



Overview

- ◆ **Firm:** Howard Kennedy
- ◆ **Area of Business:** Commercial and Private client, wide ranging practice areas but with a specialism in Property law
- ◆ **Fee Earners:** 146
- ◆ **Date Established:** 1936
- ◆ **Location:** London

Business Challenges

- ◆ Rising cost of support staff
- ◆ Internal workflow inefficiencies

Objectives

- ◆ Increase efficiency by reducing in-house typing
- ◆ Reduce backlogs & associated stress
- ◆ Improve fee earner to secretary ratios

HOWARD KENNEDY

“Using Voicepath has enabled us to double our turnover without taking on extra support staff.”

*Michael Harris,
Partner*

Challenge

Howard Kennedy is a Legal 500 listed, mid-sized firm based in London's West End. Offering both corporate and private clients an unusually wide range of legal services, its support staff have historically been under heavy pressure to keep up with a high turnover of fee earner activity.

In 1997, looking for ways to improve support service efficiency and free up room in the company's offices for additional fee earners, the firm began looking into the possibility of remote working. A pilot project aimed at providing fee earners with home working facilities was trialed and then rejected. With files still needing to be taken home and fee earners needing to come into the office to give transcription tapes to their secretaries, this method of working had no real benefit to the business.

The firm then looked to the possibility of increasing efficiency through reducing the burden of in-house typing on the firm. Overtime and temp costs were increasing the company's fixed costs, and the stress associated with clearing backlogs was also having an effect on staff morale and long-term productivity.

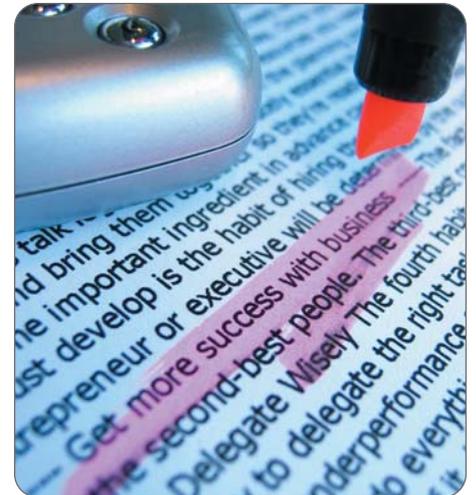
Having realised that the service that would most suit its requirements was a remote typing service, it approached outsourced transcription provider Voicepath early in 2000 to begin a pilot project.

Solution

When the pilot began in 2000, Howard Kennedy had no digital dictation system. This was provided and installed by Voicepath for use by the fee earners and secretaries involved in the initial pilot. Voicepath also trained the participants on how to use the new system. The provision of this system was also widened across the firm as a whole as the project progressed.

The main difficulty the firm encountered, however, in implementing the new system was internal resistance to change. Some secretaries feared that it would have an impact on their jobs, resulting in fee earners and secretaries viewing the new system negatively.

It was the strength of relationships between Howard Kennedy and Voicepath that turned perceptions of the system around. A senior administrator at the firm was tasked with reassuring secretaries that their positions were not in danger. In fact, part of the liaison role was to point out that it would actually free them up to do other tasks of a more rewarding nature.



“Voicepath has enabled us to revolutionise our business practice beyond the simple adoption of digital dictation. Secretaries now have time to support their fee earners on tasks other than typing.”

*Michael Harris,
Partner*

The real breakthrough came, however, when one of the firm's heaviest billing partners – a fee earner in Property whose work demanded the support of three secretaries yet still suffered from a backlog – became aware of how the fee earners in the pilot project were using Voicepath's service to reduce theirs.

As a direct result of adopting the service, he now has only one administrator, no backlog, is less stressed and has been able to use the time freed up by the system to take on more clients and increase his billing.

Over twelve months Howard Kennedy rolled out the use of the Voicepath service to all departments. Now virtually all of the firm's fee earner and secretaries, plus some non-fee earners use Voicepath in one way or another.

Benefits

Almost all fee earners have experienced a sizable increase in throughput as a direct result of using Voicepath. Whereas at one time every available space in the office would have been crammed with tapes and documents awaiting transcription, this situation has now disappeared as all is dealt with by a combination of Voicepath and the digital dictation system.

Approximately 60% of the firm's transcription work is outsourced on a daily basis and transcription backlogs have all but disappeared. One older partner even remarked that it was the first time in his 30 year career as a solicitor that he didn't have a backlog to deal with.

Furthermore, fee earners who put in extended hours also saw additional benefits as completed work was waiting for them as they arrived in the office the next morning.

The firm also experienced an upturn in efficiency and productivity. With fewer secretaries required per fee earner for typing, the existing resource could be used more intelligently than before and switched to alternative duties where appropriate. Additionally, as this new approach has allowed the firm to increase numbers of fee earners without taking on more support staff, its overheads are not increasing pro rata.

Another benefit of using the service has been an upturn in staff morale and decrease in stress levels among fee earners and support staff. Overall, the firm is a more relaxed and more efficient place to work.

Testimonial

Partner at the firm, Michael Harris, comments: “Voicepath has enabled us to revolutionise our business practices beyond the simple adoption of digital dictation. Secretaries now have more time to support their fee earners on tasks other than typing and work turnaround has improved. In fact, using Voicepath has enabled us to double our turnover without taking on extra support staff”