

# Briefing

ISSUE 12 | JUNE 2011

## How to be number one

### Strategy: the key to success

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LexisNexis on how IT integration makes strategy work, Research In Motion on why law firms are now ready for tablets and strategic advice and case studies on financial strategies, mobile communications and international payments

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# Priority number one: strategy



## Does your firm have a strategy for the future?

Most firms think they have a strategic approach to business, but it turns out they don't. For years the extent of their strategy has been 'business as usual', while their special position almost guaranteed a healthy income. Those days are gone, and they're not coming back.

In this special, printed first-anniversary issue of

**Briefing**, we interview the head of strategy at one of the world's biggest law firms and speak to CEOs, senior partners and law firm leaders about why strategy is so important – and how to work out if you're doing it right.

We also have analysis from issue sponsors LexisNexis and Research In Motion, makers of the BlackBerry PlayBook, on how IT is a central plank in any firm's strategy. In this issue you'll

also find strategic advice on international payments, financial strategies and mobile communications.

It's been an amazing year for **Briefing** – we've tried to cover everything people like you in law firm management need to know, and I hope you like it enough to spend another year with us.

**Rupert White, head of content and community at LSN and editor of Briefing**

## Linklaters' strategy man

Rupert Egerton-Smith talks to **Briefing** about transforming the law firm, differentiation, and creating successful law firm strategy



## Feature: All the right moves

Rupert White talks to law firm leaders about strategic thinking, international expansion, differentiation and how far firms may have to shift to succeed



## Integrating for growth

Tim Cheadle at LexisNexis outlines some of the key strategic opportunities and challenges facing law firms looking for growth



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Jane Galvin, head of professional services at Barclays Corporate, on creating and carrying out strategy in law firms



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INTERVIEW

# Strategy, from the top

## **Linklaters' head of strategy and business transformation, Rupert Egerton-Smith talks to Rupert White about transforming the law firm, differentiation and creating successful law firm strategy**

**Linklaters' strategy chief is a man with a lot of sway over the future of law firms. A concert pianist in his spare time (should Linklaters allow such a thing), Rupert Egerton-Smith downplays his work role, saying it's "to score the symphony, and ensure everybody is engaged and understands what we are trying to do".**

Facilitating change in a law firm, he says, requires "quite a lot of orchestration, and a lot of moving pieces. It's pretty challenging, and it's not always harmonious". But he must be playing the right tune – Linklaters is a billion-pound global legal behemoth, and he's one of the back office people closest to its top table.

Few would disagree with the statement that many law firms in the past didn't think

strategically – they just reacted to client needs and set goals like 'Let's have another cracking year like the last one'. But even fewer would say this is how the legal market is now. Thinking and acting strategically is something law firms now have to learn fast, and learn well.

Demand for 'premium legal services' has shrunk as a result of the financial crisis, Egerton-Smith says, which means firms have to work a lot harder for market share – which means they're increasingly having to identify how they can differentiate themselves. At its heart, strategy is about creating differentiation, he says.

"It's always been incredibly difficult in the legal sector to differentiate services. And for a couple of decades, firms

didn't really need to. Now, strategy within the legal sector is about how firms create a proposition that is distinctive from other firms, respond to the changing requirements of clients [accelerated by the financial crisis], and deliver a product that meets clients' requirements distinctively."

### **Changing client needs**

The need for this is something **Briefing** has covered in detail during its first year: more pressure from clients on cost – partly because those clients now "have more visibility on what legal services actually cost", Egerton-Smith says.

"They have gained a lot of visibility through [using] LPOs and other lower-cost providers of certain types of legal

work, which is giving them a bargaining counter. Plus, the role of the general counsel is changing; it is becoming more strategic on the boards of many clients, and they are under pressure to cut spend.

"The balance of power between law firm and client has shifted very much in the favour of the client."

At the same time, he says, "certainly for the bigger international firms but actually for all firms", another threat has arisen – "a very significant change in the economic environment, with the rise of emerging markets". These emerging markets, such as Asia, he says, offer great opportunities but "are highly competitive marketplaces, where clients have increasingly more choice – so firms that want to win in these markets

## INTERVIEW RUPERT EGERTON-SMITH

have to be clear about what it is that makes them distinct, and think much more rigorously about the sources of their competitive advantage and what they should be promoting to the clients".

GCs' needs have changed too. Alongside their newfound need to cut costs and get more transparency from their law firms, they now have more strategic roles in their companies. Egerton-Smith says that he thinks that, as GCs have become more like partners to the corporate leaders, they have seen a need for a more strategic partnership in their external legal providers.

Actively finding out what your clients really want and finding innovative ways to deliver on those needs is a business basic, but it's also something that law firms haven't traditionally cared for. Even this advice, I argue, sounds a bit more reactive than strategic and directing.

"I think the two [modes, strategic and reactive] complement each other, and the difference is the time horizon," Egerton-Smith counters.

"Many firms have had some form of annual planning cycle, [but] where firms haven't had so much rigour is in the longer time horizon – thinking about the aggregate effects of changes in technology and the way services can be delivered against client expectation. In the longer term, where are those vectors likely to go? What is the medium-term blueprint of the firm, in terms of coverage, product mix, the way service is going to be delivered? That gives you

a position to which the firm needs to drive.

"Without that, firms will find it very difficult to be able to make that strategic transition – they will go on planning, year after year, but they won't make a transformation in where they are heading.

"Planning is more tactical. We have a vision and we have a set of strategic priorities, which should enable us to achieve our vision – now, how are we actually implementing that, day to day? Through local planning, down at the practice, geographic and

to strategic thinking, especially when it comes to making rapid change, is that they're not run by committees.

"The complexity is getting a partnership fully bought into this whole [strategic] process. If we were a corporate, we could quickly align all the activities across the company with our strategy and just drive them through.

"We have 500-plus partners – it's impossible to get every one in a room thinking about strategic issues." To solve this, Linklaters uses discussion groups, breaking up the part-

"I think it makes it more difficult [to be agile], but many of the larger professional services organisations have quite agile governance structures. Partners have delegated their authority mostly to a [representative] board, and if that's working with its executive committee, you can quite quickly make decisions. That's the key for the larger firms."

### Think different

Doing things radically differently, quickly or not, is "where

**"The time for laborious annual planning cycles has passed. Firms are having to adjust much faster, and they can do that if they streamline their decision making."**



functional level.

"[But] I think the time for these very laborious annual planning cycles, which took four to six months, has passed. Firms are having to adjust much faster to developments in the market, and they can do that if they streamline their decision making."

### Structural change within

One thing that other business sectors would seem to have over law firms when it comes

nership into cross-functional, cross-office groups, to think about strategic questions and answers. "What doesn't work," Egerton-Smith says, "is coming up with something centrally, and dropping it on the partnership."

