

Briefing

ISSUE 01
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EXTRA

I N F R A S T R U C T U R E

From out of the basement...

How IT and facilities are shaping the law firms of tomorrow

Feature

Clicks and mortar

IT and facilities leaders on the challenges their departments face after the recession, and whether they're finally seen as holding strategic roles

Case studies

FIT-OUT: Clyde & Co's relocation project director on moving offices, fitting out, technology for the workplace and the wow factor

TELECOMS: Simmons & Simmons' telecoms manager on how his firm has made everyone more available to clients with new technology



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Facilities and IT belong at the top

Not at the bottom, in the basement, where many partners think they belong.

The canner law firms now recognise that the functions they used to regard as mere plumbing, the Morlocks of legal business, have a huge amount to add at the strategic level.

In our first printed supplement to LSN's market-leading e-zine, **Briefing**, we find out if firms are listening to their IT and facilities leaders, and what those leaders think lies in their future – from virtual desktops to the hidden benefits of an office move, from choosing a fit-out firm to using presence technology to make staff more available to clients.

We're also running a longer, wider-ranging version of the 'Clicks and mortar' feature in the digital edition – just use the link below to download it.

I hope you like **Briefing Extra** – covering people in legal who matter but rarely get attention is a personal goal, and one that lies at the heart of LSN.

Rupert White, editor of Briefing and Briefing Extra

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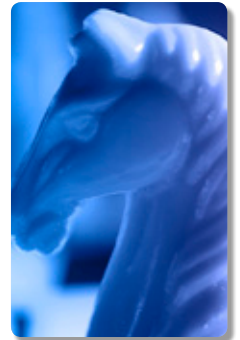
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Feature: Strategic moves

Briefing Extra speaks to IT and facilities leaders about the challenges their units face after the recession, and finds out if firms are finally giving them the strategic recognition they deserve. Interviews with IT and facilities people at A&O, Tollers, Finers Stephens Innocent, IBB Solicitors and more

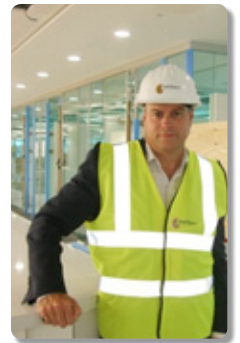


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Case study:

In search of the wow factor

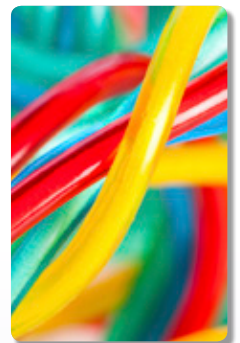
Briefing Extra speaks with Clyde & Co's relocation project director Paul Way about moving office and choosing the right fit-out team for a top-tier law firm. Way tells us why Clyde chose **Overbury** for fit-out, and what's really important in moving a law firm to a new office



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Case study: How a network can reshape a law firm

Simmons & Simmons' telecoms manager Ian Walker talks to **Briefing Extra** about how the firm is making lawyers and business services people more available, to each other and to clients – and how **G3 Telecommunications** helped the firm achieve this



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How Briefing Extra works

Briefing Extra is a supplement to LSN's e-magazine, **Briefing**. It features independent feature articles and carefully edited sponsored editorial, which is clearly marked. We always re-interview customers for case studies and edit sponsored articles to deliver better content for readers.

FEATURE

Strategic moves

Lucy Trevelyan asks IT chiefs and facilities leaders about the challenges their departments face after the recession, and finds out if firms are finally giving them the strategic recognition they deserve

When it comes to strategy – the theme of the month of this supplement's big sister, Briefing – IT and facilities are often seen as an afterthought, despite being essential to everything law firms strategically do.

But the recession and the Legal Services Act (LSA) is changing all this. Can- nier law firms are pulling their infrastructure people – IT and facilities – into strategy decisions, because they know they can contribute hugely to a firm's future.

Damian Blackburn, former Davenport Lyons IT director and now consultant at SLFtech, believes IT heads should be more involved in determining law firm strategy. "IT can bring about dramatic

changes. It should be involved at the strategic decision-making level, but I don't see much of that."

Often, he says, IT is applied as an afterthought, with a decision being made and everyone assuming IT can carry it out, "like an internal service company being given instruction", he says – which is all wrong.

