

MAY 2018

# LPM

LEGAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

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MAGAZINE  
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FROM PRACTICE  
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## BRAIN TRAINING

*Nick Lakhani, finance  
director at asb law, on  
killing the billable hour*

## LPM ASKS

*Helen Pittard at 174 Law  
discusses how she  
created a CMS*



# Got talent?

*People are an important part of any business,  
but how do SME law firms attract and retain  
the best talent?*

BUSINESS INFORMATION FOR EVERYONE IN PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

# MISTAKE TOO

GRAHAM MOORE, THE DATA GURU



When I speak to law firm management about their business intelligence (BI), management information (MI) and reporting approaches, I'm regularly asked about what other firms do well. People naturally want to learn about best practice, or better practice, from other, similar firms.

However, the question that is much less frequently asked, but which I think is equally - if not more - valuable, is "what mistakes do you see other law firms making?" This month I thought it might be helpful to answer that question for you. So, what are the most common mistakes we come across?

## 1. Treating BI/MI as a technology issue

As is the case with so many supposed 'IT projects' these days, implementing a new BI or MI solution is not really about the technology. Success is far more dependent on the culture of the organisation, the clarity of the goals and the implementation of change management, than it is on the technology used.

Purchasing a clever piece of the latest BI technology is no more useful in itself than a prospective self-builder purchasing a hammer. That is just the start of the journey. If you want your house built inside the next five years you might want to consider who the architect will be, who will project manage, who will do the plumbing and who will design the interior? Generally speaking, in each of these cases it will not be the person who is best at wielding the hammer.

## 2. Concentrating on presentation

There are many fabulous data-visualisation tools on the market, but in the hands of the wrong people they will only result in faster access to (slightly) prettier pictures. Where is the business value in that? Great-value management information presents the right information to the right people at the right time, to deliver the desired actions and outcomes. While a great-looking presentation can help in user adoption, and can certainly simplify interpretation of information, many BI projects end up delivering no more than lipstick on the proverbial pig.

## 3. Forgetting resilience

The most common reason we find for law firms not considering implementing true firm-wide business intelligence is that "our FD (substitute financial controller/IT manager as appropriate) provides all the information we need on a monthly basis." Ignoring the fact that once-a-month information is never actionable, and also ignoring the time usually spent by said person in producing that information, the single biggest issue here is resilience. Invariably, when that person leaves, the firm ends up starting again with a new FD/FC/IT manager re-inventing the same old wheel in a different spreadsheet.

## 4. Starting with the wrong outputs

It is a regular hobbyhorse of mine, but I will repeat it again here, because I think it is so important. BI, MI and reporting only exist in law firms to help management and the lawyers themselves to achieve their goals. If goals are not determined, and more importantly agreed, at the outset, then all the reports and pretty graphs in the world are not going to change behaviour in the desired direction. Any successful human endeavour needs to have clearly defined goals (otherwise how does anyone know it was successful?), and yet I continue to come across projects that do little more than retrospectively report on failure to meet the previous month's billing target.

Life is all about making mistakes, but success in life comes from learning from those mistakes. Law firms considering their future BI and MI systems have the option to learn from the mistakes of others, or to make those mistakes first for themselves. Which one will you be? [LPM](#)

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