It's not just law firms that have to deal with this challenge – Egerton-Smith says it can apply to any business that's a partnership, from accounting to management consultancy. So are law firms, because they're partnerships, just inherently less agile?

it gets more complicated", he says. "If you compare the legal sector to investment banking, for example, investment banking has historically moved in and out of markets much quicker, and been more adept and agile at the sort of entry vehicle they have adopted. Law firms have typically spotted a market and [decided to] replicate their traditional model in that market, with a pyramid structure." Firms must now learn to think about how they deploy their capabilities internationally with much more

## INTERVIEW RUPERT EGERTON-SMITH

agility, he says.

At a conference last year, Egerton-Smith is quoted as saying: "Tomorrow's law firms need to be porous, virtual, multi-sourced, adaptable and agile." How might that look when applied, though?

"Whether it's about information provision or the use of third parties for sourcing legal work, I think firms will have much larger networks, and different sourcing arrangements across all parts of their business, where information and resources will be flowing in and out of firms," he says.

He foresees the need for change in firms' internal organisation and structure that's far-reaching to achieve this – even to a firm's ethos of self-determination. "Law firms have historically decided for themselves how to organise their resources. But clients are not really interested in how we organise internally – they expect that their firm will be able to draw on all the different service lines from across the organisation.

"Firms need to become much more flexible in how they organise internally, and really map their internal organisation structures to what the clients really require."

Egerton-Smith says the legal market is "moving to a place where we need much more fungibility in lawyers, so we need broader organisational structures". In other words, lawyers need to become more interchangeable, as far as the client is concerned, and law firms need to reorganise internally to create teams and divisions structured around

delivery, not necessarily around traditional practice lines – creating, for example, teams of lawyers and non-lawyers focusing on particular clients, perhaps, rather than teams of lawyers focused on markets. At the very least, it means getting different practice areas to work much more closely together to provide a more 'joined-up' service.

This sounds a lot like management consultancy, which is Egerton-Smith's background – he spent four years at PA Consulting before joining Linklaters. But changing a structure to fit the client worked well for management consultants, he says. One area where the legal sector is catching up with management consultants is in fielding sector specialists, he says. "Increasingly, firms need to identify who the people are internally that have [specialist expertise] and, on pitches and in deals, bring together those sector experts with the product experts. That's an interesting development."

So can all firms be porous, virtual, multi-sourced and agile, or is it just something the big firms can achieve?

"It depends on the firm's product strategy," he says. "At the top end of the market, I think that will be quite a common characteristic. If you have a very niche offering – a lot of the boutique firms are doing very well indeed – you are probably a smaller firm, you probably have a very strong and regular client base, you will contract out less and have less of a network.

"In the mid-tier you will

probably have firms collaborating more with firms in the premium tier in some kind of joint go-to-market idea, so it's a similar phenomenon but working in a different way."

Collaboration is one facet of the multi-sourcing picture to Egerton-Smith.

"[Using] legal process outsourcing, teams of paralegals, legal service centres and so on is gaining ground in the sector, and is going to require firms to think carefully about risk and liability and develop more flexible structures for resourcing work.

"I think we will also see collaboration between some law firms much more [as an alternative to that], going to market between firms in different segments of the market."

### Differentiation is key

However it's done, strategically it's about "looking externally, understanding what the client or what the sector demand is, and then correspondingly ensuring that you tie together the capability that you have internally", he says.

But isn't divining customer need and flexing to meet it still reactive? Shouldn't firms be defining a vision of the future and delivering it?

"I think it's understanding ultimately who are the clients you want to work for, who, in the longer term, are the relationships that you really want to have? What do you think their demand for legal services will be, how is that demand going to shift in terms of the product provided and the

way the service is delivered, and how can you do that in a unique way?

"I don't think that you can identify a strategy for a firm without having a very close and deep understanding of how its client base is going to change over the next period. It has to start with that."

Once you know the market, you've got to stand out. Differentiation is probably the number one bogeyman right now for a lot of firms, even the very largest, and it is one of the true strategic challenges. But what can mark law firms out in the future is very different to what marked them out in the past, he says.

"There was a time when some of the traditional [things] really did have an impact, such as geographic reach, practice coverage, sector expertise. There was an ability to be quite distinct on those." But now that lots of firms can deliver on those, he says, "there's a need to find new points of differentiation".

"The new points of differentiation are around how services are delivered, how technology is used, what range of sourcing models can be adopted – which links to what range of pricing models can be offered – and how we can bind ourselves to clients through exchanges of knowledge and information using technology. These are things that are quite new features in the market."

Put simply, differentiation is determined on the client's side – while many firms think they're different, clients know they're generally not.



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Delivering on the client's new needs for lower cost and more transparency, law firms have to become more flexible and more efficient in their resourcing. Essentially this means subject areas such as business and legal process outsourcing (BPO and LPO) look almost mandatory now when it comes to being different, which might seem counter-intuitive.

Sourcing isn't "necessarily a differentiator in its own right", Egerton-Smith says, "but one of the crucial things is to

capabilities it can, alongside that, be very powerful."

Having a ready and flexible mix of resourcing could, however, be a top-line differentiator, he acknowledges. "There is a source of differentiation in having a broad range of options available for the client. So, rather than the firm having a single arrangement with an offshore provider, if it has a series of sourcing options it can bring to the table, whether that's using paralegal teams internally, having a shared service centre or a series of

know that there's a lot of heavy lifting on due diligence. They are just expecting in an increasing number of pitches for firms to demonstrate how they can deliver [that commoditised] proportion of the deal at a lower cost."

### Transformation challenges

It seems hard to fathom where a firm like Linklaters goes in terms of 'transformation', Egerton-Smith's speciality, as it's already so successful. His

response to that, though, is almost a checklist of strategic 'must-know' points for law firms, big or small.

"There are many areas there. How do we build on our strong position in emerging markets? How do we respond to markets that may deregulate over time [such as

India and China]? What is our entry model? How can we get those practices working in an integrated way with the rest of our network, particularly as we are seeing a greater degree of cross-border investment between emerging and more developed markets?"

He says Linklaters has plenty of room left to "be

responding to some of the client pressures I touched on earlier – in the way we face the client, in bringing together teams of resources, in being as integrated as we can be".

"How can we liberate our structure as much as possible to focus on clients? What is our longer-term sourcing strategy? How we can take client relationships to the next level through working with them on technological developments?"

A key goal for law firms, he says, is see the value in 'process'. Once that's achieved, a new world of legal service delivery will be here.

"More firms are looking at their support systems and legal transactions as processes, and trying to break them down to find new ways of doing them.

"That's what we're doing on business transformation – trying to make the firm more agile and responsive, looking at the way we organise our business services and, within the legal practice, how we can respond to client pressure by making delivery of certain transactions more efficient.

"When you bring together process and legal skills, you can get some very interesting discussions going about challenging the way certain legal services have been delivered.

