in class' business processes to improve fee earner productivity
- Improve the hours of coverage that fee earners could rely on
- Support other operational projects (e.g. office moves, paper-lite working)

The review

We assessed the current service delivery, using our proprietary time recording software to gather secretarial data over a period of time. We also collected insights from secretaries, fee earners and partners through the completion of over 50 focus group sessions. This discovery exercise revealed that **more than half of all secretarial time was spent on document production, file management and general administration.**

Completing the top five purely **administrative** tasks (printing, hard-copy filing, general scanning, archiving and retrieval, and post) amounted to almost 600 hours of secretary and PA time per week, or 16 full-time roles. The firm's secretaries were paid on average 25% more than administrators and yet, as demonstrated by the time recording, were spending a significant amount of time on work more administrative in nature, thereby increasing the overall service costs to the firm.

The solution – a new legal support structure

Our model separated document production, compliance and administrative tasks from the PAs and secretaries, freeing them up to focus on adding value to client and fee earner relationships. It included:

- Removal of the traditional secretarial role
- An improved PA role with a clearly defined remit and career structure
- A central compliance unit to handle client ID and conflict checking
- A more consistent and responsive approach to document production through creating specialist document production teams in each office
- A 'one stop shop' administrative service located on the fee earning floors and supporting each practice group. The team provides filing and e-filing support, scanning and matter administration
- A consolidated 'Docucentre' in each office to provide reprographics, mail and archive services

The implementation

The new structure saw Intelligent Office become responsible for on-site DPC, local administrative support and centralised reprographics, mail and archive services – c.100 people across the firm's offices.

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The right fit

Our client has a strong culture and employer brand. It wanted an outsourcing partner that it could trust to enable change, deliver great support services and critically match its focus on being a great employer for its people.

At Intelligent Office, we are proud of our culture. As a result of our focus on training, supporting and developing our people, we were accredited with Investors in People's Gold in 2012 and reaccredited at our renewal in 2015. We encourage and support personal and professional development. We like nothing more than seeing our people succeed.

This is what one member of the pre-existing support team who TUPE'd from the firm to Intelligent Office has to say:

"When I found out I was going to be transferred to Intelligent Office I felt hurt. Now I absolutely think that working for Intelligent Office is the best thing for me. I had worked in archives for 18 years, running a team of three people and I knew there wasn't anywhere I could progress to. After just a few weeks of Intelligent Office being on site, I was promoted to Docucentre manager and, two years on, I am now business services manager for one of our sites."

The results – more for less

- The cost of service per fee earner has reduced year-on-year
- In the past 12 months, the document production team completed more than 33,600 jobs, amounting to 20,844 hours or 2,779 days
- The document production team supported a year-on-year increase in volumes with 8% less resource
- In the largest site, on average, the local administrative team completed 69,519 sheets of printing, copying and scanning per week – previously done by PAs, secretaries and fee earners at a significantly higher cost to the firm
- In the past six months, the local administrative team in the largest site spent more than 1,874 hours completing filing and e-filing support

Some feedback from those we support

"Just wanted to say a huge thanks to the document production team, they have literally changed my life and taken all the stress away from my role. They are efficient, know how to do everything and do an amazing job of everything I give to them. I don't know how we survived without them!" - Real Estate

"I just wanted to tell you how brilliant Floor Support and Docucentre were last week. We had a lot of work to do for an arbitration that is taking place this week, and we were on very tight timescales – both Floor Support and Docucentre worked their backsides off getting A5 bundles prepped, additional copy docs ready and a massive scanning job completed.

"Please let them know how much we appreciate the work that they all did – I honestly couldn't have got the job finished without their help." - Dispute Resolution

About Intelligent Office

With more than 900 employees based in 49 client sites and two shared services centres, Intelligent Office is the leading provider of support services to the UK legal sector. Clients include Farrer & Co, Capsticks, Boodle Hatfield, Bevan Brittan, Bircham Dyson Bell, Wedlake Bell and Clarke Willmott.

The majority of Intelligent Office's services are delivered on site at clients' premises and include secretarial, reprographics, mailroom, facilities, matter management, front of house and core goods procurement.

Intelligent Office also provides document production support both on site at clients' premises and via two onshore shared services centres in Scotland.

IntelligentOffice^{UK}

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