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PROFILE

Organisation: **Browne Jacobson.**
 Interviewee: **Kelly Tatton.**
 Job Title: **HR Advisor**
 The Subject: **Legal firm Browne Jacobson has invested in a new HR system to improve its business processes, provide advanced functionality and add value to the business.**

Q: WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR MOVING TO A NEW HR SOLUTION?

A: Our existing HR system had been in use for over 10 years, and whilst there was nothing fundamentally wrong with it our needs had evolved faster than the technology and it could no longer deliver on our existing and future requirements. It would have required significant investment in customisation to deliver all the advanced functionality that we were increasingly being asked for from within the business and also by our clients.

The demands on the HR department had also changed significantly. We were becoming a lot more focused on being an employer of choice, improving efficiencies and needed more advanced technology to become quicker, slicker and smarter in the way we deliver HR services.

Q: HOW DID YOU SELECT A NEW SYSTEM?

A: We needed a solution that we could adapt and configure ourselves and was as future-proof as possible. This was particularly important when taking into account the impact of all the legislative changes introduced and planned. We wanted to plan that in two years' time, the system and functionality would still meet our needs without any heavy investment in customisation and additional functionality.

We looked at lots of really

good products. However, none of them offered the degree of sophistication and flexibility that we were looking for. By chance we received a phone call from ASR (now Advanced Business Solutions), they came along and demonstrated HR Pro and it met all of our requirements.

We loved the flexibility and adaptability of HR Pro; it allowed us to configure everything ourselves, without being a bespoke product. We could design and amend all the screens; and we could create new tables, re-writing the entire database if we chose. It also

included its own reporting tool for extracting management information quickly and easily. It was something that all the entire HR team could use with minimum training, and offered all the additional functionality such as self-service intranet and workflow as standard. This was the main criteria that we selected on, but it also helped that we liked the company.

Q: HOW DID THE SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION PROCEED?

A: Once we had made the decision to proceed, implementation took about four months in total, which is a

frighteningly short time now in retrospect. We chose that timescale to coincide with our pay review, as the HR system is traditionally taken down during this period and we wanted to minimise disruption.

We were assigned a dedicated project manager and an implementation executive who helped us specify and develop the initial system. The system was then delivered to us for further customisation and extensive user acceptance testing, which enabled us to fine-tune our specifications.

We spent a lot of time with our end users understanding exactly what they wanted from the system and this was fed into the design process. As we had attended systems administration training we were able to do a lot more of the configuration work than we had originally envisaged. It is such an intuitive system that you don't need a development background as long as you understand the basics of how databases work.

The old system was taken down two weeks prior to pay review, which was standard, and during this time all employee data was migrated. We used pay review letters to communicate the change, along with new user IDs for the self-service intranet. When it was brought back online, the new system was in place and individuals could access all their information.

Q: HOW DID YOU PREPARE YOUR STAFF FOR THE NEW SYSTEM?

A: We are lucky in that we have a very computer-literate workforce so we didn't need to provide a lot of training. They are used to using self-service, they understand the principles of workflow, booking holidays and updating their own records,

ORGANISATION FILE

With over 200 lawyers, including 69 partners and offices in three principal UK cities, Browne Jacobson LLP is one of the largest law firms in the Midlands. The multi-award winning firm has achieved a reputation for its carefully targeted and managed public and private sector-led growth strategy.

With an established reputation for its commercial, public sector, health and insurance expertise, Browne Jacobson offers a range of legal services to a portfolio of national and regional clients.

Its innovative and focused approach has been recognised with national and regional accolades, including *The Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For*, *MPF European Practice Management Awards*, *MPF 100 Best Professional Firms to Work For* and Investors in People accreditation. In 2010 Browne Jacobson achieved the Law Society's Lexcel accreditation for meeting the highest management and customer care standards.

The firm also has a long tradition of *pro bono* work and was awarded *Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year* at the Nottinghamshire Law Society Awards in 2008.

so instead we opted to produce a personalised leaflet for each individual giving a step-by-step guide on how to use the system. We made ourselves available to provide additional training, one-to-one coaching or handholding if needed. However, demand for this was low so we didn't need to spend much time training at all.

Q: HAS YOUR SYSTEM ALLOWED THE HR DEPARTMENT TO CHANGE ITS ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION?

