

JAN DURANT, DIRECTOR OF IT, LEWIS SILKIN LLP

“SECURITY IS ALWAYS A BIG ISSUE, BOTH WITH REGARDS TO INTERNAL PROCESS AND CLIENT INFORMATION.”

The director of IT at law firm Lewis Silkin LLP is a strong believer in the potential of secure technology to improve business processes and internal collaboration. Headhunted from her previous role, she started at Lewis Silkin in 1999 and knew the firm had a reputation for being “a bit different”.

Durant attends board meetings and helps the executive team identify and develop innovative proposals that can help change the business. “It’s dangerous not to have an IT specialist on the board,” she says. “I will help out if I think there’s anything I can resolve.”

Potential projects are discussed and priorities decided, before a specific board member is tasked with managing an initiative. Durant says the ability to reduce maintenance costs is vital in a constrained financial environment. Working to recognised standards, for example, helps cut the total cost of ownership because internal employees and outside consultants find it easier to implement projects.

“And security is always a big issue, both with regards to internal process and client information,” she says. “Protecting information is all about good policies, but there’s no point developing sensible policies if the IT department can’t back up the strategy with suitable technologies. Good business processes will not work without good IT.”

Durant says defining digital rights management is a key issue and the complex nature of DRM is recognised by Gartner, who suggest technologies and processes can vary significantly. The analyst firm says CIOs should begin by evaluating their enterprise’s real-world rights management requirements. CIOs should then consider technologies and processes that might be appropriate.

In the case of Lewis Silkin, Durant is overseeing the implementation of a collaborative and secure mobile environment that will rely on a combination of systems. It’s a process that has been a year-and-a-half in the making and will provide the basis for a company-wide roll-out through 2009.

The firm is about to go to pilot in their litigation department with the collaboration and document management platform Microsoft SharePoint, which Durant expects to provide a strong basis for future technological developments. The project will be implemented in stages: the first phase will deal with document management; phase two will address collaboration. With regards to the first stage, Lewis Silkin is combining an implementation of SharePoint with Workshare document management technologies.

Workshare Professional gives internal security protection, allowing users to compare, control and review documents, and define usage rights which can help prevent unauthorised access to information. Durant recognises that there can be a higher risk of data being accessed by the wrong people as more employees choose to work remotely. Lewis Silkin has, therefore, also deployed Workshare Protect, which provides content analyses, data leak prevention and endpoint security for data sent externally by email or mobile devices such as laptops, USB sticks and PDAs.

“We have to pitch to clients who ask about security,” says Durant. “It means we have to think carefully about how we secure documents and devices, so that clients do not feel concerned about the integrity of their information.”

Durant says the staged approach to technology roll-out should pay instant dividends. The combination of systems means the firm will cut costs associated to the maintenance of pre-existing document management software. The combination will also remove the need to deploy a range of dedicated collaborative technologies at a later stage. This second phase will concentrate on the deployment of a company-wide intranet,



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wiki-style knowledge bases and corporate blogs.

Other crucial applications include BigHand Digital Dictation software, which allows lawyers to dictate directly to the network using a PDA, mobile phone or the web. The system provides clearer reproduction of notes and allows the firm to track specific areas of workflow, such as how quickly lawyers are dictating their notes. Durant is adamant that her approach to document management and collaboration is setting a cost-effective standard for the way information is securely managed in the legal industry.

“Return on investment depends on you understanding the situation before you start spending,” she says. “In the current financial climate, IT leaders have got to make more with less and you can create innovative solutions without having to buy more technology.” ●