Briefing

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

ISSUE 13 | JULY 2011

Information superheroes

Interview:

Tom Baldwin, Reed Smith's CKO

The US/UK giant's head of KM on how knowledge is at the heart of tomorrow's firm

Feature:

How KM is boosting competitiveness

How top 100 law firms are boosting their corporate brainpower to compete

Plus:

Phoenix Business Solutions on SJ Berwin's killer KM

www. legalsupportnetwork .co.uk

It's not what you know...

It's the way that you know it. Knowledge management (KM) is no longer just about documents, precedents and IT – it's built itself a vital role in making your firm more competitive and more efficient.

KM has been coming out of the basement, so to speak, for a few years, but if the evidence in this issue of **Briefing** is anything to go by, it is now a key route to productivity and client value. Why? Because the most forward-thinking firms are now leveraging internal knowledge in innovative ways to win business and get closer to clients – and stay there.

In this issue we have a cracking interview with the friendliest man in KM, Tom Baldwin, who gives us a high-level view on the subject. Plus, we have a great feature on how firms are using KM systems and people programmes to deliver more value internally and externally. And we have a supplier's view of how SJ Berwin combined internal and external knowledge sources to boost its corporate brainpower. Enjoy.

**Rupert White, head of content and community**

03

Interview: Tom Baldwin
Rupert White talks to Reed Smith's chief knowledge officer about why KM is now central to delivering a more efficient, more profitable law firm

07

Information superheroes
Joanna Goodman looks under the bonnet at some of the UK's top firms to see how KM is coping with a fundamental shift in the structure of legal business

11
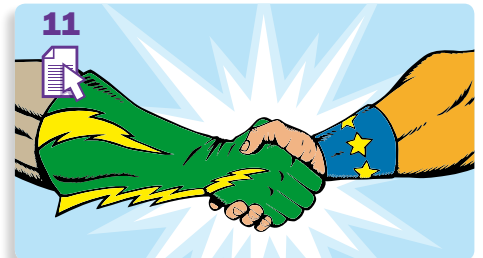
Best of both worlds
Ray Burch, technical director for Phoenix Business Solutions, on why connecting internal and external information is the key to competitiveness

---

How Briefing works

Briefing features editorially independent interviews and feature articles as well as sponsored editorial. All sponsored editorial is marked as such. We re-interview supplier case studies and edit sponsored articles to make sure we deliver valuable, useful content for readers.

Become a Briefing sponsor
Want to get involved in **Briefing**? Call one of the **legalsupportnetwork** team on 0870 112 5058, or click to email us at lsn@legalsupportnetwork.co.uk

Our interview with Tom Baldwin was transcribed by:

voicepath®
Fast, secure, onshore transcription

> " Clients want to see what engagement we have with project management and process improvement, because they have it in their own business – and they're expecting their law firms to do it. "
>
> Tom Baldwin, CKO, Reed Smith

INTERVIEW

Power in knowledge

Tom Baldwin, chief knowledge officer at US/UK giant Reed Smith, talks to Rupert White about why KM is now central to delivering a more efficient, more profitable law firm

Knowledge management, or KM, used to be one of those areas in law firms to which partners sent lawyers who didn't want to do the long hours, or geeks who liked computers more than litigation. No more.

KM has spent the last few years coming out of the cupboard, and now it's playing a key role in forward-thinking firms, both in delivering and winning work. Tom Baldwin is chief knowledge officer at Reed Smith, a firm that would, if it were a UK-headquartered business, be in financial terms number five in the *Lawyer*'s top 100. He says KM is at a pivotal point – it has the power to deliver on some of firms' key needs, both in terms of delivering on the new world of alternative fee arrangements (AFAs), and in terms of making them more efficient, more transparent to clients – fundamentally, better businesses.

"We're going through sort of a renaissance in KM, and I think it's largely due to the downturn in the economy – and it's probably been the best the thing that ever happened to KM, because there's a focus and premium placed on efficiency that we've never experienced before. It's given KM practitioners an opportunity to demonstrate what we can bring to the table."

