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**Chris Petrie, IT Director
Stephenson Harwood**

Time & Motion

Effective time recording is essential for all law firms. TheKnowList caught up with Chris Petrie, IT director at Stephenson Harwood, to find out how a new cutting-edge system that includes mobile and offline functionality is supporting lawyers' working practices in the firm's London and international

TKL: What were the business drivers for implementing a new time recording solution? Where did the impetus come from within the business?

CP: The intention was to make fee-earners' working lives easier. Many of our lawyers in London and at our international offices routinely work on client matters when they are travelling and outside office hours. We needed to provide them with a time recording system to support their working practices.

TKL: Once you'd made the decision to replace your time recording system, how did you go about selecting a provider?

CP: Our Systems Accountant attended the Elite (our practice management system provider) user conference last year and was tasked with gaining market information on products being used by other law firms as well as talking to time recording vendors at the conference and, of course, Elite. I also spoke to a number of my contemporaries and conducted additional research. A small steering group with representatives from Finance and IT reviewed a long list of potential systems and narrowed it down to a short list. The shortlisted providers were invited to demonstrate their product to the steering group which included our IT trainers, who know what users like – and don't like – about the legacy system, and which features they find challenging to use.

TKL: What key features were you looking for in the new system?

CP: We needed a system that could be used on the move – i.e. was BlackBerry-compatible – that was 'light' to install on to laptops and other devices and could work off line. It had to have the features of the legacy system that fee earners liked and were identified as important to them in addition to improved functionality. For example, they like the timer function, the screen layout, the ability to differentiate between billable and non-billable hours and highlight time that has not been allocated to particular matters or tasks.

Once we had identified DTE/Axiom as our preferred system – in terms of look and feel as well as functionality – and decided how best to demo it, we invited a group of lawyers to a presentation of the product and worked with them on how best to tailor it to Stephenson Harwood's requirements. A key for us was to find the balance between change that is manageable and beneficial rather than impose radical change that would disrupt our already busy lawyers' working day.

TKL: What were the initial challenges and how did you overcome them?

CP: The DTE/Axiom product is used mainly in the USA – although it is also deployed by US law firms' London offices. We worked with Phoenix to anglicise for UK lawyers. This mostly involved adjusting the terminology

TKL: How does the time recording system integrate with the firm's other system?

CP: DTE is an established product that integrates with our practice management and document management systems.

TKL: What are the key benefits of this type of solution – to individual lawyers and to the firm?

CP: It is early days for us, but fee earners can track billable and non-billable hours far more easily. Because the system is user friendly and accessible, our lawyers have started capturing billable time 'there and then' that would have been lost simply because the work was undertaken outside office hours. Another key benefit is that time can be recorded offline. This is particularly useful for lawyers when they are travelling or working in our international offices where internet access is less reliable. When time is recorded offline, the data is captured on the BlackBerry or a laptop and the system automatically synchronises as soon as the device connects to the internet. The added value for the rest of the firm comes in being able to support our lawyers' working practices.

KL: How are you addressing any ongoing challenges and what are your plans going forward in terms of business efficiency/financial applications?

CP: We have a rolling program of investment in our IT infrastructure and systems designed to address our business needs as they change and develop

