

MEDIA COVERAGE

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Data Management **focus**

filing

Brief encounter

Legal practices offer a prime example of the issues faced by modern knowledge-rich offices. The work that law firms do is both reliant on excellent information and still largely paper based. So it is particularly important that this sector has access to world class knowledge management systems, be they for digital storage or hard copy. FMJ looks at how two firms are addressing the issue.

Bond Pearce is one of the UK's leading commercial law firms. The South West based practice prides itself on offering clients a consistently high level of service and professionalism. It goes without saying that how Bond Pearce manages its information is a key element to the professionalism and success of the company. As you would expect of a leading law firm, the company is working towards electronically capturing and retrieving information. But paper storage is still vitally important. In fact, storage units have to work harder and be more robust and sophisticated to cope with the constantly evolving demands of the firm. Flexibility is particularly important to cope with the constantly changing demands and differing requirements of project teams and different cases.

Bond Pearce chose Triumph to meet these requirements. Because files are accessed continuously it was important that Triumph developed a clear understanding of the firm's requirements and the units became an integral part of the business's knowledge systems. Ease of access was essential as was the capacity of the storage systems to make the best use of space and provide discreet space division without the use of partitions or screens.

Open fronted units enable quick, no-fuss access to files and documents. The units include vertical filing cradles, adjustable lateral filing shelves and pull out reference shelves.



Bond Pearce is one of the UK top commercial law firms. Below: Part of their filing solution.

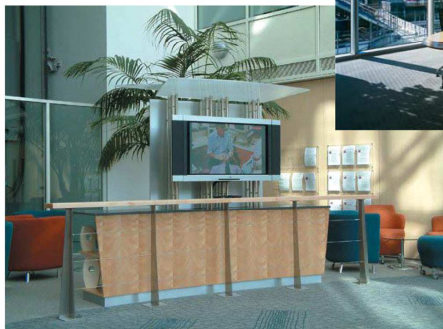


Bond Pearce facilities manager Sue Smithen was delighted with the outcome. "We think it is a perfect example of how a law firm can make information work for the benefit of the business, its employees and clients," she said. "We needed to strike a balance between electronic and paper storage in a way that gives everybody easy and flexible access to information."

Another South West law firm that used the design of its offices to improve the sharing of knowledge is Clarke Willmott. The firm moved into new offices at George's House in Bristol following its expansion from some 70 staff in 1995 to over 550 in 2003. The move into the new offices included the development of an information resource centre for both staff and clients. Positioned in the central atrium designed by Claremont Group Interiors, the area incorporates hospitality areas, plug and play laptop points, web and intranet access points and a plasma screen running rolling news. The area is stocked with periodicals and knowledge papers. Initial feedback is that visitors are happy to arrive early to take advantage of the space and that many fee earners use the area as a break-out space for reviewing information and to keep up with news.

Knowledge management in such environments is not just about workplace design, of course. Nor is it necessarily about the ability to make informed choices about the balance of digital and hard-copy storage, although that is of paramount importance. Facilities managers in information rich cultures such as law firms must also make choices about how to strike a balance between the storage of information that is essential to the core functions of the business and that which is essential to the role of support functions. That was the issue that faced DLA, the tenth largest law firm in the country, which has nine UK offices. It is from the London office that Dave Wallace heads up the facilities help desk. Wallace joined DLA, approximately six years ago, when there was no facilities management software on site or even a facilities department.

As Wallace recalls, "I came in as the understudy for the facilities manager and when I arrived there was no facilities department, no structure. Everything was on different bits of paper and so we needed to put all of this into a workable database." Aware that DLA was in dire need of a more sophisticated method for capturing and recording facilities related information, Wallace explored the possibility of implementing a CAFM system and chose to use QFM by Service Works which helped DLA to minimise the amount of information about non-core activities that had to be stored as hard copy. ■



Above: The London offices of DLA and left: those of Clarke Willmott

More information: Triumph: www.triumph-tbs.co.uk,
 Claremont Group Interiors: www.claremontgi.com;
 Service Works: www.swg.com