

Case study: Wedlake Bell



Wedlake Bell transforms efficiency with BigHand Speech Recognition

Wedlake Bell drives an increase in client service output with BigHand Speech Recognition

Overview

Globally, law firms are exploring opportunities to improve efficiency and address the legal landscape that's brought challenges and also opportunities across the full spectrum of their businesses. Wedlake Bell had, for some years, made use of an overflow typing resource in South Africa to address some of its secretarial needs. While this served its purpose, there was a growing need to respond quickly and efficiently at all hours, and that required a new solution: BigHand Speech Recognition.

Automatically converting voice to text, BigHand Speech Recognition technology builds a highly accurate speech profile for each person, and short dictations are typically returned as text within minutes.

David Hymers, Head of IT at Wedlake Bell, explains, "In addition to finding a way to improve the speed with which lawyers' dictations could be returned, there's the ability to free up secretaries to undertake more high-end, high-value work."

Speech Recognition

Wedlake Bell has 59 partners, supported by over 170 lawyers and support staff, operating across three practice groups: Real Estate, Private Client and Business Services.

As a decade long user of BigHand, the decision to adopt BigHand Speech Recognition was straightforward. Hymers confirms, "BigHand has a very low support overhead, it works well, and the interface is very easy to use. Furthermore, BigHand has always been a very reliable supplier."

Sandra Pawley, IT Business Engagement Specialist at the firm adds, "BigHand Speech Recognition is one of the most widely used products within legal; and we looked at a number of their client testimonials that mirrored our own experiences. We also carried out online research that further reinforced the decision."

Following an upgrade to BigHand Version 5 voice technology, Wedlake Bell embarked on a small, 15 user pilot of BigHand Speech Recognition. This was split 50:50 between the Private Client team, which was the heaviest user of the overflow typing pool, and the rest of the business. Following the success of the project, the company embarked upon a firm-wide deployment, and now has 65 users of the BigHand speech recognition system, with more to follow shortly.

Business Engagement

An important part of the project was encouraging partners and attorneys to embrace the technology even though they found that resistance was very low. The more experienced attorneys adapted to the new technology quickly and easily. As a group, they were the most likely to have previously relied on the overflow typing service, and are comfortable with dictating having developed the skills over many years. As a result, the benefits of BigHand Speech Recognition resonated with them immediately and they saw value in embracing the technology straight away.

Sarah Pawley, IT Business Engagement Specialist:

“One of the biggest benefits for the attorneys is the speed of turnaround – not only from an efficiency standpoint but also in supporting the train of thought.

The traditional gap between dictation and receiving the transcript can be hours, even next day, which means an attorney can have lost the thread or nuance of the client conversation. With BigHand Speech Recognition it comes back in minutes; it's a far more seamless process.”

Trainees and newer attorneys are less used to dictating. Combined with their ability to type, this group makes less use of typing services generally. BigHand Speech Recognition is the perfect way to assist them in developing their dictation skills and to provide clients a service that's genuinely quicker than typing items themselves.

“In addition to being inefficient, undertaking their own typing is just not going to be sustainable as their careers and workloads develop,” says Pawley. “Dictation is an essential skill that helps attorneys to work quickly and efficiently anytime, anywhere – and BigHand’s technology can really help.”

Improving Efficiency

Since go live in September 2017, the impact of the adoption of BigHand Speech Recognition, in tandem with the upgrade to BigHand version 5, has been significant. Tasks are automatically going to the best resource to ensure faster turnaround and, most importantly, a large portion of the firm's dictations are no longer dealt with by secretaries, and instead handled by BigHand Speech Recognition.

Wedlake Bell has reported an incremental decrease in turnaround times of all dictations, with efficiency **increasing by 49.89%** from April 2017 to February 2018.

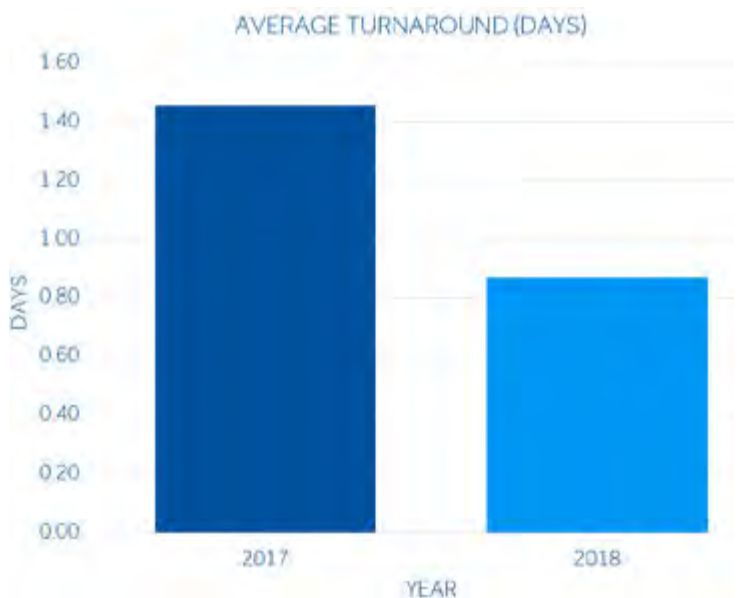


Automating Routine File Notes

BigHand Speech Recognition can also be used to automatically create file and attendance notes using BigHand SmartNote, replacing the need to formulate hundreds of file, attendance and telephone notes when recording all client interactions. The finished documents are saved, along with a copy of the audio file, automatically in the document management system.

Originally, a large proportion of Wedlake Bells' file notes were going to the overflow typing resource, but with the adoption of BigHand Speech Recognition and SmartNote, that number has reduced significantly.

Furthermore, Wedlake Bell has noticed a reduction in the backlog of work and now has more visibility, traceability and governance for documents created via BigHand SmartNote. Since implementing the technology, average turnaround time of all tasks going through the BigHand system have been **reduced by 39.87%** between 2017 and 2018.



As a result, the overflow typing service is being reduced by one-third and will soon no longer be required providing an immediate return on investment from BigHand technology.

Future Expansion

The IT team regularly check the analytics provided by BigHand to better understand who's using the technology and how . The Wedlake team then use this insight to inform on-going business engagement. A further ten attorneys are preparing for BigHand Speech Recognition training and a specific trainee engagement programme is planned for later this year to ensure the firm continues to expand its adoption of the technology.

One of the most important lessons learnt by Wedlake Bell during the project was the need to target different user groups in different ways. "Trainees are very different to partners," says Pawley. "You need to target those who are not so used to typing in one way, and those who are not so comfortable with dictating in another."

She advises, "Get the secretaries on board at the very beginning of the project – their influence is a key factor in encouraging attorneys to embrace the technology and ensuring they speak at the right pace to maximize accuracy. Indeed, the secretarial staff have been very positive about the technology, and the chance to concentrate on other, value added tasks."

Looking ahead, the firm is planning to adopt the BigHand Now resource management tool to further improve the effectiveness of secretarial talent and expertise.

Conclusion

Not only has the introduction of BigHand Speech Recognition and BigHand SmartNote freed up Wedlake Bell's support teams to focus on more valuable work, it's without doubt helping the attorneys - who have gained tangible value and efficiency gains since adopting of the technology.

As Hymers confirms, "For many, many attorneys, the adoption of BigHand Speech Recognition has been transformative."