"If you understand technology and how to apply it, the decision-making process needs to incorporate what you know before a decision is stamped – otherwise you're not going to extract the best out of the situation."

When you're talking about changing processes, law firm management often doesn't have much experience or

insight about what can be done, he says. "IT people don't just know about technology – they also tend to be process change managers, because everything new they do is a process change. There's a lot of untapped expertise that law firms should take more information from."

In many law firms, he says, IT either reports into another service head or partner, who in turn reports to the main board – giving a second-hand reporting structure – or IT reports to an operational board which reports to the strategic board.

"The problem is, the reporting line is a dotted line and it should be full at least some of the time. There should be more connectivity between

the person in charge of IT and the people who decide the strategy going forward."

David Baskerville, director of operations and IT at Tollers, says he joined the firm because it offered him close involvement with strategy.

Last year he made the move from head of IT to his current role, which, he says, reflected the closeness of IT to facilities, reception and marketing. He feels the changes ahead in the legal sector have increased the pressure on IT to provide resilient, well-performing systems and infrastructure, while also driving them to develop better systems to underpin and automate changing working practices.

"As a regional law firm, we don't have the resources

of the big boys, but the expectations remain high," he says. So, the firm's practice management system (PMS), Norwel, is now also its case and document management system, gaining efficiency through consolidation, and he's ramping up internal development resources.

David Bennett, head of information systems at Thomson Snell & Passmore, says he suspects IT is having more involvement in strategy than it used to.

"In my firm, IT strategy has helped shaped the short- and medium-term objectives. It has started the firm thinking further into the future, and it's looking to embrace the changes we suggest. The firm's groups definitely see IT as a catalyst for change. Partners are very supportive, considerably more so than I thought they would be." They're going to need to be – Bennett's department is replacing practically all the firm's IT systems, including printers, desktop applications, and the PMS.

There were several catalysts for this change, he says: the economy, the threat posed by the LSA, expanding client demands and an increasingly competitive marketplace. A desire to increase income and profitability was obviously also central. "The new systems will give us the ability to build an infrastructure based on best practice that isn't compromised by the existing infrastructure. It will allow for business continuity and remote access and will reduce the number of applications running in the firm."

Stephen Brown, IT director at Higgs & Sons Solicitors,

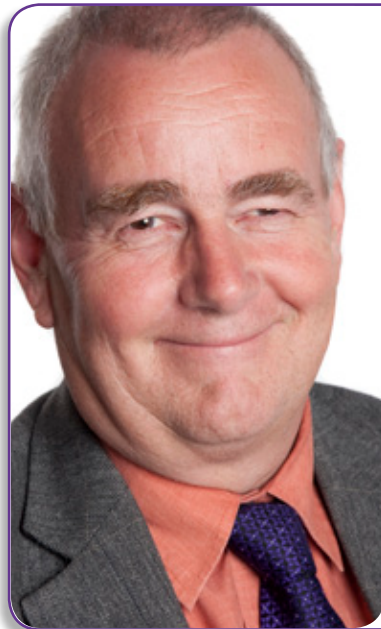
says IT is a key influencer in his firm's strategy. "Our role is viewed as critical by the partners – they understand that the business needs IT to deliver the firm's goals and strategies. I have aligned the firm and the IT department very closely to help achieve the firm's needs in the short and long term."

One good thing about a

bridge teams to a new single office, unifying communications across the firm to allow greater collaboration between staff, and with that change creating a new conference bridge to allow staff and clients to communicate using screen-sharing technologies. Cloud technologies are also being investigated.

Brown's experience shows

to the chief executive and he leads his firm's property strategy, so he's representative of the most strategically involved 'people in the basement'. He's also been heavily involved in implementing his firm's expansion plans over the last year, with new offices in Madrid and Paris. It took about four months to find, fit-out and fill those offices, and location,



"Space planning is key to making sure the firm has enough room to accommodate fee-earners as and when they're needed, without having vacant space waiting for expansion."

Mike Fox, facilities manager, IBB Solicitors

firm the size of Higgs is that Brown doesn't have to write a 50-page business case to get things done, he says. "I can go to the managing partner and say 'this is an issue, here is a solution, do you want me to do it?' If it reaches a six-figure sum, he'll take it to the partnership, and I would present the case."