Knowledge management hasn't been seen, traditionally, as a department that can help create competitive advantage. But this is changing, Baldwin says – it's now dealing increasingly directly with clients, partly because clients are involving purchasing departments and procurement in their legal buying. "We're having to have a much more business-focused conversation," he says.

"Simply going into a pitch with your CV and your league tables really doesn't impress somebody who has no context towards those things."

The downside is the pressure clients are putting on firms to become much more precise on pricing – "and not only do we have to be precise on pricing, but our clients are now holding us accountable to hit those numbers".

Worse, clients are expecting – demanding – that firms meet those promised numbers, often regardless of however many hours it takes. Whether you're working for fixed fees or a more sophisticated arrangement, Baldwin says, the pressure is on to deliver on-budget. Price predictability is now the watchword, but clients don't want to sacrifice quality – "and that's really where knowledge management comes into play".

Can KM really play a part in this that's equal to finance or BD? Sure, Baldwin says – in fact, KM plays a vital prerequisite role, because, he says: "How do you know what something costs?"

Delivering on AFAs is in many ways about working out how much work costs to do. The way firms do this is to go back over similar work and calculate what that work has cost you to do. Simple, right? Not if your data is wrong.

"In a perfect world you've already got all of your matters properly coded and tagged so that it's easy to go into your financial system and look that up and bing, bang, boom, you're up and running. But in reality… crazy as it sounds, many firms struggle with the right data points on a broad enough spectrum of matters to be able to have good
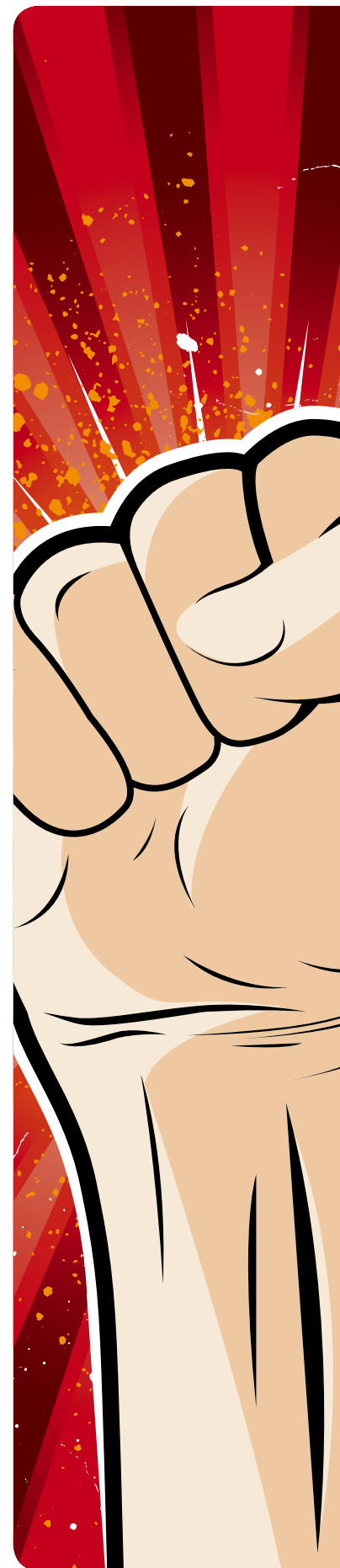
INTERVIEW **TOM BALDWIN**

business intelligence across the board."

This puts KM in a central position in delivering 'the new pricing' (see Briefing on AFAs for more on that) – but it's also becoming indispensible when it comes to delivering on the hard promises that AFAs create, because, Baldwin says, it must now manage the work to deliver with a margin within the AFA.

"It doesn't matter whether you're in the UK, Carmel US or Australia – no matter where you are, these pricing pressures are real, and lawyers are having a hard time adjusting to them because it's requiring them to do things differently."

Process power

So, it's down to KM to provide new tools to help 'process map' what lawyers do, "find areas of deficiency and help create better processes, so that they're more streamlined".

This also means identifying better staffing models to ensure work is done in a more cost-effective way while still delivering quality, and "injecting technology where we can, to help automate the creation of forms or automate other processes that used to be done in a manual fashion".

"When you package all that together, you get a process that's [correctly] staffed, it's profitable, and using technology where appropriate to make things even more automated than they were before."

