



Overview

- ◆ **Firm:** Vizards Tweedie
- ◆ **Area of Business:** General Practice; private client, tax, company commercial, and residential and commercial property with a litigation department serving all areas
- ◆ **Location:** City of London

Business Challenges

- ◆ Competitiveness in the legal marketplace
- ◆ Ever Increasing fixed costs
- ◆ Post-merger support function structure
- ◆ Ethical & quality reservations regarding offshore outsourcing

Objectives

- ◆ Reduce fixed costs through effective deployment of onshore outsourced transcription
- ◆ Streamline peaks and troughs in activity through smarter use of internal resource
- ◆ Improve quality of outsourced transcription by using a UK-based service



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*Ron Perry,
Senior Partner*



Challenge

As the product of a recent merger between two London firms Vizard Oldham Brooke Blain and Tweedie & Prideaux, the newly amalgamated firm, Vizards Tweedie (Vizards), was faced with a familiar challenge. Combining the two firms had led to an increase in billings, turnover and opportunities for the business in the future, yet to be effective these had to be matched with an internal reorganisation that reflected the new firm’s structure.

The way the firm structured its support functions was to prove critical to this organisation – not least because they represented a significant proportion of its overall fixed costs. So, it made sense for it to look at where efficiencies could be made.

Firm senior partner, Ron Perry, explains: “We first identified IT as an area where we could become more efficient – particularly with digital dictation, which we believed would allow us to organise work within the firm more effectively.”

To achieve this, Vizards turned to specialist supplier SRC, which recommended the WinScribe digital dictation system. It was at this point that the firm first expressed an interest in outsourcing transcription. Ron continues: “It struck us, once the WinScribe system was in place, that with work being completed electronically it no longer mattered if the typist was sitting in our offices or a hundred miles away. Add to this the fact that outsourcing would seem to allow us to reduce fixed costs, cope with peaks and troughs in activity and make ‘smarter’ use of our own resource and it looked very attractive.

At this point Vizards’ options for an outsourced service provider were limited to overseas companies. Ron comments: “Ideally we would have preferred a British-based supplier, but in order to test out how such a service would work we selected an offshore provider from a shortlist of three and began sending work across.”

Soon afterwards, however, limitations emerged in the overseas service which led to Vizards seeking out an onshore alternative.

Ron adds: “We found that cultural and language differences when using an offshore service were affecting the quality of documents returned to us. Simple errors such as incorrectly spelling words such as ‘Piccadilly’ proved an annoyance – especially as we had paid a premium for each document to be given a second proofreading by a senior member of staff.

“Moreover, we found that some of our fee earners were unwilling to use the offshore service on ethical grounds, believing that doing so was potentially putting people in Britain out of a job.”

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*Pat Debens,
Practice Manager*

Solution

Bearing these factors in mind Vizards turned to Voicepath. As a UK-based service, one of Voicepath’s greatest selling points is that it gives firms access, either on a ‘pay as you go’ or ‘contract’ basis to a pool of native English speaking expertise. Consequently, it was simple for Voicepath, once in place, to significantly improve the quality of documents returned to Vizards.

Another key part in meeting Vizards’ needs lay in integrating the outsourced service with its internal document management system, iManage. Firm IT manager, Robin Mace, comments: “It was vital that any outsourced service we used worked seamlessly with our existing processes.”

The two companies worked together to make this level of integration possible through giving Voicepath’s network of home-based remote typists the same level of access to Vizards’ systems as internal secretaries.

Robin adds: “We gain a significant advantage from using Voicepath in that its systems are now fully integrated with WinScribe’s. This makes outsourcing work directly from the digital dictation system a one-step process which is as easy as sending it to a typist internally.”

In terms of how the firm uses its existing support staff, however, outsourcing straightforward transcription tasks has allowed Vizards to organise what work is dealt with internally more effectively.

Ron comments: “Voicepath provides the same high quality of work which we would naturally expect from internal staff. This is a crucially important factor if, as we are doing now, we plan to make increased use of the service. There needs to be a level of trust between the client and supplier which Voicepath has worked hard to establish.”

Benefits

The adoption of the Voicepath service soon led to the firm experiencing an increase in fee earner use of outsourcing. From an operational point of view, it was quickly able to prove its worth. Firm practice manager, Pat Debens, comments: “Being able to call on Voicepath’s resource when we needed it meant that we were able to reduce the amount we spent on temporary staff to cover holidays, sickness and busy periods.

The Voicepath service also played an integral role in helping the firm’s fee earners to overcome their reservations regarding outsourcing work. Ron adds: “While fee earners had ethical reservations about sending work abroad, we found that they are perfectly happy to do so within the UK

Initially, most use occurred during periods of pressure or when support staff were sick or on holiday, yet further impetus to outsource work was established when the firm was forced to make four secretarial staff redundant.

Ron concludes: “The redundancies took place as we needed to reduce our overheads quickly, but they also established that we could make a far more strategic use of outsourcing. Not only was its service more cost-effective than employing someone, but it also freed up physical space within the office. From our point of view, with offices in London carrying a premium price, it makes far more commercial sense to use expensive square footage to house a fee earner than a secretary.

“Essentially, we are finding that outsourcing allows us to bill more per workstation. These are precisely the kind of efficiencies which we need to make while merging what were two firms into one. Furthermore, it gives us a better chance of keeping our overheads under control and profitable in an increasingly competitive legal market.”

Testimonial

“We are delighted that our relationship with Voicepath has become so successful. The company has proved an excellent partner in helping us to improve our business.”