Moving house

'Things done' at Higgs recently include moving the firm's Brierley Hill and Stour-

up some of the many upsides of moving – he says his office move, which brought a 170-strong team into a new 30,000 sq ft building, was a good opportunity to implement a number of technological updates, including refreshing all the network hardware, updating IP server addresses and providing new phone systems.

But moves are a big deal for firms of all sizes, be they small, 200 or top 50. Jason Cousins, premises and facilities director at Olswang, sits on his firm's operations board, he reports

cost and getting the right deal were big criteria.

The moves, he says, highlighted the difference between refurbishing an existing building and moving into a new one, and the cultural differences that can crop up when expanding abroad.

"In Paris, we found somewhere which we refurbished – in Madrid we got a brand new building. Madrid was the easiest to fit-out, because it's got all the lighting in place, raised floors and so on. Paris was a different kettle of fish – no raised floors, old-style

building, having to run trunking around the edge of the rooms and trying to put wireless systems in. Not easy.”

Cultural barriers reared their heads, he says, both in finding and communicating with contractors and with appeasing the wants of foreign lawyers. “In Germany, lawyers don’t like to share offices; in Paris, they don’t mind. In Spain, they don’t like more than two people in an office.”

He chose desk furniture from an environmental point of view, he says – and furniture that can be used in any international office, that will stand the test of time.

This wasn’t just for ease – it’s about consistency and brand. “We’ve stuck with the one chair, so if you go to an Olswang office you will see the same chair in every single office. We also have very much the same IT set up as we have in the UK.”

Opening more European offices, he says, has meant restructuring the firm’s services to manage facilities, infrastructure and services on an international basis.

Back in the UK, Mike Fox, facilities manager at IBB Solicitors, says the main challenges when his firm moved office were in managing the logistics and details to tight budgets, and making sure there was as little disruption to the business as possible.

His team project-managed the whole move, from selection of premises to fit-out, lease-end negotiations to seating and space plans for 60 people, the desks, the IT and the move itself – a big project for any business. Managing expectations was a

key challenge, he says – some fee-earners, for example, had issues with moving to a very open plan set-up with air-conditioned offices.

Becoming strategic

Fox says facilities in the past always played a support role in the formulation of strategy at IBB – it alerted the firm to new trends and technology, and helped ensure it was up to date on best practice.

But his role has changed, because of the recession. “We have been tasked with looking for ways to improve value for money,” he says. “We started to take a serious look at our overhead costs in 2007 and were surprised at the amount of money we were able to save. It was a real wake-up call to see how complacent we had become with regard to supplier costs.”

His firm turned to some costs consultants – a painful but beneficial catalyst for change, he says – which soon proved their worth. “We worried about the impact the tendering process would have on our existing supplier relationships – we didn’t want to lose the goodwill we had built up. Also, we felt that the changeover process was going to be labour intensive, and it was.”

But the benefits came later in cost savings and a different

Upsides to the downturn

Chris Booth of fit-out firm Overbury outlines some benefits to doing up an office, or just moving on

The downturn has presented a great opportunity for the legal sector to secure good lease terms on new property, or to renegotiate existing ones, Chris Booth, chief operating officer of fit-out company Overbury, says.

They have also “taken advantage of a highly competitive market to get keen prices on their fit-out and refurbishment projects” – as outlined by Paul Way in our case study on Clyde & Co on page 9.

There is still a lot of resistance to moving away from the traditional cellular office environment to open plan, he says, though there are exceptions.

“We’ve seen a trend towards legal occupiers creating more aesthetically engaging environments in the common areas of their offices,” he says. “Technology is starting to play a bigger part in legal client requirements too, with a move towards taking

on technological advances to address storage issues, so space is used more efficiently.”

Moving premises, Booth says, can be much less disruptive than having works carried out while your company is still in the building and can also work out more cost-effective, as the construction programme can run more quickly in an empty space. There’s also less downtime and out-of-hours requirements for noisy works when the work is happening in a different place.

Another plus side to a move is in going somewhere that’s more energy efficient and that meets higher ‘green’ standards, he says – this can mean longer-term cost savings as well as helping with CSR requirements.

There’s an oblique but interesting further strategic reason for an office move – it says ‘fresh start’ to staff and clients alike, he says.

attitude to supplier management, he says. “Our skill or ability to negotiate supplier deals has improved. Also, we have been able to manage the relationships better. And an unexpected benefit of the whole process has been the rest of the firm’s willingness to become more open to suggested changes.”