Reed Smith is also turning this management information into client-facing transparency.

Baldwin's team built a system called ouRSite, a web-based extranet through which clients can see how matters are being staffed and how the firm is progressing against budget. This is especially valuable if the firm has create a bespoke workflow for the client.

It also addresses a very modern client concern – that when firms propose AFAs, clients worry that they're going to unduly staff the work with lower-level resources. Delivering more matter transparency through ouRSite means Reed Smith can allay those fears.

Delivering these solutions falls to KM, he says, and it drags the firm into a newer world – of process improvement and legal project management.

Seeing legal work through the eyes of the project manager is a hot topic in UK law and across the Atlantic on Baldwin's home turf, and it has numerous significant knock-on effects, including a movement away from practice divisions with firms and towards client and sector teams – partly because clients like law firms to talk their language.

"Our major clients are in pharmaceutical, life sciences, manufacturing, financial services and energy, and we have dedicated client teams in those areas. In most cases, those industries are very process-oriented, even in the legal departments – I've been on-site with clients where [client] lawyers are talking [project management language] Six Sigma.

"We see it in pitches, we see it across the board – they want to see what levels of engagement we have with project management and process improvement because they have it in their own business – and they're expecting their law firms to do it."

At Reed Smith, this is also partly being delivered by embedding into teams lawyers who have "substantive experience in certain areas but also have process improvement backgrounds, who have done process mapping and process improvement engagements".

> "Clients want to see what engagement we have with project management and process improvement because they have it in their own business – and they're expecting their law firms to do it."
>
> Tom Baldwin, chief knowledge officer, Reed Smith

This isn't just a recession-driven fad. "The reality is our clients are never going to go back to the old norm. They're going to demand accountability, they're going to demand certainty, and when you get to that level of rigour, you have to introduce some level of rigour in [your own] process."

KM as differentiation

But it's not all about process and workflow. The shift to-

INTERVIEW **TOM BALDWIN**

wards client and sector teams is driving firms hard to be able to produce expert lawyers – so KM is increasingly becoming about delivering technologies and human programmes to help firms more accurately and quickly locate the human capital that lies at the heart of legal business.

"Clients want to see much more than just your legal acumen," Baldwin says. "They want to know that you can take that legal prowess and apply it directly to their business. That's more important than ever, from a pitch perspective."

But digging out your best people just gets harder the bigger you get. And this is a growing issue as the market continues to consolidate. "If you merge with a firm in Asia or Canada, and you're in London, it's very difficult to walk down the hall to know what those people do."

Technology, such as enterprise relationship and expertise identification systems, can get you part of the way to unearth those experts, he says, but part of the solution to this human problem lies in creating programmes within the firm that turn lawyers into business-savvy people, to get them to be more like the clients the firm seeks out.

Baldwin sees this as "a natural evolution for law firms", because, at the top, your capability is assumed – "instead, it becomes about demonstrating you know their business better".

Happily, giving clients an insight into how the firm delivers the work (with OurSite, for example) delivers a high-value side-effect: if the firm can describe the legal process of the client's work in the client's own terms, it can show that it knows the client's business – so it's providing differentiation.

What's your USP?

"We've found that these tools and methods have a greater impact in how we demonstrate our sector expertise than almost anything else. The clients are seeing what we're doing dissected in a very granular way, they're hearing our thought process as we go through that map [and they're seeing that we understand their decision points, which are often not legal ones]."

Baldwin says this kind of behaviour is still in its salad days at Reed Smith, but "reaction from clients is extremely positive, and the feedback we get is that it demonstrates our expertise in a unique way".

The dark side of this data-led modernity is information overload. This is another area that KM units have been turning their minds to in recent years – to "look at the totality of all that data, and figure out the best way to sum up that information in the most digestible way".

Part of the solution is in prioritising information, and part is thinking about a different way of delivering it, he says. It's similar to the IT concept of 'rich vs reach', or, as Baldwin would put it: "I can take a bunch of reports delivered via email and consolidate that into one master web-based report that gets pushed via something more interactive. Whether I'm on a Blackberry or an iPad, I get it in a format that I can read. If I'm at my desk, I get a higher-fidelity version that has more func-tionality. But, if I'm on a mobile device, I get an automatically streamlined version.