A: Our strategy is about getting the basics right, about innovating and growing the business, and HR Pro has allowed us to do that. From a business point of view it has enabled us to become more than an administrative function; instead we are a key support team driving and enabling change. We are aligned with the business strategy and are able to focus on key business priorities such as engagement, development frameworks, career planning, business development support and improving performance, helping us to become an employer of choice. We add value to the business evidenced by our scorecard approach, which is essential for any HR department.

Q: WHAT ARE THE MAJOR BENEFITS YOU HAVE SEEN FROM THE SYSTEM?

A: We have been able to greatly speed up and streamline our administration processes. For instance, the pay review process used to be difficult to manipulate and labour intensive. Now it is much simpler and efficient; we can immediately extract and model the information from HR Pro, produce the pay review letters directly from the system and send them through to the line managers. The need for downtime has decreased due to the speed and ease of updating records and it has decreased the processing time from two weeks to one day.

HR Pro has enabled us to move to a completely paperless

PERSONAL FILE

NAME: Kelly Tatton.

BACKGROUND: Kelly joined Browne Jacobson LLP in 2002 and is a senior member of the HR team with responsibility for HR systems, projects, compliance and wellbeing.

She has played a key role in Browne Jacobson winning several industry awards, including the *Lawyer* 'Best Graduate Recruitment Campaign' in 2010 and 2008, *Personnel Today* magazine's 'Top 40 Best Places to Work in HR 2008' and the Managing Partners Forum 'Top 100 Best Professional Firms to Work for 2008', in addition to achieving the Lexcel quality standard in 2010 and *liP Health and Wellbeing Award 2010*.

Kelly previously worked at Alliance & Leicester as HR MI analyst and performance analyst. She is a chartered CIPD member and obtained an MSc in Strategic HRM for her dissertation on *Maximising Potential Through HRM*.



HR office in terms of personnel records. Previously, each individual had a hard copy personnel file; now everything is stored in HR Pro and at a click of a button you can see all of an employee's relevant history, such as their new starter paperwork, appraisal forms, job description, CV, sickness certificates, etc. Similarly, managers and employees now have instant access to their relevant personnel information and no longer need to keep paper records.

Moving to a paperless office not only has obvious environmental benefits, it allows us to work much more efficiently; an added benefit is that it has enabled us to work more effectively remotely. In terms of the flexibility it offers, the time it saves us, the paper and storage costs and the floor space utilisation, it is a massive benefit.

The new HR system has assisted us in being awarded a number of accreditations where we have needed to provide copious amounts of information and evidence of our business

practices. This includes full Lexcel accreditation, which is the legal profession's quality standard, Investors in People, Health & Wellbeing award and the EQA diversity accreditation.

Training solicitors is a huge investment for the firm and our costs are only recovered after they have been full-time fee earners for two years. Using HR Pro we can track each recruit's recruitment, training and performance and see where we have been successful, and whether we are using the right criteria to assess and select our future trainees. This has allowed us to improve our trainee solicitor retention from 53% to 87%, increasing our return on investment. The increased quality is reflected in the trainees' experience, with our trainee programme being recently recognised by the award of eight rosettes for the second year running by Lex 100 in their annual survey of trainee solicitors.

Q: ARE YOU PLANNING ANY FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM?

A: We have an exciting 18

months coming up as we are looking to review our benefits strategy with a view to implementing flexible benefits. Key to this will be the full integration with a flex benefits platform, building on our existing total reward statements and payroll integration.

In addition, we recently reviewed all our recruitment agencies in order to determine those that are the most effective and have provided the best quality candidates. From this, we have agreed a preferred supplier list with negotiated preferred rates.

This approach saved over £200,000 last year and we are now looking at developments to minimise our reliance on recruitment agencies further by building our own candidate management database within HR Pro. This will be a fully reportable database of candidates and they will be able to update their details directly from our website.

Q: IS THERE ANY ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO OTHERS CONTEMPLATING A SIMILAR SYSTEM?

A: You need to have a clear understanding of what your objectives are and to be realistic about what you can achieve and in what timescale. It is very easy to get carried away with a new system and lose focus. Implement the first stage and build on this from the experienced gained.

To start with, map out your processes and involve the right people, at the right level, at the right time and gain their buy-in. This is absolutely critical. We involved our HR team, our administrators and employees from the beginning in how they wanted the system to operate and what they wanted to see in the system. This meant that we had their buy-in from the start.

Align any developments of the system to the business priorities and as long as you do that you won't go that far wrong.