Fox says that seeing office space as a resource, and therefore trying to get maximum return on investment in premises, is one of the top strategic innovations a law firm can make in terms of facilities.

“Space planning is key to making sure the firm has enough room to accommodate fee-earners as and when

they are needed, without having vacant space waiting for expansion," he says.

Advances in technology have also helped with space, says Fox, especially those that allow people to work effectively outside the office. "This has meant it's easier to share desks and expand without acquiring more space," he

At Tollers, around 40% of the workforce is able to work from home at any one time. "When looking to implement such arrangements, people assume the challenges to be in terms of security and equipment," director of ops and IT Baskerville says. "But as you move towards flexible working, it becomes obvious

hours in the office. The biggest challenge is the explosion of devices, browsers and operating systems. Keeping our remote working solution operating in this proliferation of platforms is very challenging."

Nick Boarland, IT manager at Finers Stephens Innocent, says his department is always looking for ways to improve

Boarland is always on the lookout for technologies to make lawyers more efficient. "Technologies such as speech recognition, which ties in closely with the incumbent digital dictation system, will enable lawyers to be more efficient, giving them the ability to complete more work in less time.

"The knock-on of this is that secretaries, potentially, will have more time to be PAs rather than being over-burdened with copious amounts of typing. It won't suit all, and it will take time to introduce such a culture change, but it will be a feature of law firms in the future."

Ash says his department at A&O is constantly looking at the smart device market (smartphones, tablets) and already has services in place that can be used by staff with iPads – his was the first law firm to launch an app for the iPad, he says, but he's also waiting to evaluate the BlackBerry Playbook.

"Personal choice is something that makes users happier, and the biggest benefit [of offering smart devices to staff] is that, in the long hours and rush of daily life, they can use the devices for personal and business purposes in a way that best suits them. The downside is the data leakage implications, the ability to provide support to such a wide range of devices that keep changing, and general security, to name a few."

Ash's department is also currently working on several collaboration and communications solutions, including services that will allow clients and lawyers to work on



"Virtual desktop technology will give lawyers the same experience, whether they're at home or in the office."

Nick Boarland, IT manager, Finers Stephens Innocent

explains. "Sometimes, thinking about space in this way has been neglected, as it tends to be an investment decision at the beginning of a long lease without much thought of the return expected on that investment."

Going mobile

Space creation isn't the only driver for flexible and mobile working, and the barriers to mobility aren't always the ones you might expect.

that the challenges are more related to people, processes and procedures."

The devices that firms issue to staff can include a laptop, a smartphone and even now tablet computers. While these are great for making people more mobile and helping them to travel light, they're an infrastructural challenge.

"Flexible working is very prolific: start early, finish late," jokes Gareth Ash, CIO at Allen & Overy. "Mobile working is growing, but it's not extensive, because people spend long

efficiency, whether lawyers are in or out of the office.

"The improvement of virtual desktop technology will give them the same experience, whether they're at home or in the office," he says. All Finers lawyers have BlackBerrys, he says, "which have become efficiency tools in their own right", and they can dictate and file emails to the firm's document management system from them as well as use email. The Finers IT team can even manage all the firm's servers from their BlackBerrys.

transactions together. “We also have an automated document assembly project being implemented as well as a Chinese walls solution.” (Read more about how technology can bring lawyers and clients together in our Simmons & Simmons telecoms case study on page 11).

Farming it out

A major bugbear for IT and facilities right now is the growth in outsourcing, in all its guises, in law firms. Damian Blackburn, former Davenport Lyons IT chief and now consultant at SLFtech, says many firms are outsourcing some or all of their technology to save money. “Most initial difficulties with outsourcing tend to be operational matters, which you can sort out quickly. Longer term, you can lose some strategic view if you outsource everything, and you could argue that you lose a bit of control – but you get benefits like access to a wider range of specialisms, and more continuity and contingency built in when you do outsource.”

Outsourcing a firm’s IT systems, often called cloud computing now, takes IT and services stress and puts it on the web. It’s an important innovation for law firms because it gives a scalable, economical IT model to work with, where you can buy the power and the space you need, without having to do it yourself, says Blackburn. And the preferred cloud suppliers are ISO 27001 approved – which means they apply the best possible data security standards to your data, and

can do it better and cheaper than you can.