"We need to have some way that the lawyer who's receiving this information… can do more than just read something, because most often there's an action they want to take – they want to see more detail behind the financial input, they want to see more information behind the client."

Future KM technology

Lawyers may or may not be pleased to see a techno-solution to this techno-problem, but, Baldwin says, this inte-grated, multi-platform world is the way KM is going.

"What we're seeing is the next evolution of information delivery, and aggregation that spans multiple disciplines within a law firm. It's a harmonised approach that gives the lawyers the easiest, most digestible way to look at information, and it spans multiple platforms." (*see* Phoenix's article on p11)

This means a lot of working with IT, but it is also about designing and architecting the systems – which is a KM thing, at least, it is at Reed Smith, Baldwin says. But it's right that it's KM people leading the way on this, he says, because they're not embed-ded in one specific group. "KM can look at it in the most holistic, non-biased way, and

> "Clients want to see much more than just your legal acumen. They want to know that you can take that legal prowess and apply it directly to their business. That's more important than ever, from a pitch perspective."
>
> Tom Baldwin, *chief knowledge officer, Reed Smith*

INTERVIEW **TOM BALDWIN**

work with the lawyers to figure out how to use this information, what's most important to them."

A goal in this bright future, Baldwin says, should be a situation where "the lawyer doesn't need to know the names of the various systems they need to go to get information – other than Microsoft Office and a few other core applications, they shouldn't have to even go into separate systems to get what they need; it should all be delivered in a unified interface".

There have been many efforts to deliver this future, he says, but "I don't think that, if you ask most lawyers today if what they're getting kind of meets their needs, that they would say that these tools are meeting all their expectations". Partly this is because the technology's not at the right level yet, he says, and part of it's been the learning curve to understand the technology available – and it's also been because the lawyers' needs themselves are changing at the same time.

But the time has arrived when sophisticated technological assistance at the fee-earner level has become more than a 'nice to have' – it's now essential to remain competitive.

"If you rewind the clock five years, having a dashboard that tells you when matters are approaching the threshold of a budget might have been novel and cute, but it may not have been a requirement.

"But with fixed fees and other types of billing arrangements, having a widget that

pings you when matters are approaching, say, 75% of budget becomes crucially important."

Beyond this now essential tech, Baldwin thinks one of the future routes to KM nirvana lies in software that will do what lawyers often fail to do – correctly 'tag' documents and, more important (and harder), matters. It's called predictive coding, and it might represent a partial solution to the great challenge of the 'missing data', mentioned earlier, that prevents true insight into the cost of legal work.

Why matters matter

"If you talk to anybody, whether they're in IT or KM, they'll tell you that lawyers historically have been wretched at profiling documents. Many lawyers will just put 'other' in a document description because they just don't see the benefit [of not doing so] – it's too much hassle to spend the extra ten seconds to find the right document type."

Baldwin says firms have systems that do predictive coding for KM for documents, but he can see on the near horizon technology that aims to auto-classify matters too.

"Matter typing suffers from that same dilemma, where lawyers, when they open a matter, will just put in 'general' – so when you go back to dip into your pool of matters to

price something, you don't have the data from which to pull, to use the KPI tools.

"I'm hoping to see somebody build a system that takes the technological concept of auto-classification and moves it up a level to auto-classify matters. Once you do that, you can use that data in so many different ways – when it's correct.

"Most firms have [hundreds of thousands] or even a million matters in their accounting system – imagine how much power you would have at your fingertips if you've got those matters properly classified.

"You could do better pricing estimates, and you can also work properly from an experience and KM perspective if you've properly classified matters. Right now, I have great data to find expertise, but if [I can really know that] a lawyer's billed X amount of time to a certain type of matter, boy, that's really

powerful. Today, law firms in general can't rely on matter types to do that in an accurate way. If you're looking at KM technology, that's a big one that no one's done."

So the future of KM is, in part, something like the semantic web – and it's not just a geek's dream of making the information within a law firm more available and more understandable. It could,

in fact, effect a profound increase in a firm's financial self-awareness and a significant step up in capability and efficiency, all based in computing, that would make a firm a lot more competitive.

