



Overview

- ◆ **Firm:** Nelsons
- ◆ **Area of Business:** General practice; individuals and businesses
- ◆ **Date Established:** early 1980s
- ◆ **Location/s:** Nottingham, Derby and Leicester

Business Challenges

- ◆ Maintaining the balance between efficiency and fixed costs
- ◆ Rising cost of support staff

Objectives

- ◆ Reduce fixed costs whilst maintaining maximum support staff efficiency
- ◆ Work more efficiently by using outsourcing to reduce surplus resource
- ◆ Upskill & restructure support staff roles by outsourcing routine transcription work

nelsons
go one better

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*Tim Hastings,
Chief Executive*



Challenge

Nelsons is one of the largest legal firms in the East Midlands and among the fastest growing firms in the UK, having won top 10 placings in The Lawyer magazine's 'Rising 50' for the past three years. With a turnover of over £13m and 35 partners based across three offices, its diverse practice area serves the needs of both businesses and private clients.

As an organisation focused on profitable growth one of Nelsons' key challenges is staying efficient through keeping fixed costs under control.

Chief Executive, Tim Hastings, comments: “Balancing efficiency against costs is a juggling act for firms of all sizes, but it is especially important when it comes to ensuring steady workflow across multi-site operations like ours. Each office requires support staff, but these represent a large proportion of our overall fixed costs. Consequently, we must be sure they are well deployed and working at maximum efficiency.”

Tim continues: “Good practice advises against the top-heavy management structures which often go with this model. Here, especially with staffing, it pays to live by the pyramid principle – building structures for each business area in which each 'level' of the pyramid is 'peopled' appropriately.”

The challenge of balancing staff costs with efficiency was what led Nelsons to outsource support work through Voicepath. It selected the company as its outsourcing partner in 2005, having completed a firm-wide roll out of an nFlow Digital Dictation System (DDS).

Head of IT, Robin Easom, comments: “With DDS in place fee earners and support staff can work far more flexibly. As dictation files are discrete and more effectively distributed than tapes it allowed us to eliminate transcription backlogs. It also meant work was now shared among support staff more evenly so we could identify areas where we had surplus resource.”

The next step was to work more efficiently by using outsourcing to gradually reduce this surplus resource. Tim adds: “We built this into our ongoing efficiency and staff de-duplication drive. This then allowed us to 'think twice' before replacing any secretaries leaving the firm; instead, sharing their organisational tasks among remaining staff.”

“Realising this would create a situation where surplus work arose led to us initiating our relationship with Voicepath, which has seen it type a steadily increasing amount of work for the firm since 2005.”

Solution

Tim Hastings continues: “While cost savings were our primary motive, we wanted to find the 'right' solution before taking the plunge. The chosen solution needed not only to be fast, accurate and cost-effective, but it also had to be logistically manageable. Voicepath seemed to offer precisely such a service.

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*Tim Hastings,
Chief Executive*

“Outsourcing has played a key role in restructuring the way my team works.”

*Jon Roberts,
Partner*

“It also had the advantage of being UK-based. What we were keen to avoid was sending work abroad, as we didn't think this would suit our working practices.”

The Voicepath service could also be ‘bolted on’ to Nelsons’ existing IT systems with minimum additional investment through its 360° integration with DDS. Robin comments: “This made integrating our systems with Voicepath a simple process, as we could set it up as a ‘special’ secretary within nFlow. This allows fee earners to send dictation files to Voicepath just as they would to an in-house secretary.”

Benefits

Along with helping Nelsons to restructure its support functions more effectively, Voicepath has also played a part in refining the role that certain support staff play in the business. Tim adds: “Typically, we look on outsourcing as a way of relieving secretaries of the more mundane aspects of transcription while keeping the more complex and specialised work for ourselves. It is a good way of ‘upskilling’ our support staff.”

The service’s operational benefits can be seen in partner and Solicitor-Advocate Jon Roberts’ team in the Commercial Litigation department. Jon has used the Voicepath service strategically since its introduction.

He comments: “Outsourcing has played a key part in restructuring the way my team works. For example, my assistant’s time used to be taken up with dealing almost exclusively with my work. Now that transcription can be sent to Voicepath, however, she is able to assist other fee earners in the team. She is even taking on elements of fee earning work in her own right, giving her a more varied and challenging role than before.”

Adopting the Voicepath service has allowed Nelsons to make significant progress in balancing efficiency with expenditure. Tim continues: “With Voicepath, a fee earner is not only guaranteed to get a document back within a determined time frame, but they can also rely on it having been properly checked for errors beforehand.

“We now have a situation in which certain fee earners only use Voicepath for their transcription and have been able to increase our use of the service as and when the need arises.”

It is cost terms, however, that Nelsons has experienced the most dramatic improvements. Tim adds: “Our projections estimated that this new process could shave a third off what we then spent on our secretarial pool – providing we were able to keep control how much individual fee earners used the outsourced service.

“To achieve this, we effectively rationed the service, giving each fee earner access to a package of dictation time which was equivalent to what the departing secretary had undertaken.

“In practice, however, we discovered that the cost of Voicepath processing the package of dictation was less than half of the previous internal cost, as the tendency has been for more work to be absorbed in-house by the retained staff. In effect, outsourcing routine work and giving more complex and organisational tasks to existing staff has exposed capacity for work which we never knew existed. Moreover, we have found the quality and timeliness of outsourced work has matched internal standards.

Testimonial

“What began as an experiment to see whether it was possible to make savings via outsourcing, a business process such as transcription is now helping us strategically, enabling us to knit ‘efficiency’ into the company culture.”