"This sector is looking at its legal transactions more as processes now and thinking: 'How can we make these more efficient, given the pressure we are under from clients?'. That is what business transformation is about for law firms." ●

**"Who, in the longer term, are the clients you really want to have? What do you think their demand for legal services will be? How is that demand going to shift in terms of the product provided and the way it's delivered, and how can you do that in a unique way?"**

Rupert Egerton-Smith, head of strategy and business transformation, Linklaters

think about the longer-term geographic blueprint of the firm, which market should the firm be in, what product mix does it need to offer in those markets. And the way it sources its expertise is really a second step [in that]. Sourcing is not necessarily a differentiator, but if you are in the right places and you have the right

relationships with a number of LPO providers who bring different skills. There is a sort of differentiation in that."

LPO isn't for everyone or every work area, he stresses. Clients need specialist skills run from a reputable firm for work such as "really big, complicated M&A deals", for example. "But clients also

## FEATURE STRATEGY



# All the right moves

**Law firms say they understand strategy – so why are they often so bad at it?**

**Rupert White talks to law firm leaders about strategic thinking, international expansion, differentiation and how far firms may have to shift to succeed**

**Strategy is one of those concepts that people think they get, but often don't. In law firms, strategy is often either seen as a corporate import, dominated by management-speak, or as something firms already do. Many partners pay lip service to the need for strategy, but they don't really buy into it – after all, they're still in business, right?**

Wrong. Tony Williams, erstwhile managing partner at Clifford Chance and Andersen Legal, says that the near future for a lot of law firms is more cut-throat and competitive than they think, and that they are not as likely to survive that future as they believe.

"Relatively little strategy is being done, although firms think they're doing quite a bit," he says. Williams is now a law firm management consultant, so he's seen the inside of a few boardrooms, and he says the problem comes down to the fundamental question: "What is a strategy?" – if law firms don't know what it is, they're unlikely either to create

one or know how to achieve from one.

A simplified idea of strategy is within a 'vision-strategy-implementation' framework – a business needs an idea of what it wants to be, it needs a definition of success and some very high-level ideas of how it will realise that success, and it needs to break that down into plans of action. In military circles, where strategy was born, the concept is comparatively simpler, primarily because the 'vision' is much more straightforward – win the conflict. In political-military terms, it's more complex, as winning a conflict is often a strategic outcome of a political goal: domination of a scarce resource, for example, or countering a rival ideology. But that's still fairly definable.

In business, in the legal sector, the fact that any vision of a firm's future is hard to make clear is compounded by the fact that this vision really has to be different from everyone else's. Strategy in legal business is, right now, all about differentiation.

"It's see it very much how you are going to position yourselves over the next three to five years and how will that have resonance and relevance with the clients you've got and how their needs will change in the next three to five years – and the clients you want to target and how their needs will change, and how you'll seduce them away from their current incumbents," Williams says. It's about differentiation, he says, whether that's in what a firm delivers, or how it aligns its practices with client needs, or in where in the world the firm wishes to work.

"It always come back to the question: 'What do your current and target clients need now and will want in the future?', and I'm quite disappointed at the number of strategies that are prepared by law firms apparently without any reference to answering those questions."

It's all about competition, something law firms have, comparatively, had to care very little about until quite recently. In the near future,

the legal market will be about stealing marketing share from other law firms, not just making more demand, Williams says. "So how do we win those clients, how do we keep those clients? We've got to bear in mind that our competitors will not be standing still either. It's brutal – if you're not planning to win, then I'm afraid you're likely to fail, because others will be attacking you."

"You're doing strategy for offensive and defensive reasons."

## Modernising legal

Judit Petho is CEO of Manches, and she embodies, in many ways, the new, corporate approach people like Williams say many firms will have to adopt. She did a lawyer's tour of duty with CMS Cameron McKenna at the end of 1990s, but more recently she spent four years as COO of accounting firm RSM International. She also holds an MBA, and she's been applying this business savvy to Manches



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since she joined in October 2011, and law firm strategy, she says, is in large part about differentiation.

"Strategy is really about creating competitive advantage," she says. "Many law firms don't really understand what strategy is. Strategy [in business] is only a few decades old, but multinational companies and other professional services firms are much better at it. Law firms didn't really need much strategy [in the past] – they needed to serve their clients very well. But that has changed."

The wrong strategy, she says, is to just want to be the best in an area – something one hears a lot from law firms. "You need to compete to be unique. Strategy is about delivering superiority to your clients and stakeholders by being unique and doing something different. It's very difficult to do something different, of course, in legal services."

She says that strategising "is actually very simple", but she, like Williams, predicates it on understanding the competition, the context – "it's about getting from where you are right now to where you need to be to achieve your vision, considering everything else that is around you".

Creating a unique strategy, she says, will rest on the leader's vision and the culture of the firm. Because, she says, law firms "don't have a product, and because lawyers can move to another firm and everybody can deliver a similar type of service [in the top 100] if they really want to, it has to be about being client focused,

then aligning everything else behind the scenes to achieve that. That is probably the best strategy you can have."

A hard part of strategy, it would seem, is in creating a unique vision for the business. Harder still is bending the firm to that vision.

## Getting your way

Leadership is a challenge in law firms because, in many cases, they are still partnerships, often a group of

included." Companies have to make hard decisions, he says, shifting investment and choking off under-performing areas, but "in a partnership environment, that's a very difficult message, politically, to get across".

"It's trite, but strategy is also about what you're not going to do, as well as what you are going to do."

This is where firms come unstuck – a vision cannot be made by committee, and a strategy cannot be made by 500 partners, as

it could easily mean going further.

## Vision things

Firms will have to become radically altered to thrive in the market's highly competitive future, says Mark Dembovsky, CEO of Howard Kennedy.

"You've got to challenge your existing model, how you do things, what you are doing, what is the most effective way of taking things forward and, in challenging the model, look

"You have to learn to take everybody with you – that is the difference between a manager and a leader, and that is what law firm leaders need to be a bit better at."

Judit Petho, CEO, Manches



type-A personalities, which are regarded by many as far from perfect environments for creating singular visions.

Williams says that firms cannot create good strategy without honing the decision-making team down to a very small unit. "Law firm strategies often almost read like a UN resolution – everybody is

Rupert Egerton-Smith, head of strategy and business transformation at Linklaters, says in [our feature interview](#). Somehow, the executive team in a law firm has to create a vision of the future and then get all the stakeholders to 'buy in' to that vision. This usually means getting them devolve power to a small group – but

at every single aspect of your organisation.

"People need to go back to some very basic fundamental of what it takes to run a business, and a law firm is a business. It may be a very different kind of business, and partnerships are a wonderful model – the consensual way in which most partnerships work

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is a fantastic way of running a business – but nevertheless, that should not be a block to doing things in a forward-thinking, effective, modern way of running a business."

Everyone needs to feel involved, Petho says, but a firm needs to be led, not nudged into its future. "You have to learn to take everybody with you – that is the difference between a manager and a leader, and that is what law firm leaders need to be a bit better at. A leader takes people with him or with her, based on selling the vision and then charting the way, because they also have to show people how are they going to get there."

"You cannot have a vision that seems completely unattainable to everybody; it has to make sense. Then you can translate it down."

What is this vision thing? As Petho says, firms think they have a great vision when, often, they don't, just a vague idea. And, because it's vague, it can't be measured, so it's unlikely that it'll be achieved.

