

CASE STUDY

Switalski's Solicitors

About

Awarded the 'Yorkshire Law Firm of the Year 2006 (1-30 partners)', Switalski's Solicitors is an established practice, specialising in criminal and childcare law. With offices in Wakefield, Bradford and Leeds, Switalski's comprises 6 partners, 20 associate solicitors and an ancillary staff team of more than 60 people. The firm has category 1 status in all publicly funded areas of work and also provides private client services.

"Although we are operating in a market under huge change, there are significant opportunities to be taken by firms that set themselves up to meet future demands. The cost savings we are experiencing questions why we did not outsource a long time ago!"

says John Durkan.

Challenges

Although Switalski's are a forward thinking and rapidly expanding firm, relying on Legal Aid funding has its challenges. Legal Aid is about size and volume and without it, it is virtually impossible to make a practice financially viable. Also, *"due to the Carter Reform which sees us being paid lower fixed fees we face difficult times"*, says John Durkan, Practice Director at Switalski's Solicitors.

With this in mind Switalski's had to develop a strategy to remain competitive in this ever changing market. To ensure ongoing financial growth, costs were evaluated and the area of support staff was identified as a function where costs could be reduced. The key was to outsource the everyday typing to a specialist professional company who would produce the same high standard of transcription as Switalski's would produce internally but at a lower cost.

Switalski's came across Global Secretarial via the LAPG and as a Legal Aid firm it was reassuring for them to know they were LAPG

accredited. Global Secretarial is run by solicitors who understand how law firms operate. They are based in South Africa where the language, culture and time zones are similar to the UK, all of which were advantageous to Switalski's. Switalski's believed that if their outsourcing venture was going to be successful 5 key elements were crucial; however these presented the firm with their own set of challenges.

- 1.** Ensuring all partners were in agreement and 'bought' into the concept
- 2.** Ensuring someone senior was in charge of compliance and monitoring
- 3.** Ensuring internal IT resource was allocated to deal with any issues that may have arisen
- 4.** Ensuring all fee earners and support staff were trained on how to make the most of outsourcing their typing and to take their own responsibility for its success
- 5.** Ensuring the working arrangement was carefully and positively communicated to all staff to dispel any potential rumours which may cause unnecessary tension

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Address (South Africa):
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Bellville, Cape Town 4001

Website
www.globalsecretarial.co.uk

Results:

The key elements highlighted above as presenting initial challenges were overcome and the outsourcing venture between Global Secretarial and Switalski's Solicitors has been a very successful one. As a result Switalski's are steadily increasing the amount of work being sent to Global Secretarial. The firm's partners all supported the arrangement and aided in driving through the critical internal changes that aren't always immediately attractive to staff. The firm had made the decision not to go back to the way things were with massive backlogs of analogue tapes and incompetent temporary workers so the venture had to work!

Ongoing monitoring has been established to ensure the best possible service is provided by both organisations. For example; Switalski's are continually looking at ways to reduce the time to upload and download from Global, the installation of a new server has significantly reduced admin time for staff who deal with Global and they are regularly reviewing internal procedures to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

All communication distributed to staff about the outsourcing was done so carefully and positively (and continues to be so). For example; highlighting how quickly the back logs are cleared, allows support staff to move into new roles, ensuring that no redundancies were necessary. Switalski's were able to assure internal secretaries that

getting the typing done elsewhere

did not mean they had no future at the firm. Any secretary who enjoys extensive typing is able to continue to do so as long as productivity levels remain high. These messages were very well received and have resulted in a number of support staff progressing into higher end support functions such as client matters, so their job satisfaction and productivity has increased.

As a direct result of the success of the outsourcing venture with Global Secretarial and the subsequent cost savings of approx. £15,000 per secretary per annum, the employment of future fee earners will not result in the employment of additional support staff to deal with the increased day to day typing.

Conclusion:

Switalski's now has seven full time dedicated secretaries working for them at Global Secretarial in South Africa and are therefore saving about £105,000 per annum.

The increased use of Global is a cornerstone of Switalski's future strategy to ensure the firm remains profitable and viable.

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