

MISSION CRITICAL IT

Making Business Thrive

INTERVIEW WITH
ALISON LEE
MANAGING DIRECTOR
BISCOES SOLICITORS

Commissioned by:



Tailor Made
TECHNOLOGIES
IT & Communications

Introduction

Interestingly, Bill Gates once said that “the advance of technology is based on making it fit in, so that you don’t really even notice because it has become part of everyday life.”

Interestingly, because within a timescale which is unprecedented in business, IT has moved from supporting function to in effect, controlling function. So what could the influence of IT be, say, five years down the line?

This is one of the interviews for a book commissioned by Tailor Made Technologies and to be published by DECISION magazine, in which businesses which are really focused on the relationships with their staff and customers, share what they consider to be the issues they have to get right in terms of IT.

Communicating value is an imperative

“There will always be people who will want to self-serve using the internet when it comes to getting advice, but that isn’t the offering most will actually rely on now or in the future. If, as a service provider, what you are providing is simply transactional, there will always be someone who does it cheaper, and the danger is that technology makes advice a commodity, so it’s even more of an imperative in this digital age to communicate the value you are providing, not just assume the client appreciates it.”

And Alison Lee, managing director of Biscoes, a seven-office firm of solicitors, makes another salient point. “If your focus is providing a predominantly on-screen, purely transactional legal service, you can make the technology a selling point, but I don’t see it as being something that an advice based service provider can promote to attract the type of client it is looking for.

“What advisers should do in my view is to find ways of using technology to make it easier and better for lawyers to provide that bespoke service, by automating laborious time consuming tasks such as file opening. For us it’s about deploying technology behind the scenes to improve the client journey and experience, rather than IT being the driver.”

Alison Lee



Of course garbage-in, garbage-out isn't confined to describing the efficacy of flaky data loaded into a system. If a firm's commitment to customer service is confined to intent rather than delivery, the consequence will be much the same. Biscoes have the motto 'Great service, every client, every time', but it's not simply a declaration of intent.

"We take our entire staff through client experience workshops to reaffirm what good service looks like," explains Lee. "Otherwise, over time, you can slip into the frame of mind of coming to work, doing your bit to the best of your ability, but thinking that clients getting in touch to try and speak to you is an interruption rather than the reason why we are here."

“We have a mystery shop four times a year, picking a different service area each time in order to check that we are doing what we say. A small example. Someone contacts one of our offices because they need an immigration solicitor. If there isn’t one at that location, how do we channel them? Giving them a number to phone another office isn’t what we would consider to be client-centric.

“And it isn’t just about how many rings before the phone is answered. Was the caller told who they would be put through to, and did that next person then address them by name?

“Our staff suggested that we have a service charter and one of the questions was whether it should include a money-back



One of the Biscoes offices

service guarantee. If you are really committed to service, you would have put in the time and effort to analyse how that has to be delivered, so why would you balk at making that offer to the client?”

IT, says Lee, has enabled what traditionally would have been a local law firm to broaden horizons in terms of service offering, personnel, and clients.

“It’s only attitude which will hold you back,” she suggests. “We appointed a lawyer based 175 miles away to head up our new court of protection division. He asked if he needed to come and live near the office. I said I don’t know why – most hearings are by video conference or in London.”

Lee says she was surprised (pleasantly) by the versatility of the firm to adapt to a very quick move to homeworking because of the pandemic. “Yes, we were already cloud hosted and had VOIP, so we could say here are your new laptops, which meant everyone could continue their work seamlessly. But we had all got used to having two large screens on our desks and then we had to immediately adapt to using a laptop at home. We had already been using a third party overflow service to answer calls in our name a couple of hours before we open, a couple of hours after reception closed and at weekends. Initially in lockdown, they took all the calls.

“While Covid-19 meant law firms had no choice but to enact change immediately, the danger is that we creep back to some

of the old ways of working again. Do we need to print off a document to amend it? Well, if you find it difficult to read it on screen, you can always view it in a larger typesize!

