



## Digital Dictation and workflow from V7 Technology

### *V7 gives Flack & Co the vital link to the paperless office*

#### **Flack & Co Solicitors – Legal Aid Specialists**

Flack & Co is a Legal Aid specialist Solicitors practice in Wandsworth, London. William Flack, the founder, decided to concentrate on this area of law from the time of qualifying. This led to the setting up of a specialist department for another law firm before establishing Flack & Co in 1999. The firm offers expertise in dealing with issues of housing and welfare benefits law. There is a huge demand for this type of expertise but the margins are slim. Therefore any solicitor entering this field needs above all to be efficiency driven.

William Flack's vision is to create an inertia-free, constantly moving production line, where solicitors help themselves to transcriptions, electronic documents and legal tools, such as case management. By making these items accessible from the working screen of solicitors' computers, Flack & Co can eliminate internal competition and unrecoverable administration costs and achieve almost a paperless office.

#### **Making the vision a reality**

High value legal activity lies in client meetings, case analysis and preparation for hearings but administration eats away at solicitors' time. Every minute spent on a case requires another minute to locate and handle relevant files. Traditionally, dictation tapes and paper documents would need to be stored in physical locations away from solicitors' work point while 'work in progress' tends to clutter desktops.

These traditional ways of working are therefore prone to errors with tapes being mislaid and fee earners jostling to get their dictation work typed as a priority. This leads to unproductive effort and creates inertia, downtime and unnecessary HR overheads. It also raises operating costs that legal aid solicitors in particular cannot pass on to the Legal Services Commission. Although some documents need to be retained, over 90% of physical records can be eliminated. This is William Flack's key objective.

#### **Making the transition**

Flack & Co only started to outsource dictation about a year ago. Before that the firm used tapes but William became disillusioned with all the problems associated with this traditional process. "The most disliked aspect of the traditional approach was that the uncertainties of the 'dictation to transcription' process prevented the firm having tight control of the 'bigger picture'. The productivity demands of legal aid however, meant the firm needed to continually improve efficiency."

Flack & Co set up a Digital Dictation System (DDS) in the summer of 2005 and sent audio files as email attachments to typists in remote locations but the partners found it difficult to track the process. How long was work waiting to be typed? Which files had outstanding work on them? Who was the fee earner? What dictations had been completed? How big

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was the backlog? The unanswered questions made it difficult to plan ahead or make any kind of accurate forecast.

### **Digital Dictation – the key to the paperless office**

Flack & Co has devised a three prong strategy to solve the problem. Firstly, it is introducing an Openlaw document management system, allowing all paper documents coming into the offices to be scanned and the original documents disposed or returned to the owners. A case management system has been introduced and this is currently being used together with the document management system. This enables solicitors to retrieve any document relevant to a case, create new documents or take action on the case direct from the working screen.

The missing link was a digital dictation and workflow system. Flack & Co wanted any solicitor to be able to outsource dictations easily with similar ease in retrieving the transcriptions. The V7 Digital Dictation System provided the solution. This meant that all routine casework could be taken via the PC.

### **Why was V7 digital dictation system selected?**

The firm realised that an integrated digital dictation and workflow system would provide the missing link towards the paperless office – an operating environment uncluttered by physical records. V7 dictation system was recommended to Flack & Co by Quill, a Law Society accredited software supplier who provided the Opsis case management system. Quill had been impressed with the V7 system, which they have seen successfully implemented at other clients. Flack & Co partners were similarly impressed with the V7 system and decided to implement it as soon as possible.

### **Hassle free implementations**

The implementation was quickly completed. There were the inevitable teething problems as the system bedded down but William Flack said “I was very impressed with the level of customer care V7 offered. They respond with fast detailed answers to anything we ask them”. V7 also provided the training but the ease of use meant staff only needed a half day induction.

### **Benefits to the company**

V7 DDS has enabled Flack & Co to achieve significant productivity gains. Every solicitor has complete visibility across the enterprise. Using the Administrator screen, everyone can see the queue of dictations pending. They can see which dictations have been prioritised, how many priorities exist, which fee earners are ascribed to the dictations, which transcriptions have been completed and which dictations are currently being produced. They can also check when work was processed in the past. This is important if there is doubt as to whether letters went out.

Typists can see the queue of dictations allocated to them, the size of the file, the level of urgency and therefore respond accordingly. This is a significant benefit because they can be more helpful if they can see the bigger picture. For example, on a Sunday one of the firm's typists spent much of the day helping to reduce the backlog of typing. In the old days typists would not have seen the back log or taken any action over it. The sense of team work is therefore increased. The partners have a clear picture of the global work load

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and can adjust their outsourced resources according to the ebb and flow of the firms dynamic work load.

The V7 system has made Flack & Co a more agile organisation. This process will continue as other digital technologies, such as Webcam conferencing, are integrated. This will enable a client to be interviewed by an assistant under the remote supervision of a solicitor during the critical part of the process. As these technologies are converged within Flack & Co the firm will achieve its vision of a totally streamlined and seamless operation with complete visibility across all areas of its work.

William said "With V7 DDS in place I can now see the 'big picture' at any time. I know how much work is outstanding, measure the productivity of typing and also see how long any dictation has been in the queue. Partners can see when an item was entered into the system and we can change the status of the queue if some dictations become more urgent. People can work at home, are more productive and there is virtually no down time".

Where once solicitors had to search physical files they can now send and receive dictations and transcriptions with little more than the click of an icon. Every minute of a solicitors' work used to require a further minute of administrative time. Now it only takes seconds. Or as William Flack commented, "The V7 system has introduced around 40 to 60% improvement in productivity in the dictation to transcription process. It operates at the core of the practice and we would now be completely lost without it".

### **Main advantage – anywhere-anytime transcription.**

The firm has seen the biggest productivity leap in terms of outsourcing dictation. Outsourced typists can work the hours that suit them. Many work from home and balance life style schedules with Flack & Co priorities. Apart from raising efficiency Flack & Co has significantly improved its operating margin by minimising the weight of HR costs and employer administration.

### **The future**

V7 is currently working with Flack & Co to enable solicitors to send files directly from outside locations such as Court to the office. This is another example of how V7 technology is helping to link everything up with case management and scanned documents to provide 'joined-up' legal aid.

**Flack & Co Solicitors** are based in South London. It specialises in housing and welfare benefits law and does not undertake work in other area of law. The firm has Legal Services Commission Quality Mark status.

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