

Briefing

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SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

TAKING A POP
How Herbert Smith Freehills is having a go at the world of alternative legal services

BREXIT BAROMETER
What Briefing readers think the European project's fate means to legal business

EYES HAVE IT
Industry analysis of how data's presentation drives better business performance



Seeing is believing

Visualisation of business information makes a big difference to whether you do the right thing with it

INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

Reporting for duty

The reputation of business intelligence for delivering both deeper and more actionable data is driving DW Reporting, a specialist in the field, to diversify and expand operations

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law firm's people are essentially incentivised to perform for their firm through changes in numbers.

There are the numbers that are ideally nudging skyward at the bottom of their pay slips, of course. But sadly managing performance isn't quite that simple. Even the best lawyers won't just perform at a constant hum.

Moreover, the work is never really done. Like many other professionals, lawyers, and those managing or supporting them, need to prioritise the tasks that really do need to be done today – the contract to be completed, bill to be sent, or client needing a catch up – without delay. They need to know the numbers they most need to know this week, they need to know when those numbers

change by a critical amount, and they may well need to know what to do about it this minute before it's too late.

That's not an easy dynamic for any business to manage. Not only will the priorities not be the same for every firm – each linked to a different strategy. The goals themselves will change with external factors – and today's specific numbers are, of course, changing all the time as the world unfolds. Global firms, moreover, are increasingly finding ever more sophisticated ways to divvy work up across convenient time zones to keep things going around the clock.

Going for growth

It's the role of business intelligence (BI) to make



some sense of all this – to work out the datasets the firm needs to prioritise for particular roles, teams or individuals, and plan how to get them to do what they need to do with that data.

DW Reporting's proposition is that the law firm can leave all of this to them. And with over 250% growth in 2015, says the team, firms would appear to agree. Commercial director Jon Roscow says the business won 26 new clients in 2015 alone, taking it from 25 to over 50. Turnover is now more than £1m a year – and the business has just opened an office in Canada with the hire of Rob Stote, formerly product manager at Thomson Reuters Elite.

“It’s a huge coup for us – and we expect to turn this from a European to an international business

within three years,” says Roscow.

Managing director Dan Wales adds: “Demand has grown very rapidly here in the UK – so the word is out. We were starting to grow a client base on the other side of the Atlantic. The next logical step is to have local specialists there to service that demand.

“We have already essentially taken business intelligence from being something of a mystery into the mainstream. It’s very clear that firms today need more effective insights into business operations to be ever more competitive.

“Historically, I think BI work has been viewed as quite time-consuming, expensive and even high-risk. But this capability is now a ‘must have’ – the opposite of all three of those perceptions.”



Domain game

But while others also offer tools to create whizzy visions of management information, business intelligence consultant James Baldassarra says: “It’s less about the tools you use, and more about understanding what the business is finally trying to achieve. The software isn’t the end game. You also need to understand the dynamics – and even characters – of a law firm to achieve positive business change.”

It’s notable that everyone at DW Reporting other than Roscow has spent plenty of time working for law firms themselves over their

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careers – so common processes and approaches to cultural challenges, among other business improvement obstacles, are well understood.

Baldassarra continues: “One of the really exciting things is that firms are no longer just focusing on the most obvious metrics – billing targets, for example, or work completed.

They’re venturing into harnessing much more contextual information from the business – such as the time to complete key processes. It’s not just about improving the numbers – but how to get to that one important number that much faster.”

Baldassarra scopes out firms’ requirements and turns them into interactive visualisations – whereas fellow business intelligent consultant Samuel Sheldon focuses on the foundations of data efficiency and architecture that means DW Reporting can improve its own performance to clients over time. But everyone working for the business needs to understand the contextual challenges of a law firm.

“Different firms also target slightly different

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things,” explains Sheldon. “We will work with them to understand their key indicators and create the dashboard display formations they specifically want, as well as need. There are lots of clever styles of graph and chart, for example, but there are also other concerns, such as something attractive that fits corporate brand guidelines and values.”

Assign responsibility

Firms’ reporting requirements are, in fact, potentially every bit as bespoke as their design preferences – a fact that has recently led DW Reporting to add a new string to its bow.

Assign Managed Reporting, launched in September 2015, offers to manage shorter-term reporting projects as needed. RPC was the first firm to sign up, and within just one month – acknowledging that often-irregular reporting needs made resourcing in this area of business support particularly difficult in a more cost-conscious climate.

Wales explains: “There’s a real lack of resource in finance systems and reporting expertise. So with Assign, firms can acquire our support on an annual basis.

“Whenever a new piece of work is needed, they just log a call with us. Perhaps you suddenly need a report for a key client – and you need it today. But internally there’s just no availability because of other projects ongoing”

Interactive experiences

However, with its Evaluate matter budgeting and pricing option and Quantum enterprise business intelligence solution, the business clearly also invests in building firms a longer-term picture.

“One of our core company values is the way that we manage all our relationships,” says Roscow.

“We can help firms with short-term needs through Assign, but we want a long-term relationship that appreciates the lifecycle of BI investment.”

For its own part, and to complement the team’s law firm experience, the business is also investing in continuous project and account management skills training for all employees.

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The bottom line, of course, is that regardless of data type, duration of project or display style, firms want any technology they deploy to be used regularly and consistently.

Baldarrassa explains that some alignment with consumer-grade experiences may also therefore be sensible to consider.

“Consumers increasingly expect certain analytical capability each and every day. They’re used to certain presentation styles on their own phones – location information or personal fitness data, for example. When that consumer comes to their office, it’s probably not a bad idea to try to engage them in some of the same ways.

“People should really be able to identify – and understand – their basic metrics at a glance. They then drill down into details, through simple directions, to understand more about something at any moment in time.”

Sheldon adds: “It’s no longer acceptable just to provide the visualisation. That graphic should shed light on the actual actions to be taken – not just a prompt, for example, but a hook through to the necessary system that needs updating. If I see I have missing hours, one click can take me straight to the time-recording system to do something about that before I forget.”

It all boils down to managing to understand and action more, in the short time at your disposal. With so much business bursting through their own front door in quick succession, the team at DW Reporting should easily be able to relate to the experience of their clients. ▀