The rise and rise of Wragge & Co is a great example of a clear vision, carried out. Quentin Poole, senior partner at Wragges and the firm's de facto strategy chief, says "you can't just invent strategy in a vacuum without knowing where it's really taking you". You can't just say you're going to open a load of offices, he says – echoing Petho's point – a firm has to lay out what market position it wants to get to. In essence, he says, it's a question of: "What is it we want to be?"

"Twelve years ago [or so] we said to ourselves: "We have around 373 people in this organisation, and we are the wrong size to be able to compete for the kind of work and clients [we] want. Our turnover was [around] £23 million. We said that, in five years, we need to have 1,000 people and £100 million turnover."

"We got to 1,000 people and £85 million turnover in five years. So we didn't succeed, but we got bloody close, and that was fantastic. That was a long-term plan, or what I call a vision – where we need to be."

The Wragges vision is to be a top-20 UK-based law firm "in the next three or four years". "That's the medium-term vision. It is not a destination but a milestone, in that it will take us to a scale and require us to do things internationally. We need to do it to position the firm for the next stage of its journey." (*Read an in-depth, digital edition-only analysis of how Wragges rose from the Midlands to become a City player in just a decade on [page 12](#)*)

## Going global

Poole says this growth isn't going to happen just by relying on market growth in the UK, and Williams would likely agree – it's partly why he says UK firms are going to have to rob their competition of the

## Digital edition only

### Strategy: where firms fail

**Tony Williams, principal at Jomati and ex-managing partner, outlines where law firms fail when creating and delivering strategy.**

"One way is just the lack of research at the beginning. Firms will put a huddle of eight or 10 partners in a room with no credible information, no decent research and no client information – and come up with a strategy. That's a pretty dangerous way to proceed."

"Second, they will tend to duck the hard decisions." In other words, they'll look at the growth areas in the business and fail to recognise that growth has its opposite... and they'll refuse to accept that "the other side [of the internal investment equation] must be that, at best, not investing further in the areas that aren't in growth".

Instead, he says, law firms

often just fudge this problem.

"Third, a strategy is often prepared but the relevant business planning isn't done. So, they may have done a great strategy, it's rolled out, all the partners nod sagely at a partners' meeting or whatever – then it's put on the shelf for another three years, dusted down, re-dated, etc."

"[A good strategy must] guide every decision you make – the business plans, the annual budgets, the back-office functions, everything has to be aligned to what you're trying to deliver. And you've got to have clear measures for performance and clear priorities as to what you're going to do."

"That's where most firms fall over. Having ideas is not necessarily the problem, although there could be more rigour on those – it's in the execution."

best work. Growth in UK plc is not going to magically hit double digits by 2015, so any firm with a vision of market dominance has think hard about foreign markets.

To a lot of top law firms, international growth means looking east. Until recently it meant grabbing work and friends in the Middle East but, after market wobbles in Dubai and growing foment in other Middle East oil nations, the area may now look a little less attractive. The far east, especially China, however, is now obviously a primary target for the UK's top tier.

Poole contests that there's still plenty of promise left in the

Middle East. "You only have to look at the plans for the next decade [there] – infrastructure and economic development plans, and so on. For countries like Abu Dhabi, Qatar, it's crystal clear that there are plenty of opportunities in the Middle East." Plans in connection with the Olympics and suchlike in Qatar alone, Poole says, "are running into the tens of billions".

And, while the far east is "a very significant part of where the road leads" in terms of growth, Poole says, "people significantly underestimate the fact that the US is still by far the world's largest economy".

"In terms of growth and

# All the right moves

prosperity over the next 20 years, China is where a lot of the opportunity is, but I think we should be careful not to write off the old world."

Poole says international growth is the right thing for Wragges, but it's not automatically the correct route for all firms – and both Petho and Williams agree it depends on the firm and what it wants to do for clients, and what kind of clients they are, they say. Most likely, many would agree.

But, for some law firms, it is already the way forward.

Alec le Sueur is strategy director at one of the biggest offshore firms, Mourant Ozannes – and he says that, for offshore, it's an international domination game.

"The landscape has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. Now the offshore law firms are after not just their own jurisdiction, but the whole offshore market." The offshore firms, Jersey, Guernsey and Cayman and so on, are determined to convince their clients "wherever you want to go, we can look after your offshore needs", he says.

How they achieve this domination is showing up in different ways, though. Mourant Ozannes are doing it through merger, in part – "we are now the largest in the Channel Islands in terms of lawyer numbers, and we also have a substantial Cayman office", explains Le Sueur. "Part of our strategy is to boost the Cayman office and we're very active in reviewing other options." Those 'options' include further

mergers, of course, but, Le Sueur warns, "a merger is not a strategy in itself – a merger is a means to an end".

"You have your vision to be the leading law firm in a certain place and a merger is a means of getting there. To do it yourself would take many, many years of building up from scratch, whereas a merger, if you get it right and that's a big 'if', gets you instant coverage. Of course, it has to be with the right partner that fits you in terms of culture, reputation and quality."

Of course, as Williams says, some of the most profitable firms around the world are not global firms: "Look at Wachtell [Lipton, Rosen & Katz] in New York – \$4m per partner and just a New York presence. In the UK, look at Slaughter & May, which, though it has very strong 'best friends' around the world has a very limited international presence, is still a very, very high-quality firm."

But in terms of strategic thinking right now, the big money is on international reach, partly because big clients want law firms to be much more than law firms.

## Strategic futures

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges ahead for law firms is how they change themselves into something more than a law firm. As the UK market deregulates legal service provision, there may be companies out there looking to do the bread and butter work law firms have always relied on. The answer to this

threat, for many firms, may lie in doing what they should be doing anyway.

Corporate clients are increasingly looking for trusted advisers that can do more than law. Their partner firms know their businesses intimately, so why, they are now thinking, can't they advise them on more than M&A or employment law? This is something Linklaters is hearing, says Rupert Egerton-Smith [in our feature interview](#), but it's also something the smaller, aspiring corporate firms see as an opportunity.

"I'm a great believer in the notion that law firms should be diversifying out into various pieces of consultancy work, and I think quite a lot do a fair bit of consultancy already," Poole at Wragges says. "But I think we should be pushing out the frontiers of consultancy across a range of practices, [in ways] that are adjacent to our existing legal practice – HR consulting would be an obvious example." This kind of thing will be a lot easier to deliver after October 2011's last changes through the Legal Services Act, Poole says.

A key way to get more strategic thinking into a law firm, says Poole, is to bring in more non-exec directors – "You can get quite a lot of value out of [non-exec directors] and I completely fail to understand why top-20 or -30 firms wouldn't have such people on their boards."

However a firm looks at strategy, it's got to start thinking strategically about the future. The days of the

annual planning cycle being the extent of strategy in a law firm are over, according to Egerton-Smith, and his views are echoed by many who are involved in real strategy.

Le Sueur at Mourant Ozannes says that firms above a certain size will likely need to pull in more specialised strategists to deal with this, as they need to differentiate and compete better, rather than just doing more of the same".