A&O is taking a novel approach to outsourcing this year – it’s chosen not to do it. Instead, it’s transferring most of its back office to a new building in Belfast, in an in-house, inland near-shore affair. HR, finance, IT, library and business services functions will be shipped over, with about 180 roles transferring from London. The number of support roles in Belfast is expected to reach 250 by 2014.

Ash says around 70 IT roles will move over to Belfast – about half of his team. “We’re not going to deny that it’s not about cost to a certain extent [in IT]. But it’s also about providing value to our clients, in being as cost-efficient as we can be. [And] now the firm is more global, the requirement to be London-based is not so pressing.”

He says the move will mean the firm will have to be smarter about the way people communicate. “We’re putting in a lot of video conferencing facilities, and Belfast isn’t that far away – you can do it in a day if you need a face-to-face.”

Green legal futures

The most recent, and possibly one of the most important future issues in infrastructure is environmentally conscious behaviours, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

A firm with green credentials and community spirit is more attractive to clients and recruits, and both facilities and IT have a part to play.

Carol Light, head of facilities

management at Shoosmiths, says CSR is a prime focus at the firm. Shoosmiths has created a corporate responsibility director position, and Light works with her “on processes, procedures, targets, strategy and benchmarks”.

“We are heavily involved not only in the strategy and process, but also in the day-by-day management, assessment, insurance and risk assessment, charity support events, and so on. It forms a fundamental part of our quarterly reviews.”

CSR and environmental awareness are big issues over in IT, too. Boarland at Finers says that CSR is key to the firm, and his department has taken measures to ensure they are as mindful of green measures as possible. He’s virtualised most of the key servers, cutting power and the need for air conditioning, and he’s ensuring the responsible disposal of all the firm’s old PC hardware to a charity that refits them for people in developing countries.

At Olswang, CSR is a priority, says Cousins, and facilities makes a big contribution to the firm’s CSR efforts. Olswang implemented the environmental management standard ISO 14001 two years back, he says, and is now listed in the Sunday Times Top 60 Best Green Companies. It also has “numerous” CSR projects on the go. Olswang’s leaders, he says, have always been keen to be seen to be good with the environment, in the selection of products and in other areas. “It doesn’t hinder what I do, but I do have to factor it in, which takes time. Measuring our carbon

can take quite a lot of time, for example, but we use those results to win awards – and those awards get us free advertising, if you like.” This doesn’t mean it’s greenwash at Olswang – if a firm is doing well enough to win awards, it needs to have fully embraced the values the prizes denote.

Fox at IBB knows a lot about green issues in the workplace – he had a 20-year career in the Department of the Environment. It was easier to implement green policies in the public sector, he says, but in 2008 IBB carried out an environmental audit of the firm’s main office at Capital Court, and the initiatives it has had since include providing recycling facilities everywhere, recycling copier toner cartridges – “we made this a pre-requisite on the re-tender of the copier contracts”, intelligent lighting systems, regular energy audits, encouraging landlords to install smart meters on electricity supplies, recycling and reusing stationery, and setting as many printers as possible to default to double-sided printing. Next on the list is a Carbon Trust analysis of how the firm can cut its lighting energy use.

All these things sum up why those who work in the basement actually have one of the furthest views in the business – and why they should be listened to more, before the big decisions are made. As Fox says: “In my experience, projects like these are an important part of the review and renew philosophy, often saving money as well as contributing to the firm’s green credentials. It’s a win-win situation for everyone.” ●

CASE STUDY FIT-OUT : CLYDE & CO

In search of the wow factor

Briefing Extra speaks with Clyde & Co's relocation project director Paul Way about moving offices and choosing the right fit-out team for a top-tier firm

Clyde & Co is moving its London staff to new premises, with nearly 700 lawyers and back office staff moving from two offices into one building in the City. In charge of this move is Paul Way, relocation project director for Clyde & Co, and his life is, understandably, all about project management.

There are few, if any benefits in having staff spread across several offices in the same location for a law firm – especially in expensive places like the City, Way says. “It’s not rocket science, but there’s a massive improvement when people are co-located.”

But moving house isn’t about the money – it’s just as strategic a thing as re-engineering a firm’s existing office with a new fit-out, for example, because a firm should be looking to meet its future needs, not just its current behaviours.