No wonder KM leaders like Baldwin want this to happen – because KM is now at the leading edge of law firm efficiency and competitiveness. Perhaps, to KM people, their field has always been a part of that. The difference is that, now, the rest of the firm is having to acknowledge it. ●

> "If I can really know that a lawyer's billed X amount of time to a certain type of matter, boy, that's really powerful. Today, law firms in general can't rely on matter types to do that in an accurate way."
>
> Tom Baldwin, *chief knowledge officer, Reed Smith*

Information superheroes

Joanna Goodman looks under the bonnet at some of the UK's top firms to see how knowledge management is coping with a fundamental shift in the structure of legal business

Law firms are changing the very way they are structured to deliver better services to clients – but to make that work, the way they create and handle knowledge has had to undergo a similar shift. It's no longer just what you know, but who.

In the strategy issue of **Briefing** (June 2011), Linklaters' head of strategy and business transformation, Rupert Egerton-Smith, said that law firms must become more flexible in how they organise themselves, and map their internal organisation structures to what clients really require. In other words, law firms should look at moving away from practice areas and towards client- and/or sector-focused groups.

To varying degrees, this is happening in the top 100 and beyond, but being 'client centric' means getting a grip on who knows what – and whom. As Tom Baldwin, chief knowledge officer at Reed Smith, says in this issue's interview, "clients want to know that you can take legal prowess and apply it directly to their business". This move towards client and sector teams brings legal slightly more towards the management consultancy model – but there are some real differences between the two when it comes to knowledge management (KM) and practice.

But the move away from the practice area structure, and a need to demonstrate vastly more sectoral and client knowledge, is putting a greater pressure on KM people and their solutions – and the clock will not be wound back.

Team challenges

Suzanne Fine, global head of knowledge and learning at Linklaters, emphasises the strategic role that KM is playing now in providing fast, straightforward access to knowledge and expertise. "The role of KM, and learning and development, is to provide an effective, consistent interface that facilitates knowledge sharing. We need to enable lawyers to use our internal know-how and expertise and access the firm's industry experts across all geographic locations."

To deliver this global KM set-up, Linklaters worked with IT consultants to develop a web browser toolbar for law firm workers, called Se@rch, which is based on Autonomy's meaning-based search engine. The firm doesn't need an additional expertise finder, Fine says, because Se@rch links the lawyer who generated any particular document to that person. Internal directories are then used to find specific experts.

Face-to-face contact is still a key element of the 'who do you know' approach.

Fine and her team organise training courses to encourage collaboration between individuals in different parts of the firm. Wikis are established after each training course to help people keep in touch and share ideas from the training. A simpler outcome of this approach is that helping people put faces to names fosters collaboration because they feel more comfortable contacting people they've already met.

At Field Fisher Waterhouse (FFW), the firm is organised by practice area and sector group. Learning and knowledge management director Jane Bradbury says its information officers work closely with the lawyers and are integral to every team. "KM is not a back-room position," she says. "[KM people] sit with the lawyers and attend client meetings. Positioning them with the lawyers has made them more effective than

Information superheroes

they were when they were working in a centralised library – team-working is incredibly important."

Bradbury and her department are often the first port of call for partners looking for specific expertise. Echoing a point made by Baldwin at Reed Smith, Bradbury says that, because FFW KM people work across departments, they are most likely to know which specialists to contact. FFW doesn't have an expertise locator either – its search engine, Recommind, is used to identify the authors of relevant documents on any particular topic, and it can generate contact lists.

In fact, unlike global consultancies and corporates, most law firms do not have standalone expertise locators.

Mark Gould, head of knowledge management at Addleshaw Goddard observes that an expertise locator isn't high priority in terms of IT investment because lawyers tend to use their personal contacts within the firm. Addleshaws also has a contact directory on its intranet.

But, he says, "in a larger firm with international offices, online information becomes more valuable".

A larger trend than expertise search right now is the growth of the client account manager. As part of its sector focused strategy, Addleshaw Goddard is experimenting with these new roles, Gould says, because the traditional set-up of partners managing legal work and client relationships, "is not always effective".