“After lockdown we asked everyone if they wanted flexible working and to tell us the arrangement they would prefer and how it would meet our business needs. But we already had agile working – some of our family lawyers for example would spend more time in court than the office. Of our 150 people, after the lockdown, thirty-five have been doing some form of homeworking.”

“Our strategy is not to have the teams working predominantly at home or to be centralised in one office, regardless of whether IT can facilitate that, because it doesn’t chime with our client base who still want a personal meeting with their lawyer. Even the younger generation which is so comfortable with technology doesn’t want to go through the finer details of what went wrong in their marriage on computer.”

“I’m really keen to harness IT to address what we actually send out to clients,” Lee continues. “Law firms tend to dispatch letters relating to compliance and regulation without thinking about the contents from the recipients’ prospective, and it’s a bugbear of mine that there can be a tendency for the legal profession to write letters to clients as if we are communicating with a regulator. Technology means we know if a client has received, opened and read a digital communication, which they can sign and return digitally as well – but because IT streamlines the



process it doesn't mean we shouldn't be looking for ways to simplify the content to make it completely understandable.”

And Lee is wary about claims that clients will appreciate what technology has to offer as a matter of course. “The IT industry will tell a law firm that its clients will want a portal, but you could say that would commodify a process which should be an intrinsic part of relationship building.

“Technology means we can easily pro-actively provide the information by email or text, although I prefer we use the phone because a call isn't just about providing transactional information. One of our trainees picked up some unrelated work as a result, because in conversation with the client he found he had gone to

school with their brother who was also in business and needed some employment law advice. It wouldn't have happened with an email exchange.

“But whether by phone, email, or text, a client would prefer the lawyer to get in touch and provide an update without having to wonder what's happening and then going online to try and find out.”

That said, Lee points out that one size fits all doesn't have to be the chosen path. “Other service providers we work with, estate agents for example, will have access to a portal so they can log in and see the progress of their client's transaction.”

According to Lee, introducing new technology is all about “planning, training, and not going off piste. I always say to the heads of departments if there's a problem with IT they need to raise the issue in the right way, otherwise in any firm it can feed the naysayers with negativity.

“We can all be frustrated by case management systems which aren't as good as we need them to be, primarily because they aren't as easy as possible for the user. And if systems aren't sufficiently straightforward, people will try to find ways to work around the inadequacies. If there was a perfect case management system out there, one which does everything we needed without having to make what can be significant changes, then we would all have it.”

Does she think artificial intelligence is already influencing the thinking of law firms such as Biscoes? “There is a lot to be said for robotic processing to determine everything is correct in a document, which for a person is a labourious, time consuming task where human error could occur, although I wouldn’t say that is really true AI,” Lee suggests.

And being aware of potential human error, and defining ways to avoid it, matters in preventing cyber crime. “The biggest fail point in cyber security,” she says, “is that we are all busy people, and it takes a fraction of a second to click on a link without thinking. It is a continual worry which has to be addressed because hackers are constantly finding new ways to attack. I think an organisation should always make a point of making every attempt known to Action Fraud, the national cyber crime reporting centre.

“If I get an email or text from a colleague or client asking for financial information, I reply ‘can I come up to your office and talk to you about it?’”

www.biscoes-law.co.uk

About Tailor Made Technologies

Since 1994 Tailor Made Technologies have been delivering professional IT, communications, cloud, and cyber security solutions for businesses, education and public sector organisations across the UK. Through their 28-year track record TMT have been ranked 6th best managed service provider in EMEA and 2nd in the UK, as well as being featured on The Sunday Times Fast Track list for a decade.

Accreditations include ISO 9001, ISO 27001, Investors in People, with TMT's 105 engineers looking after 2200 customers and 11,000 managed devices, meeting 96% of service level agreements.

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About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of directors and managing partners responsible for businesses with a turnover of £3million and above in the south of England and London.

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