Though it seems the buildings market might finally

be on the rise again, Way says that where deals can still be made, they can help defray the cost of moving out. “With the kind of incentives that landlords have been offering, and the competitive nature of the fit-out market, it is possible to fund the fit-out with the savings that you make, for example, on rent – or at least make the cost a lot less than the multimillions it could be.”

Law firms aren’t really that different to other businesses when it comes to moves, Way says, though they’re still very sensitive to location. But while location remains the law firm ball and chain, things are changing faster inside the offices. After the recession, a lot of firms are looking at moving to a more open plan layout, Way says, because open plan can foster communication and be made even more useful with technology such as wifi.

Clyde & Co isn’t going that far; the firm is staying with

cellular offices, but they will now be a mixture of two-person offices and open plan spaces, he says. There are great advantages to having a two-person system, though, both in daily communication and in giving trainees a close relationship with a partner or a senior associate – that “helps their learning, development and it improves communication”, he says.

When moving house, a facilities chief needs to have some core issues at heart these days, according to Way – among them, resilience (or business continuity), increasing efficiency and capability, client value and appearance.

Clyde & Co is shifting its main IT systems to an offsite data centre as a central element of the move – cutting the risk presented by power outages or other problems within London. The firm is increasing capability in many ways, including fitting a white noise system in open plan

support areas, putting in firm-wide wifi, and creating new breakout areas, meeting rooms and a better restaurant area. All these things are far easier “when you’ve got the fit-out contractor doing it, rather than trying to do it retrospectively”, Way says.

The firm wants to encourage people to have informal client and team meetings in the restaurant and breakout areas, “to get people moving around the building and using the space in a slightly different way”. The firm is also significantly enhancing its firm’s in-house entertaining and presentation capabilities, to deliver more in-house client entertaining, seminars and training events at a lower cost than external delivery.

To Way and the firm, the fundamental benefits of a move or re-fit are improved client visitor experience, and an improvement in staff experience, retention and recruitment. But a move has a

lot of challenges to overcome, ranging from resistance to a culture change and working practices, to new skills, resources and training needs.

For example, your firm may never have managed its own aircon system, or operated the basics of its building before. Way says that this is when options like outsourcing need to be considered: "Is it a better option, is it more cost effective, does it lead to improved service levels and opportunities for staff development?," he says. "It's how you manage the communication and how you work with other key departments, like HR, before you can get down to the nitty gritty of appointing a third party."

In other words, you really have to be on top of your project manager game, and you need a team of suppliers you can trust. And, Way says, if you're a top tier firm, or you're aiming to be one, you need top tier contractors on your side.

When it comes to fit-out, Clyde & Co chose **Overbury** because "they are clearly in that top tier". Most important to Clyde, Way says, was quality, cost and to choose a strong main contractor, to minimise the potential for contractors or subcontractors going into receivership or going bust. "If you're halfway

through a fit-out and a key sub-contractor goes pop, your programme can be seriously affected. It takes time to find another supplier, and you run the risk that they're going to charge anything they want because they're not in a com-

who will be meeting with the main contractor from time to time, and you need to have confidence they can deliver presentations and reports concisely. You don't want to waste the partners' time.

"You want to have key direc-

the main contractor can build it to the highest quality – but if on day one your internal teams are running around like headless chickens and haven't been trained on new systems, or deliveries can't get into the goods lift... It's the smaller

"It's very much about looking the key people in the eye and thinking: 'If it's halfway through the fit-out, on a Sunday afternoon, and there's a major problem on-site, is this guy going to sort this out for me?'"



petitive situation, and quality is clearly very important, for staff and clients."

But when it comes to short-listing a fit-out supplier, Way says, "it's almost completely a people exercise".

"It's very much about meeting the team, finding out who the key people are, looking them in the eye and thinking: 'If it's halfway through the fit-out, on a Sunday afternoon, and there's a major problem on-site, is this guy going to sort this out for me?'"

"Also, previous experience of law firm fit-outs is important, because you'll undoubtedly have a group of partners

in the fit-out company who can succinctly deliver a very punchy presentation and report that says 'We're on programme, we're on budget, everything's all right'."

For project management people like Way, you don't get better than that. But, he says, the nitty gritty of any move is about making something happen so well that, to most people, it's painless.