"The legal world has changed so much in the last five, let alone 10 years, especially with the financial crisis, in the way clients are becoming more globalised, and client demands are changing, asking for more for less."

If you fancy a serious strategy test after reading this article, Dembovsky at Howard Kennedy has a pretty radical idea (for law firms) when he says that firms have to get strategic as part of being more like business in general and, in doing so, firms have to become less risk- and failure-averse.

"Unless you create that environment, you don't allow opportunities for growth and innovation," he says. "And, in this climate and in this type of market, you constantly have to be reinventing yourself – because the brain surgeon stuff that a firm might have been doing last year is commoditised this year."

So, the task is: turn a law firm into a risk-embracing, visionary business that's as much a consultancy as a legal service provider – better get your calculator and lucky gonks out. ●



## Digital edition only

## Strategy study: How Wragge & Co became a City hitter

***Wragges senior partner Quentin Poole describes the creation and execution of the vision that led this top-50 firm out of Birmingham and onto the world stage inside a decade***

**“When I first became managing partner 15 years ago, we were the 50th or 60th largest law firm in the UK, and it was all [from] Birmingham clients. The Birmingham market was saturated – we had 16% of it, another three firms each had 16% of it. There was no future for us here. [We realised that] we needed to step out into a bigger market.”**

This realisation set in train a set of decisions that changed the firm. Poole and the team at Wragges identified that it needed “to be (a), winning work nationally and (b) winning work from FTSE 100s”. But how to achieve it?

They decided that the firm would stay in Birmingham “and see how that goes”, he says, and then identify what it could do in London, “rather than open all around the UK”. Second, they decided “to really focus on general counsel, because these large corporates that we were interested in [15 years ago] were starting to form significant legal departments, run by general counsel”.

So, Poole says, the firm decided to heavily tailor the service to general counsel. “That was a classic example, I think, of a vision – as in ‘what are we trying to do?’. We’re

trying to keep our market share in Birmingham and then we’re trying to add, shall we say, 1% of the UK.”

After that comes the ‘how’, he says. “The way we were going to get there was by targeting work geographically across the UK, and focusing particularly on the very largest companies, the FTSE 100 and around general counsel, because they looked to be the buyers of the future.”

In other words, Poole and Wragges defined a vision of where the firm wanted to be by defining the kind of clients it wanted to serve (which is a huge amount more definition than just being a top-50 firm, for example). It then outlined how to make that happen by defining a geographical focus and a client entry focus.

“What’s happened with that vision and that strategy is that we’ve moved up to 27th [in the top 100] and we’ve cut our Birmingham market share. But we probably have 1% of the UK, and for the 27th largest firm, we are consistently in

the top 10 of the rankings in Chambers and Hemscott.

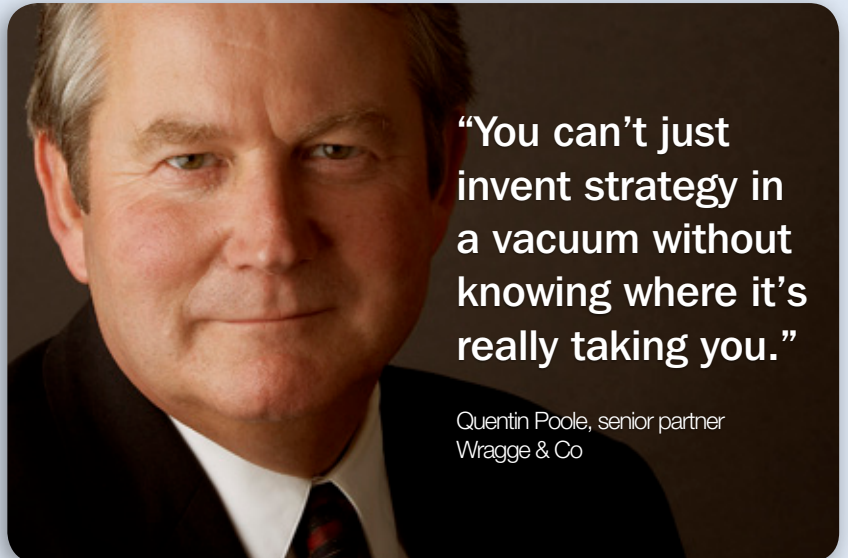
“For me, that’s a good example of vision, strategy and implementation. I think we’ve been good at that.”

It didn’t all go according to plan, however. When asked

demanding physical presence in London.

“We were a bit slower off the mark than we should have been. I take responsibility for that. We had debates about it, but we didn’t bite the bullet.”

In the end, though, Wragges



Quentin Poole, senior partner  
Wragge & Co

what the firm would have done differently, with hindsight, Poole says Wragges could have been more agile.

“We probably took too long working out we needed to be in London, really. We were very proud of our Birmingham roots and we thought Birmingham gave us a great cost advantage, all of which is true – but we should have probably started right out at the beginning with that. We should have said: ‘If we really believe in our strategy and our vision, then we are going to have to engage more with the City – and that would have

did take on the City, and the move paid off.

“What’s become increasingly clear over the years is that the focus of our practice shifted towards City clients and then, of course, more recently, international clients. So London just becomes more and more critical.”

The fundamental change in the business carried out through this strategy is no better described than this, however: “Eight to 10 years ago, 80% of our work and clients were Midlands – today, over 80% of our work and clients are not Midlands.”



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# Integrating for growth

**Tim Cheadle, general manager for enterprise solutions at LexisNexis, outlines some of the key strategic opportunities and challenges facing law firms looking for growth after the Legal Services Act**

**Fee income at the UK's largest 100 law firms fell by 3% in 2009-10, according to CityUK, an independent body promoting competitiveness in professional services. Revenues at the 50 biggest City firms fell by 4% in the same period. This is only the tip of the iceberg.**

The ripple effect of the global economic crisis continues, and cost-cutting and consolidation are still happening in the legal services market. The Legal Services Act 2007 (LSA), in full effect from October this year, only exacerbates these challenges.

The recent contraction of the legal market, caused by the recession, has dramatically changed the sector's nature. Customers have become much more demanding, insisting on transparency and value for money. Alongside these pressures, increased competition and an imperative to reduce base costs has led to a growth in the use of outsourcing, which itself has put further pressure on pricing.

And, of course, compliance has become increasingly central to how firms do business – it will become ever more

important as changes to the market's regulatory framework are brought in, and the market opens up to non-legal services entities. Law firms in the future will not only need to comply with legal sector-specific regulation, such as outcomes-focused regulation (OFR), but also financial and accounting industry legislations.

## Re-assessing strategy

Against this backdrop – and given that practically any organisation, regardless of its prior market experience, will be able to offer legal services – the accepted industry view is that legal, from commercial firms to the high street, will need to be flexible and adaptable to changing market demands, consider IT and business process outsourcing options hard, and perhaps also have a virtual presence. This approach is even more important for the low-value, high-volume legal services providers.

