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HWL Ebsworth uses digital dictation and speech recognition to boost quality, reduce risk and cut costs

Sydney, February 2015 – Leading edge digital dictation coupled with integrated speech recognition has allowed national law firm HWL Ebsworth to continue its rapid expansion while keeping costs under control and reining in risk.

BigHand’s digital dictation has been widely deployed throughout the organisation, with a significant number of lawyers embracing the solution. In addition about half of all dictated files are being routed to BigHand’s speech recognition system for automatic transcription and file updates, boosting efficiency and keeping administrative costs in check.

According to National Information Technology Manager, Aaron Elliott, not only has this saved the firm money - he estimates that the approach has saved the firm hiring at least two more administrative personnel - it has improved client service levels thanks to a quick turnaround.

The firm is one of Australia’s fastest growing law firms, and currently employs 953 staff including 194 partners, 443 professional staff and 316 support personnel. It operates nine offices across mainland Australia offering a comprehensive suite of commercial legal services.

BigHand’s digital dictation, integrated speech recognition and workflow software is one of the key productivity solutions for the firm.

Aaron explains that in the mid 2000s, the firm had been exploring digital dictation and building a business case to replace its old standalone analogue tape system. At the time, a discreet area of the firm was selected to act as a pilot, prior to the firm deciding on a much larger firm-wide deployment due to the robust and scalable nature of the solution whilst providing enough flexibility to cater for the specific requirements of each department, team and user.

A year ago HWL Ebsworth extended the system by deploying speech recognition, in order to fully “capitalise on the efficiencies of BigHand” says Aaron.

Use of the technology is widespread - but not mandated. Nevertheless Aaron says that; “I wouldn’t mind betting that of the top ten fee earners in the firm, eight of them use it solidly”. He says that the efficiency dividends are significant for the firm, thanks to being able to turn around client documents much faster than was previously possible.

The firm is so convinced of the benefits of the solution that it is about to launch an internal programme to energise users about the breadth of function that BigHand now supports, and encourage those fee earners which have not adopted the solution yet to begin using it. The programme will remind all fee earners how BigHand digital dictation and speech recognition can be used for general dictation tasks, to complete progress updates, send email alerts, and provide mobile access to workflow quickly and easily.

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"We are targeting the people who don't use it currently - the people who think they can type faster than they can talk," says Aaron. At present he says around 510 of the firm's team members are relatively active users of the system, noting that; "some people use it solidly ten times a day," particularly for file notes and quick advice letters.

Lawyers are offered the chance to use BigHand with either a traditional dictation device attached to their computer, or via the BigHand app on their smartphone allowing voice files to be submitted via BigHand's workflow management tools either to the word processing pool which will tackle transcriptions according to their assigned priority, or route them directly to speech recognition; "So that if a client requires urgent assistance out of hours, our lawyers' needs are catered for in this regard" he adds.

Aaron says that about half of all HWL Ebsworth's digital dictations are routed to speech recognition for transcription. The firm maintains its word processing pool to handle the remainder of the transcriptions and particularly for more complex jobs such as reforming documents, but Aaron says that the firm has been able to continue to grow without having had to expand that pool, adding that speech recognition has probably saved the firm having to hire an additional two or three administrative personnel.

Aaron praised the continual development of the system, which has seen BigHand evolve with new features and functions such as the ability to take photos and integrate them with documents using the BigHand smart phone app and workflow tools.

HWL Ebsworth runs a centralised Citrix shop, and while Aaron said that the initial deployment was challenging because of the layer of complexity that Citrix added, it now was a very straightforward programme to manage and operate.

He said that the impressive workflow management capabilities of BigHand meant that it could lend itself to broader application - with the system acting as a centralised firm information repository with the ability to digitise analogue processes in the firm by incorporating a combination of task capture methods and smart forms - and he was looking to expand the solution in the future.

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About BigHand
The BigHand Group supports over 200,000 professionals globally, across 1,650 organisations, and is based out of Chicago, London, Sydney and Toronto. BigHand's voice productivity technology combines workflow digital dictation, smartphone applications and speech recognition to offer the professional services market a technology that allows professionals to use their voice to get more done while improving operational efficiencies and reducing overhead costs.

Further info is available at www.bighand.com. You can also follow BigHand on www.linkedin.com/company/bighand.
About HWL Ebsworth
HWL Ebsworth was recently ranked as the second largest legal partnership in Australia by the Australian Financial Review (Partnership Survey – 13 December 2014). HWL Ebsworth is an independent, nationally integrated, full service commercial law firm, providing tailored and commercially oriented legal services, and unrivalled value for money.

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