

Edwards Duthie support first ever London based Community Legal Advice Centre with Partner for Windows to deliver an integrated approach to services

Edwards Duthie is one the largest law firms in the East London/West Essex region, with 13 Partners and 170 staff operating out of 8 offices. Their client base is drawn from across the country and they therefore operate very much on a national basis. The firm specialises in a unique mix of corporate, trade union, private client and publicly-funded work and they hold the Quality Mark with the Legal Services Commission, as well as being the only firm in the country to have an LSC specialist contract for all specialist areas.

The firm has been a client of TikitTFB since 2002 and an active member of the user community ever since. They are always looking for new ways to develop how they provide services and manage internal functions, and Partner for Windows has been a key element in contributing to those enhancements. One of the most recent projects that Partner for Windows has played a major part in was the opening of the first London-based Community Legal Advice Centre (CLAC) in May 2010 – a joint venture between Edwards Duthie and the Barking and Dagenham Citizens Advice Bureau. The centre provides general advice to legal representation, on a full range of family, employment and social welfare problems.

TAKING A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

There were many important factors to consider when the firm decided to bid for the CLAC, but whether they had the right technology in place to manage the centre was not one that gave them sleepless nights. Whilst they faced some tough competition, a combination of the firm's extensive experience in delivering publicly-funded legal services, supported by a commitment to maintaining the quality, strength and diversity of the underlying IT infrastructure that helps deliver these services, was a key factor in the firm securing the contract.

Richard Roebuck, Head of IT at the firm comments, *"We strongly believe our ability to respond to all of the bid questions relating to IT and management reporting provided us with a clear advantage over the other applicants.* Our in-house systems have evolved over many years and have been built by a stable, dedicated in-house IT team. As such we have full confidence in our ability to rapidly develop any element of our existing framework to meet any new business or regulatory requirements. *The fact that TikitTFB are synchronised with the LSC, as well as with all necessary facets of running successful public contracts, is central to our ability to quickly deliver tailored application solutions in the most demanding of environments. For me, all of these were significant contributing factors towards our successful bid."*

COLLABORATION IS THE KEY

The firm had little over a month to set up the CLAC. Whilst many cosmetic elements of the centre were in place, the IT set-up needed a little more consideration to combine the CAB central system and Edwards Duthie's Partner for Windows system. "We approached the IT requirements with an open mind. It became clear relatively quickly that the existing CAB systems were highly tuned to the requirements of CAB and were run centrally on a national basis. To successfully deliver against the bid requirements required agility, rapid development and

FIRM SPECIALISM

Corporate, trade union, private client and publicly funded work

LOCATION

East London/West Sussex

PARTNERS

13

SOLUTION DEPLOYED

Partner for Windows for the first ever London-based Community Legal Advice Centre



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A PARTNER FOR WINDOWS CASE STUDY

deployment; characteristics not normally associated with centralised, online mainframe type systems.”

The IT team set about developing a platform to exploit the best features of both systems, which operationally, meant that cases would be opened within the CAB central system and once a decision is made to offer specialist advice, the case is referred to Edwards Duthie. The data migration between the two systems is driven by Data Import Server, a data transfer module from TikitTFB. Data is collated from the CAB system and deposited into Partner for Windows, allowing the fee earner to manage the case using the firm’s normal processes.

One particularly difficult element of the project was differentiating between rates applied to CLAC cases and standard country-wide Legal Help rates within Partner for Windows. “Building a second Legal Aid matrix was not viable. We gave serious consideration to modifying the national rates table and applying those rates to specialist cases driven from the CLAC, but this was also ruled out on the basis that we may wish to bid for contracts outside of our current demographic.”

After extensive consultation with TikitTFB, the IT team were able to develop a separate platform within the Entity and Matter based user-definable environment, building the required tables and drop down lists using SQL strings supplied by TikitTFB. “The custom fields and drop downs are delivered to the end user on a series of custom screens both at Entity/Client and Matter levels, effectively giving us our own tailor made Legal Help module. With this issue rapidly behind us, the collective role out of the CLAC was effortless.”

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

On opening the CLAC it was estimated the centre would offer representation to between 5-6000 clients per annum, so the implementation of a highly flexible and robust practice management system was essential to manage the high volume of work undertaken by the centre. “Partner for Windows manages all aspects of the management of a case throughout its entire lifecycle; from the initial opening of a specialist matter; to conflict checking; document production; time monitoring; financial control and viability within work types; to final submission of monthly performance statistics to the LSC. ***I find it difficult to imagine how we would conduct our daily business activity, both within the firm and the CLAC, without a heavy reliance upon Partner for Windows.***”

PROVIDING A FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

The firm have been using Partner for Windows for over 8 years and are heavily committed to exploiting their investment to the full. “As we move forward we are constantly looking at developing new methods of case automation, reducing administrative spend and the supply of quality, meaningful management information.”

The firm are actively involved in the TikitTFB User Group and have found it a key source of information and inspiration over the years. “We try not only to look inward but outwardly at our Partner for Windows peers and discuss best practice, innovation and many other aspects of daily life with the application. ***The User Group environment has undoubtedly contributed to our greater understanding of not only the system, but how to use it to our best advantage, as illustrated by the successful CLAC bid.***”

ABOUT TIKITTFB

With more than 30 years of dedication to the legal profession, TikitTFB supports over 600 legal practices throughout the UK with managing risk, ensuring compliance and enhancing profitability using our award-winning Partner for Windows Practice and Case Management system.

Partner for Windows uses industry standard Microsoft technology, enabling the software to be smoothly integrated into existing infrastructures. Catering for firms of all shapes and sizes, Partner for Windows provides a flexible and comprehensive solution which can be readily tailored to meet the needs of practices now and in the future.

Part of the Tikit Group, provider of IT services and software to 90% of the UK’s top 100 law firms, TikitTFB is well positioned to make magic circle technology accessible and affordable to large regional and high street firms.

“We will continue to strive forward, which to date has proved highly successful. It is likely under the new political climate and in this already difficult sector, we will have to undertake far more, for much less. Partner for Windows and the TikitTFB Support and Development teams are the foundation in our ability to meet these demands.”

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