To remain viable, law firms must strategically re-assess their medium- to long-term business objectives and

organisation structures. The options are many – do they want to continue as a traditional partnership, merge with another law firm, expand their practice areas, be part of a network of law firms, restructure as a multi-disciplinary practice, secure private equity – or even list on a public stock exchange? Whatever they choose, examining the options will help them understand their customer base better. This should be the basis for developing a business strategy to achieve defined business goals, identify and adopt the tools necessary to achieve those goals, and ultimately, carve a differentiated place for themselves in the market.

Further, law firms must start thinking like truly commercial entities. The ability to demonstrate business efficiency, good risk management and legislative compliance, great financial performance and tight corporate governance will become crucial components of day-to-day operations in tomorrow's law firm. Being good at 'law' is no longer good enough – firms also have to become good at collaboration, project management,

risk management and financial planning – all expected of any well-run, profitable enterprise.

## Business and IT strategy

The business models that law firms are creating to meet these challenges are so complex that technology is and must be the delivery platform.

Law firms need to devise IT strategies that are far wider in scope than their day-to-day, back-end technology operations and the adoption of the traditional practice and case management systems. IT strategy should focus on delivering the best possible client service, and a service that delivers competitive advantage to the organisation.

One outcome of the recession is a large-scale move towards alternative fee arrangements, especially fixed-fee pricing, which is putting pressure on firms to cut costs. When devising an IT strategy that copes with those challenges, IT outsourcing is worth considering, because it moves IT instantly from being capital to operational expenditure. Also, it moves the



IT department from 'keeping the lights on' to acquiring and developing technology that will substantively impact the bottom line.

To get a wide enough IT picture of their businesses, law firms should consider acquiring generic technology systems that encompass business, financial and practice management functionality, underpinned by workflow. Such systems let firms grasp business opportunities by giving them the agility to develop new processes quickly. For example, a firm can use workflow technology to easily build new processes to expand into another practice area.

For the larger firms, perhaps with national, international or even listed company aspirations, ensuring foolproof financial reporting and compliance will be especially crucial – so the IT systems they adopt must be able to support these needs.

A firm setting up a practice in another city or country, for example, may need to account for it separately as a different legal entity, but still keep it as part of the parent company. In this case, financial reporting and compliance needs would be different – but the technology has to be able to support the new entity.

Today, some believe that merging with an international firm is a good survival path for

UK legal services providers. But, if a firm is contemplating this, the technology it adopts must cater to the needs of multiple currencies and jurisdictions for every aspect of the business. It also needs to support financial planning, corporate governance and compliance reporting for the two merging entities individually and as a whole.

Efficiency will be crucial to profitability. Any adopted

business goals. Strategy is not a one-off behaviour.

Business intelligence and analytics must be part of the mix to enable this measurement. By gathering and analysing business data, firms ensure they have their fingers on the financial pulse of the business. It is absolutely crucial to have an accurate view of where the firm is profitable, what the underperforming business areas

business development.

Using such an approach, a large law firm we have worked with found that 40% of its clients spent less than £5,000 a year. The cost of servicing those clients was more than the fees coming in. In a post-recession and LSA world, such businesses may be untenable, but culling unprofitable clients can only be done if you know which clients to cull.

But, despite huge uncertainty, there's a growing confidence in the sector, especially among firms that are creatively re-inventing themselves and looking for value in new markets, customers and partners.

Law firms need to be warned, though, that new entrants to the market will not be burdened by

legacy business and IT structures – so they will be leaner and better positioned to take advantage of opportunities.

Now is the time for strategic change – the days of inward-looking, well-ensconced, niche players in the sector are numbered. The legal industry landscape is changing, and so must the players.

**“Firms often understand the importance of strategy, but neglect to measure its performance. This is a significant failing.”**



technology must support this by automating processes for activities such as client onboarding, conflict checking, referral management, credits checks and the like.

### **Strategy is measurement**

Firms often understand the importance of strategy, but neglect to measure its performance. This is a significant failing – the second cancels out the benefit of the first, as no action is taken to continuously fine-tune the firm to achieve

are, the client attrition rate, the profile of the profitable client base, billing patterns, the impact of current strategy on the bottom line and how it can be changed – and these views should all be based on hard facts, not assumptions. This input can then be fed into the business strategy, including the key elements such as personnel and recruitment policy, fee structures, as well as attrition management, new service offerings, cross-selling opportunities, client relationship development and management and new

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## ANALYSIS TABLET COMPUTING



# Why tablets are taking over legal

**Briefing speaks to Dan Slosberg, professional services marketing manager at Research In Motion, about why law firms are now seeing the business benefits of tablet computing**

**Why has Research In Motion launched a tablet computer, the BlackBerry PlayBook, now? Because the world has begun to embrace tablets, but also because IT departments and businesses in general have started to accept them – more than that, they've realised that they can use them to deliver more value to clients.**

When LSN polled the legal IT community early in 2011 for its Legal IT landscapes 2011 report, one thing we asked was whether law firms saw the advantages in tablet computing, or as a millstone around their necks. Almost one third of legal IT people said they were “planning to do more with tablets in 2011” – and almost half said their firms are “examining how to expand” tablet use.

So, when the folks at BlackBerry said they wanted to be involved in **Briefing**, we thought it might be useful to interview them to find out why

legal is ready for tablets.

“IT departments have been the innovators that drive the use of technology in the enterprise up to now – but that's changed in the last 18 months or so,” explains Dan Slosberg, professional services marketing manager at Research In Motion. The reason, he says, is the people bringing their favourite new technology into the workplace and wanting to use it there. This is driven primarily by the ubiquity of the smartphone and the massive growth in tablet use, and it's a trend often called ‘consumerisation’.

Smartphones and tablets are “at the epicentre of the consumerisation trend”, he says. “Tablets have taken off, and that's coming across into business. It's not just legal – every industry is looking at how to bring the gadgets that have added value to people's home lives into the workplace to increase productivity and service to clients.

“I think a lot of people think tablets are great to use, but they're now wondering how to do more than just the basics on them. People use them for everything, from taking notes in a meeting to browsing, as well as, on a smaller scale, corporate apps.”

The challenge for law firms is to realise the value in tablets, both in terms of efficiency and client value. “Technology in the enterprise exists to drive value for customers, employees and the company, so law firms probably have to embrace consumerisation – but they need to demonstrate business value with a clear return on investment.”

Law has been ripe to find real value in tablets for some time – most legal users spend a lot of time on activities that a tablet is ideal for: document review/amend, email and web research. Now that many tablets, such as the PlayBook, also have integrated cameras and videoconferencing

software, even the more advanced communications lawyers need can be met anywhere, any time.

Is it the popularity of smartphones like BlackBerry that has primed the pump for tablets? “Absolutely,” Slosberg says, “but like any technology there are limits to phones, the big ones being the size of the screen and the ability to switch between applications that remain running.”

Both of these smartphone downsides are solved by the PlayBook, Slosberg says, as it's the only tablet around that allows for real multi-tasking. Running multiple apps simultaneously is normal behaviour for all serious information workers now – so it's surprising that almost no tablets do it.