"Relationship managers

help to formalise expectations on both sides, facilitating the exchange of information and building a pipeline of work," he says. "There is also a more intangible role of packaging information in a way that meets client expectations."

But this doesn't mean the firm has flipped on its back: "In theory, relationship managers own the knowledge exchange action, and become the client's point of contact, but in practice the client may prefer to work with a particular partner." And, of course, client

undertakes multi-jurisdictional mandates for global clients. Teams have to draw experts from across the firm together, and Fine's team has to work across jurisdictions as well as practice and sector areas.

Collaborative working

Addleshaw Goddard introduced a sector-focused strategy two years ago, having previously concentrated on across-the-board positioning.

tate work tended to be siloed in terms of practice groups and clients." The sector head at Addleshaws, therefore, had to bring together everyone at sector level and foster collaboration within and between groups.

The outcome has been a more collaborative environment, he says – physically

> "The challenge is to build client knowledge without distracting lawyers. We need to find a way for fee-earners to move client work into the wiki or another collaborative solution that does not involve extra work."
>
> Mark Gould, head of KM, Addleshaw Goddard

relationship people need as much input from KM as the lawyers, if not more.

Linklaters 'head of sectors' role, currently occupied by projects and energy partner Fiona Hobbs, demonstrates this new focus on a sectoral approach, which is particularly appropriate in the energy sector, where the firm regularly

But, as Gould explains, some sector groups were easier to bring together than others. "The firm already had a well-established financial services practice, with particular strength in building society mergers, so lawyers in that sector were accustomed to working together. However, retail and consumer and real es-

as well as intellectually. "The sectoral approach has altered the way different practice areas interact. The projects and real estate groups in our Manchester office frequently work together, so they are now located in a single open-plan office.

"Sharing knowledge and insights improved the service

Information superheroes

to joint and separate clients, so when the London office moved premises, we drew from that experience and the office is completely open plan. The office layout encourages collaboration, and people have become accustomed to working differently."

In a more digital mode, Mark Collins, head of knowledge at Nabarro says online workspaces (in WorksiteWeb at Nabarro) can also help foster collaboration within and between teams.

Nabarro is organised by group and practice area, but its lawyers work collaboratively in sector and client teams, he says. "We have client groups, interest groups and industry sector groups – which pool resources from across practice areas. Each has its own online workspace, where anyone can share knowledge and where we can push RSS feeds of business intelligence, news and information.

"Like many firms, our internal structure supports management convenience, not client service, but our sector focus [also] makes us better commercial lawyers and enhances our client offering."

Pitch perfect

FFW is strongly focused on highly regulated industries, and cross-practice teams are regularly pulled together for pitches. "If you get the team right at pitch level, the work follows," Bradbury

says. "People have to work across departments because our teams reflect client needs.

"Other benefits [to that] include the ability to cross-sell our services. It is important for clients to know what expertise we have in their sector and, to provide effective, commercial advice, our lawyers have to understand the sectors they operate in and target relevant business."

Linklaters has developed a specific tool to locate teams and relevant documents

relating to specific deals, called Deal Finder. The pitch team, part of the business development function, works closely with knowledge and learning using a combination of Deal Finder and Se@rch to work with knowledge from across the firm. This approach helps Linklaters "leverage previous deals to win new business", Fine says.

At Nabarro, business development uses the Hubbard One solution

Proposal Generation to build written pitches from standard text on practice and sector credentials, including CVs, and tailored information added manually. "We also create a non-chargeable workspace for each pitch, which hopefully becomes a live matter when the work is won. We have workspaces on the intranet for clients, matters, projects, sectors and practice areas," Collins explains.

Issues of engagement

Firms are using collaboration and social media tools, but their effectiveness depends fundamentally on how willing people are to use them and, sometimes, even on the type of lawyer involved.

Fine's KM team at Linklaters uses LiveMeeting, internal instant messaging and collaboration spaces created after training courses (*see box p10*) to share feedback and ideas. Addleshaw Goddard has created around 30 client wikis, but only five are used regularly. Feedback suggests this is because some practice and sector groups preferred face-to-face team meetings to digital working, but there could also be another reason – an aversion to yet more 'clicks' in the working process.

