A True Victory for Legal IT

Best Authority® at Townsend and Townsend and Crew

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THE LAW FIRM OF TOWNSEND AND Townsend and Crew has existed since the 19th Century. With approximately 600 employees, half of whom work on litigation matters, our IT department certainly has its hands full. How does a law firm that has been around for nearly 150 years stay fresh with technology? By doing due diligence and testing applications thoroughly before they make it onto our system, that's how.

In the Summer of 2008, we reinitiated a longstanding conversation about whether to purchase a new Table of Authorities production tool. A TOA is a list of citations in a litigation brief. TOAs can be extremely time-consuming for our secretaries and word processors to complete. Our firm previously used FullAuthority, but most legal secretaries said it was not very helpful and that it only served as a backup to a manually created Table of Authorities.

WE MOVED AHEAD WITH THE PURCHASE OF Levit & James' Best Authority and began the pilot in the Fall of 2008. I chose a variety of people to participate in the pilot—some were technology-proficient while others required more hands-on guidance. During the pilot, we encouraged and solicited feedback. Amazingly, we did not receive a single criticism or objection to the software, not even suggestions for improvement—nothing! There were no reported problems beyond making settings adjustments with Best Authority. I actually extended the pilot into 2009, not believing that Best Authority (let alone any new software) could be that successful out of the gate. As it turned out, the product was indeed performing that well.

Levit & James' Colin Lowry sat in on the Best Authority training sessions. The users took to it immediately. It was one of the least controversial Firm-wide technology initiatives I have ever undertaken. Colin handled each and every question the pilot team presented to the satisfaction of the team.

I don't recall seeing a group of secretaries and word processors more excited than they were about Best Authority. They were totally slack-jawed, as if to say "Where have you been all my life?" The secretaries in the pilot actually sent out e-mails to non-pilot participants, offering to run TOAs for them using Best Authority because it was "fun" to use. I've never seen anything like it before—ever!

EVEN WITH THIS OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE response from the pilot group, I still needed to be convinced with a real-world example of what Best Authority could do under the pressure of a filing deadline. One of our secretaries, who had used Best Authority at another firm, called me and asked if she could have the software even though she was not a member of the pilot team. I agreed and asked her to report her experiences. She was able to do a TOA for a 200-page brief in approximately 40 minutes. If she had created the TOA using Microsoft Word, she'd still be working on it! Without Best Authority, that TOA would have definitely needed more eyes on it. After this occurrence, I reported to the Litigation Committee that we were moving beyond the pilot of Best Authority. There were no pain points—Best Authority was a very well-received product and we were ready for Firm-wide deployment.

The Best Authority implementation coincided with a new desktop rollout placing Best Authority in all seven U.S. offices. Even after the Best Authority roll out, there were still no complaints or help desk tickets resulting from the product. We showed the users the e-Learning modules and handouts provided by Levit & James and gave them a quick product demonstration.

THE BEST AUTHORITY IMPLEMENTATION has been one of my prouder moments while in legal technology. It has been one of the larger victories of Townsend's IS Department. Based on our experiences, I believe that Levit & James' sole purpose on the planet is to make lawyers and their legal staff happy—and they definitely succeed at that!