“With PlayBook, you can really be doing several things at once – programs aren't just sitting suspended in the background. This works the way people work now. It's the

way I work – I couldn't function any other way," he says.

This is where law firms will likely find their business case for tablets, he says: making use of tablets that deliver the same kind of power as laptops, but in a more mobile device. This delivers benefit to lawyers and back office staff alike, especially as they now work together more often. If, for example, you can put more capability into the hands of a pitch team while it's on-site with a client, you could have made the difference between winning work or not. The same goes for internal use – a finance chief can deliver financials to the board as easily with a PlayBook as with a laptop, and do so better – tablets are easier to use than a laptop.

"As the legal market gets more challenging, firms are having to keep a closer eye on cost control, what work's being done, what it costs, what does it translate to in terms of margin.

"And, as more and more employees spend a lot of time away from their desks, how do you empower those people with up-to-date financial information, for example, to make the right decisions? It's all about getting the right data into people's hands so they can make more informed decisions at the point of need."

That's where having the capability contained in apps such as rekoop's business intelligence app for PlayBook comes in, he says: "Those kind of apps can make a difference to finance or BD people, or fee-earners or

managing partners – everyone in the law firm now has to get closer to the numbers. Tablets are a great way to do that, because they can be graphical, simple and intuitive. And if they're that easy to use, they'll get used."

They need to be used securely, though. BlackBerry's answer to the big question every IT director in a law firm will have – is this the most secure anything can be? – is BlackBerry Bridge. Bridge means, basically, that the PlayBook is simply a presentation system for firm information that is in fact being passed to a BlackBerry smartphone, which most law firms have already built for maximum security. "Whether it's email or any other data that's being pulled through the BlackBerry Enterprise Server, you're still within the existing security set-up," Sloshberg explains.

"As soon as the connection with the phone is broken, the content's not on the PlayBook.

"There's an incredible amount of secure information in a lawyer's email. But with Bridge, that data doesn't reside on the tablet."

But though it's absolutely vital, and a primary client concern, security doesn't make a law firm money – it is capability and value from the firm that does that, and tablets, Sloshberg says, can increase capability and value to the client.

"If you can demonstrate that you can create value to the client in terms of IT investment, you're on to a good thing, and I think tablets fall into that category. People can now see how tablets can help law firms get closer to clients, whether that's through access to information or how professionally you can deliver a presentation, for example. This is having a positive effect on the client relationship, and the level of spend and loyalty from that client. It's about getting a competitive edge."

## PlayBook vs the world – why BlackBerry thinks its tablet will win the device battle in legal

### Real multi-tasking

"With PlayBook, you can really be doing several things at the same time – programs aren't just sitting suspended in the background."

### Made for the rigours of business

"BlackBerry Bridge makes the PlayBook incredibly secure. Managing a secure session between a BlackBerry smartphone and the PlayBook, Bridge means no sensitive data need ever be held on the tablet, and provides full access to a firm's email, calendar, contacts and intranet."

### Adobe Flash support

"The vast majority of websites, both external and internal, rely in some way on Flash, and it's really important to be able to view and use Flash on business tablets."



### Speed and power

"It's a lot more powerful than other tablets, and like any tablet, you can access information instantly – it's a lot more mobile, it's instant-on, it's a lot easier to use. There's a lower learning curve to tablets."

### Portability means productivity

At just over 7" across, the PlayBook is small enough to fit into anyone's bag, and at just over 400g, it's light, too.



[www.blackberry.com/uk/playbook](http://www.blackberry.com/uk/playbook)

## Managing every mobile device in one place

If you're in IT and wondering how you're going to manage all these different smartphones and tablets in your firm, you're in luck. RIM has announced plans for a multi-platform BlackBerry Enterprise Solution that could let law firms incorporate secure device management for Android and iOS devices and tablets, as well as those from BlackBerry, all managed from a single web-based console.



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## CASE STUDY GLOBAL PAYMENTS SERVICES

# Payments made easy

**Anthony Blunt, Page White and Farrer's head of finance, on cutting cost and risk in international payments with Travelex**

**Every month, specialist global patent and trademark law firm Page White and Farrer (PWF) disburses three-quarters of a million pounds in client and firm payments to suppliers across the world, in a multitude of currencies.**

Management of this process used to be painful and costly, until PWF streamlined the business process and delivered it into the hands of a single outside specialist, and minimised the costs of currency exposure by using an integrated online platform.

"It's not rocket science", Anthony Blunt, PWF's head of finance, says. "All our suppliers are on one system, and we do our payments online" using Travelex's GlobalPay service. The process is now more efficient because everything is automated and centralised with one company – and not, he points out, a bank.

"Doing this through a bank means entering supplier details each time, and there's no user-friendly interface. Making a payment now is basically one click, job done. It means we can compete better, providing a more cost-efficient service, which means value for our clients."

Having a single online interface also helps reduce

finance risk – Travelex's dual-authorisation functionality, for example, "is online, is quick and painless, and it means that internally no single individual has access to the bank account". This helps PWF prevent fraud and improve internal control – a simple but important advantage in risk and finance best practice.

The market for international payments providers is a tight one, but, Blunt says, he picked **Travelex** as a supplier because it's "always innovating, trying to differentiate and stick out from the crowd". He points to the company's Future Payments service – through which firms can book a fixed exchange rate for payments up to 120 days into the future – as a classic example of this. "We might not see the invoice paid for another four months, but we don't have to worry about losses due to exchange rate changes."

Blunt ran the service alongside PWF's bank at first, "to ensure we had choice, to spread our risk and have a better chance of getting the best deal". "We thought it would be nice and safe and low cost – but once we got started it wasn't like that at all." The difference in cost to the firm was so significant that Blunt shut the bank's service

down as soon as possible.

"The bank wanted £2 per receipt plus a percentage of the receipt, and charged for payments on top – incredible."

Blunt has now also gained a real zero-cost advantage: using Travelex's Holding Balances service means that receipts in and payments out in dollars or euros incur only a transaction fee – so PWF does less exchange while making "the whole process a lot cheaper and easier", he says.

He admits it's tricky to calculate exactly how much the firm has saved, but "paying higher fees to suppliers ultimately means our fees go up – which means we are less profitable and less competitive".

Given that most of the payments PWF makes are client disbursements, Blunt needs to get the best exchange rate for a client – and be open about it. "If a client queries an invoice, for example, we then have to send original invoices from the supplier along with transparent exchange rates. There's been the odd time when rates have been better elsewhere, but I've just called Travelex and they've matched it – not because of a contract or clause, but because of our ongoing relationship."

Blunt values this collabora-

tive approach, and access to great client support, highly; it's a strategic advantage that dovetails with operational efficiency.

"Most of the time this is a standard, automated, commoditised service. But, costs aside, the real unique selling point is [Travelex's] expertise and old-fashioned client service. When something out of the ordinary happens, we get help and advice."

That kind of relationship creates a team approach to solving problems, which is more valuable strategically than just having a customer team on the phone.