"The challenge is to build

The social media firm: Dirkzwager

A key priority of the KM function at 120-lawyer Dutch firm Dirkzwager is to share knowledge with the firm's clients, which represents a major shift in what firms think KM is for.

Dirkzwager's innovative knowledge-sharing platform is based entirely on social media. Each of the firm's eight practice areas has a blog, written by lawyers who received training in blog writing. The blogs are used to generate client e-newsletters. There are also 10 news feeds covering various themes, so lawyers can create customised feeds for themselves and clients, who can link these feeds to their intranets.

Plus, key sector groups have dedicated knowledge managers. As knowledge manager there Mark Jansen

explains: "They highlight relevant legal and business information, undertake desk research into clients and markets, support external knowledge blogs, organise meetings, restructure knowhow portals and work closely with the marketing department."

He says that, because many enterprise clients don't have knowledge managers, the 'big idea' was to transport legal knowledge to enterprise legal departments – creating client value out of KM.

Dirkzwager's feeds and newsletters can be accessed directly via the internet, as well as via email and specific apps for iPhone, BlackBerry and Android. The firm is piloting a desktop app for Mac and Windows.

Information superheroes

client knowledge without distracting lawyers from their work," Gould explains. "If we ask them to upload or forward information to the wiki, we are creating an additional task. We need to find a mechanism for fee-earners to move client work into the wiki or another collaborative solution that does not involve extra work."

Gould says the success of collaborative platforms depends on participation – and this depends on the working culture of individual practices or sector groups.

Collins agrees – at Nabarro, some groups make more use of workspaces than others. "If there are only three lawyers, they will probably have a meeting. But as groups get bigger and broader, systems and workspaces become essential." Nabarro's workspaces are genuinely collaborative, he says, but it's essential to make the process as fast and straightforward as possible. Collins has dealt with this by allowing them to 'cc' an email to the workspace. "It's not web 3.0, but it works," he says.

Broader collaboration

FFW also uses wikis to share sector, project and client information and create newsfeeds around particular clients. Information officers provide most of the structure and content, and lawyers pass them information to upload. There are about 30 FFW wikis and blogs, updated by the KM team, supported by webinars and group meetings via video

conference. But collaborative spaces can't be created willy-nilly.

"You can only establish a wiki where people want to communicate on a collaborative platform," Bradbury says. "It's not the right tool for every group, but it works particularly well where sector groups straddle more than one office.

"We would like everyone to move away from Outlook and into collaborative technology, but the level of involvement depends on the culture of different practice areas and industries."

Looking ahead, the focus is on involving clients in knowledge sharing, adding value to the client directly (*see box: The social media firm, p9*). Popular tools include client-facing blogs, wikis and other collaboration spaces. A relatively recent trend is for clients appointing panel firms looking to source know-how in one collaborative space.

"Dealrooms have evolved into secure internet spaces where a client can get all their advisers working together," Collins observes. "They include social media technology – the ability to add and edit information – and involve different levels of security for particular resources." But, he says, generally a client has to be pretty big to establish this type of resource to bring together its legal advisers.

One example of that is the Banking Legal Technology Portal, a site that hosts content from 13 leading international law firms and is accessed by 30 global financial institutions. The

idea there, Collins says, "is to highlight key know-how and developments and avoid duplication".

So, as firms change to match themselves more closely to client expectations, they've also got to adapt their corporate 'brains' to do the same. It's unlikely, from the evidence, that this means becoming just like management consultants, though structurally they are moving that way.

Making links at Links

Firms are increasingly seeing the value of training as a means of building peer and sectoral networks across geographical and practice areas.

At Linklaters, Suzanne Fine, global head of knowledge and learning, and her team organise a week-long orientation course twice a year in London for more than 100 lawyers across all international offices.

The courses are aimed at fostering networking between new lawyers joining the firm, to bring them into a 'cohort'.

Following each event, an online network is established to help lawyers stay in touch with their cohort and organise further events to maintain face-to-face contact. "The network keeps the communication going, and fosters relation-

ships across the firm, which enhances our global strategy." This is a similar methodology to that used by MBA courses and global consultancies.