"Operationally, it's so important to understand how you're going to move into that building and make it work from day one.

"You can have an architect design a fantastic office and

things that stay in people's minds.

"First impressions count, and you need to retain the wow factor. You may have had familiarisation trips for staff before the move, but for a lot of people it may be the first time they see the building. You want it to be a great experience, and for people to say: 'Wow, this is fantastic. I know why we've moved. This is brilliant.'"

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CASE STUDY TELECOMS : SIMMONS & SIMMONS

How a network can reshape a law firm

Simmons & Simmons' telecoms manager Ian Walker talks to Briefing Extra about how the firm is making lawyers and business services more available, to each other and to clients

Telecoms and IT have long been a part of driving competitive advantage at & Simmons. "It's a long while since my role was about managing bills and lines," says the firm's telecoms manager, Ian Walker. "Communications are a strategic part of the business for us. We select technology solutions based on what can drive the greatest value, and how it fits with the firm's strategy."

Simmons & Simmons was at a comms crossroads at the end of 2009: telephony systems were approaching the end of their lives, and Walker could see that the field of unified communications technologies had matured enough to make it very attractive. The decision to start afresh was a "no brainer", he says.

The value that could be delivered by the integration of real-time communication (telephone calls, instant messaging and the like) into the firm's IT infrastructure with asynchronous communication (email, voicemail, text mes-

sages and so on) was clear, and it was also available in a usable way through Microsoft Office Communications Server, or OCS (now rebadged by Microsoft as Lync Server).

"Globally, we had a real mishmash," Walker explains. "When you open a new office, you often inherit the existing telephone system and you make do." Turning this organically grown mesh of comms systems into a unified global system, integrated with office systems such as Outlook, is an expensive business, so Walker says he wanted to "sweat the existing assets until we were sure of the advantage such a change would give us" – so the firm waited until voice over IP (VOIP) was mature enough to deliver sufficient value to make the leap.

Integration enabled by OCS was a key trigger: "We knew that enabling flexible working on the move, and having one number and one mailbox for all users, all fitted the direction of our business and would benefit clients and lawyers hugely," Walker says.

Presence technology also helped swing the decision. Presence is something most people only know from using Skype or instant messaging. Combined with 'one number, one mailbox', presence is a powerful 'shrinking' tool for big businesses.

"Presence shows you someone's availability across all devices and applications," Walker says, "and because it's integrated with Microsoft OCS, the second I pick up my phone, it shows on the system – real and live."

The firm picked the Avaya Aura 6 telephony system and **G3 Telecommunications** as the strategic partner for the London roll-out of the system. It picked G3 because the company, Walker says, understood both the "business pain we were going through" and the Avaya system better than most. "With G3, from day one it felt more like a partnership. They fit in. It's really like they are part of us – we can trust them to deal with our partners professionally and they know their stuff."

With more than three quarters of the firm's offices now using Avaya, Walker says the strategic benefits achieved at the firm are twofold: business process improvement and technology efficiency.

Presence has been an essential component driving business efficiency. "Because you can see when people are available, you can make the best use of your time and their time," Walker says. Having an integrated system also helps colleagues working internationally, bringing them closer with internal video conferencing (also built into OCS). "It is so much easier to video call each other and clients," Walker says. "Plus, we use presence information and tools like IM to get the most out of time-zone differences."

Walker is also excited about 'federation', which makes presence information visible externally – passing the internal benefits outlined above to the client base. Clients can now see if one of their lawyers is available for a call, or just IM with a quick question. "This



“With unified communications, we’re not just putting a telephone on a desk anymore. It’s integration, and it’s changing how lawyers do business.”

is something that will happen more and more,” Walker says. “We pitch it to new clients and they definitely see the benefits. I think that, over the next 18 months, it’ll really take off.”

Walker says the firm is committed to flexible working and delivering excellence – the trick is ensuring that one doesn’t negate the other.

“As clients want ever more 24/7 availability of our staff, work and home life boundaries are increasingly blurred. But the Avaya Aura CM6 has certainly gone some way to giving power to the lawyers to be available as much as possible to clients, while maintaining control of their lives. That’s really important to us,” Walker says.

He also has a long list of benefits around “simple changes that help us do business the way we want”. Blending someone’s desk phone with their work mobile, for example, means that clients call a person, not a device. “Clients don’t care how it works, and that’s the point – they just think you’re

always in the office.”