"We had an issue with a new, large corporate client that outsources its payments process overseas. We couldn't get them to understand why they needed to provide certain information. Travelex got on the phone and smoothed the process, like they were part of our team. It was very helpful.

"It sounds clichéd, but it just makes working with a supplier so much easier – it's another area not to worry about."

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## ANALYSIS STRATEGIC PLANNING

# Plan to succeed

**Jane Galvin, head of professional services at Barclays Corporate, on creating and carrying out strategy in law firms**

**With the Legal Services Act (LSA) around the corner, it is critical that firms have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their own business, and they acknowledge the potential threat of new entrants and new regulatory standards to the market.**

We encourage clients to have a clear vision of their growth strategy, with a five-year plan for their business that foresees how they aim to get there. It is imperative to have the whole firm brought into this vision early to ensure organisational synergy.

Strategically, firms need to truly understand what their unique selling point is and which audience they want to target. For example, are they looking to have multinational blue chip companies as clients, or high-net-worth individuals in the UK?

Looking forward, how do firms plan on classifying themselves in the marketplace? Are they anticipating future expansion through mergers – bearing in mind that two firms that lack vision could result in a disaster – through organic growth? Would the firm prefer to remain small, niche and specialised? The same question applies to whether the firm wants to establish a global or a national presence.

Obviously, any firm must be able to adapt to changes and be flexible enough to deal with setbacks and obstacles along the way, so it should be acutely aware of its structure, and the limitations or the opportunities that brings.

When, for example, was the last review of capital levels in their business, both in terms of borrowings and retained profits? Our clients are paying well-deserved attention to their structure, especially in light of the LSA. How seriously are they considering external investment and, more importantly, are they ready for the changes it may bring? The LSA could cause a substantial shift in the structure of firms, and should push them into being more corporate in their set up. Does this mean, for example, having more non-legal CEOs, COOs, non-execs and/or CFOs?

This brings us to the topic of people – a firm is only as good as its people, and they cannot be neglected. Firms need to evaluate their sustainability, including how talent is attracted, incentivised and retained, as well as the age profile of key staff. Another important consideration is performance management – is it on a rounded scorecard basis, or purely on fees billed? Fundamentally, how visible is the performance of a firm's

employees, and how forward thinking is the reward structure?

Another key area of strategy is differentiation. Historically, this has been low on the list of priorities, but in an increasingly competitive space, that has changed. A successful business plan should lay out how the firm proposes to market itself, taking into consideration the strength of its brand as well as how to improve reach.

An equally important differentiator is how they add value to their clients. How good is the firm at building and retaining relationships with its client base? It goes without saying that a happy client means more business and positive word of mouth referrals in the marketplace. Adding value can also come from offering alternative billing structures to clients, though this generally depends on the flexibility of the firm and whether clients perceive fees are justified, based on performance. There are many solutions that firms can offer, including structured payments, discounts for early payments and retainer fees, to name but a few.

Lastly, firms should continue to look at costs and the returns they are generating. If they cannot generate sufficient

economies of scale, they should consider outsourcing.

In terms of people, law firms are paying increased attention to training. A key consideration is whether firms have considered using lesser-trained individuals in-house for certain functions, only upskilling those that require it. This approach can reduce costs to both the firm and its clients.

In sum, firms should ensure they are investing for the future with a clear strategy, focused on people, structure, systems and, most importantly, client relationships. Cash generation should remain a high priority, along with ongoing funding of the firm, with the potential need to change the ethos of the partnership model.

Successful firms should be prepared to embrace the challenges that change brings, and be flexible with their business model – while never losing sight of their vision.



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## CASE STUDY MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

# Closer to clients, wherever you are

## John Banister, COO of Wiggin, on how his firm has saved money, increased productivity and delivered better mobility with Total

**You'd think that a boutique media firm would have an innovative vision of how to deliver its legal services in a world of mobile working and distributed business – and with Wiggin, that's exactly the case.**

The 45-lawyer firm operates on a partially outsourced basis – much of its back office, even reception, is managed by third parties. But the management and IT tier is still very much in-house, headed by John Banister, Wiggin's COO. He recently led a vital change in the firm's comms – shifting mobile workers over to BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES) Express, and working in partnership on the firm's comms needs with Total.

"We rely on Total as a trusted adviser to work with us to provide a solution that works best for the firm," Banister explains. Though Wiggin is headquartered in Cheltenham, it has a vital London office to be close to its UK media clients. This means it has a "very mobile workforce", he says. "Technology-related communications are desperately important to us, because fee-earners can be working at home, on the train, in cars or in either of our offices – so constant availability of systems is absolutely critical – more so than a typical London firm." Fee-earners and partners at Wiggin can be spending more than half the week in London, with the rest split

between Cheltenham and homeworking. US clients "can easily be looked after from Cheltenham", Banister says, but London clients want to see their lawyers – so they need to be connected, wherever they are.

Total now manages Wiggin's leased lines between Cheltenham and London, its BlackBerrys, 3G cards and

Server to Express was an obvious move to make. "For a firm like ours it's perfect – you can just add new users without paying for each one.

"Plus, moving the fee-earners over to BES Express was seamless – we did it live, during the week. We could have done it in a day, if we'd had all the devices in the building. That's how easy it

£150,000 a year since working more closely with Total, mainly by not spending money it might have otherwise spent. The biggest savings come from better management of the firm's leased lines, he says – "we've got much bigger lines at significantly less cost" – and the firm is also saving across the rest of the comms provision package it has with Total.

"The key thing is availability," Banister explains. "It's a horrible phrase, but it's got to be 24/7, because a significant proportion of our work comes from US clients and they work in a different time-zone."

"To us, it comes down to the ethos of the firm – being excellent and being the best at what we do. We're in a tiny niche in quite a competitive area and we're selling absolute expertise. Everything has to be brilliant. Every law firm will tell you this, I know, but it's absolutely true here.

"We've got to know that when you switch on your PC or mobile device, anywhere, it will work, and you'll be able to get access to the documents you need. We need to know that all the processes will work – because they all ultimately feed up to what service is about to the client."

**"Moving the fee-earners over to BES Express was seamless. We could have done it in a day – the only delay was getting people into the office to take their BlackBerrys off them."**

other comms. It also manages the secure connections with staff home use.

Wiggin people do get around: the firm has seen a 160% year-on-year growth in BlackBerry use since 2007 – but working with Total, it's cut mobile costs by 22%, year on year.

It's done this mainly by moving from BlackBerry Enterprise Server to BES Express. The firm "hasn't found anything that we use yet that Express can't do", Banister says, outlining why the shift from the more expensive Enterprise

is – the only delay was getting people into the office to take their BlackBerrys off them."

Making a significant IT cost saving with almost no impact on the fee-earners is indicative of how Wiggin likes to work.

"It's all about efficiency, flexibility and access. Total has saved us a lot of money over the last few years by constantly working to look to find how they can supply either the same level or the best level of service at a lower price."

Banister estimates that the firm has saved around

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