Links isn't alone – top firms are increasingly consciously incorporating networking opportunities into their training and development programmes.

Social networking and collaboration spaces provide a useful follow-up to facetime, helping people across the firm to maintain contacts and collaborate more easily in future. Benefits to the firm include a more joined-up service and the opportunity to leverage client contacts across groups. Social networking site LinkedIn is also becoming more popular among law firms to help deliver this joined-up networking.

But to win tomorrow's client, firms will have to find even better ways to mine both the information held in databases and the information held in people's heads. Client-centric service involves more than legal and sector expertise – it's about relationships, both within the firm and between the firm and its clients, and a sharp focus on personal networks, and KM (and learning) will play a pivotal role in making this happen. ●

ANALYSIS KM SYSTEMS

Best of both worlds

Making it easy to access a complex mix of internal and external information is the key to competitiveness, says Ray Burch, technical director for Phoenix Business Solutions

Law firms now recognise the value of cutting-edge technology. One of the effects of this is that the next 10 years will be transformative in legal services delivery. And a major part of that transformation will be in knowledge management (KM).

A decade ago, KM tended to involve multiple, disconnected functions. Now, people expect to search across several sources concurrently, rank results by relevance, and filter the results using a combination of taxonomy, structured metadata and extracted concepts and entities – 24 hours a day. It's the 'Google effect', and it's helping give better access to data in almost every business.

Law firms have grasped that knowledge does not reside just in documents – searching for experts is often the key to client satisfaction, or to winning a pitch. Firms also now have a lot more content to deal with, like voice, video, wikis, blogs and discussions. Whatever the format, the most relevant material needs to appear at the top of search results, and be displayed clearly. This is a standing challenge.

We've been working recently with SJ Berwin to develop a cutting-edge (and award-winning) KM solution that brings together the Autonomy iManage Universal Search (IUS) and Phoenix Knowledge Assist solutions to help deal with this challenge.

The combination of IUS and Knowledge Assist gives lawyers faster access to knowledge, which increases productivity and collaboration and improves client service and value for money. In my opinion, this would strengthen any firm's market position and competitive advantage.

When we were asked to build it, there were two key priorities: a straightforward user interface that required little or no training, and the ability to weight search results in favour of the firm's specific knowledge resources.

The speed and quality of advice the lawyers give, and therefore quality of the client's experience, is dependent on their ability to access precedents and other documents relating to similar recent work, and the firm's to locate expertise within the firm. These abilities also affect any firm's ability to win work, because the right experts need to be found rapidly and effectively when pitching.

Behind the scenes, the information itself comes from a variety of sources, and SJ Berwin was looking for a system that could combine its own knowledge with external resources.

The firm chose Autonomy IUS, the latest web-based intelligent search product, which integrates with the iManage document management system. The workflow tools for submitting, reviewing, categorising and publishing content in IUS are particularly valuable – Knowledge Assist, meanwhile, addresses the risk associated with updating internal precedents, forms and so on by ensuring that all material is relevant, up to date and approved. Knowledge Assist can also be separately integrated with SharePoint and SharePoint Search.

Because IDOL, the engine behind Autonomy IUS, wasn't specifically designed for the legal sector, a challenge we faced was how to tailor IDOL's powerful search technology to SJ Berwin's business requirements. We worked with Autonomy to make sure that a wide selection of connectors with all the appropriate legal resources were put in place.

This development also helped deliver global KM capability. Global firms or firms with global ambitions have a further KM challenge when it comes to external sources – offices in differing jurisdictions need their KM system to link to various external knowledge sources within those jurisdictions, including various rich media. This was the case at SJ Berwin, but it was solved through the creation of that wide selection of connectors.

To create an intuitive user interface, we ran a pilot study to develop an interface that suited SJ Berwin users of all levels of technological capability. It seems to have worked – usage figures and feedback tell us that lawyers now primarily rely on IUS and Knowledge Assist for knowledge and information.

The ability to turn around high-quality work faster has reduced costs and improved productivity, client service, and value for money – and it's cutting-edge KM that delivers this. In my opinion, it's solutions like those described above that are helping firms build competitive advantage for the next 10 years.

Click!
for more about what Phoenix Business Solutions does for law firms