Integrated voicemail is also, he says, a “really basic and obvious benefit”. “A call will go to you, wherever you are, then try your secretary and then, if all else fails, the client’s audio message will arrive via email onto your Blackberry.” One more small OCS benefit is the ability to click ‘dial’ from any device, including a desktop PC – a simple advantage that Walker says is “fantastic”.

Working with G3 to reinvigorate and replace Simmons & Simmons’ comms infrastructure has been about “bringing everything together and reducing cost”, Walker says. “By replacing telephone and voicemail and integrating it into one system we save around £25,000 a year on maintenance, just in London.” And simple features like ‘phone sleep mode’ help with energy costs, he says, as well as green goals – a different product would have cost £15,000 more in annual energy costs in London alone.

Making better use of the firm’s existing network

infrastructure was also a goal. Now, routing and breaking out of calls over the WAN, where legally allowed, allows the firm to leverage its previous investment into its network.

Walker is also part of the way through consolidating all the global Avaya contracts into one through G3 and the Aura Alliance, which should deliver reduced supplier management – “helping us with our strategy and creating huge savings, if done correctly”. Some savings come in centralising management – smaller offices without local IT staff won’t need to hire in contractors.

These are just some of the changes Simmons & Simmons has been working on with G3 – and it’s happening, Walker says, partly because the firm has now fully realised the benefits of trustworthy strategic IT partnerships. “Consolidating with a strategic partner like this is useful, but you need to do your homework and build the relationship first. If you ever need to bail out, it makes a bigger and bigger impact [the more work you give to

one partner]. But we just don’t have any nervousness with G3 – it’s been a long time since I came across a supplier like this.”

What Simmons & Simmons is doing is far beyond buying new telephony or network systems – it’s embarking on a journey into an integrated future. “With unified communications, we’re not just putting a telephone on a desk anymore,” Walker says. “It’s integration, and it’s changing how lawyers do business with their clients.

“We’re enabling the lawyer on the move, so that clients get though to them more often. This lets our people work more flexibly and gain a better work-life balance. It’s an expensive process, granted, but being available at the right time with the right answers helps you win deals, and keep clients.”

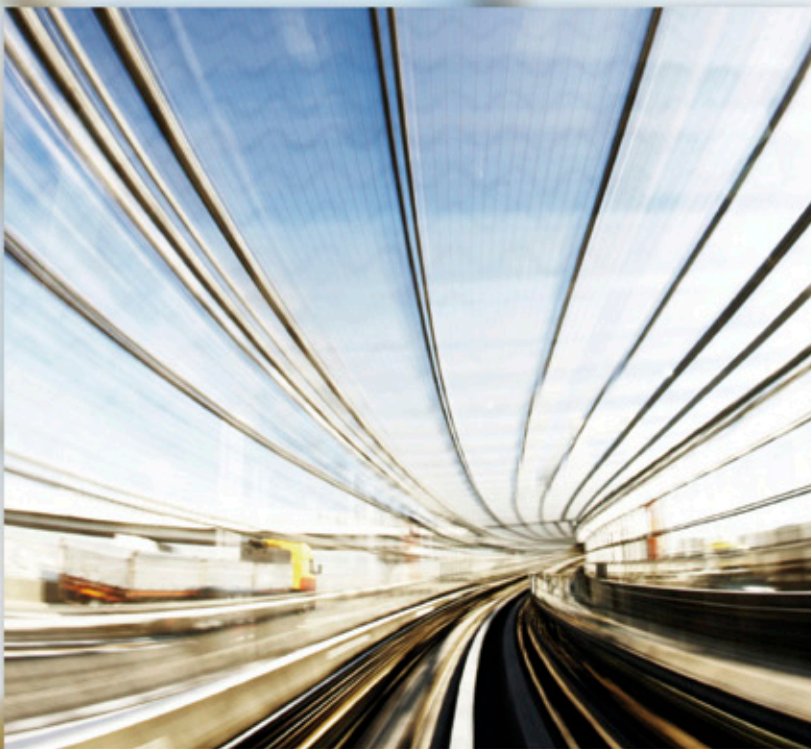
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Legal IT landscapes

A GLOBAL SURVEY OF LEGAL IT PEOPLE ON THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUES AFFECTING LAW FIRMS IN 2011



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