



David Baskerville

Case study: Tollers

It's fair to say that with your arrival came Norwel's biggest challenge. Tell us about it.

I'll be the first to admit that when I arrived back in 2006, I didn't expect to still be a Norwel site in 2007. The firm was looking to modernize and push forward and my initial thought was that a best of breed strategy such as a combination of Aderant and Visualfiles would be a better proposition going forward. But before I did anything I needed to see exactly what was what and for three months or so I reviewed how the firm operated, how the systems measured up, where the issues lay and what we would need in the future to secure the right alignment of IT and business requirement.

During that period I met with the senior team and developers at Norwel and it was really during those first sessions that I started to re-evaluate our relationship. It became clear that many of the negatives I had heard about were largely down to us – not utilising the system to its full potential, not installing or maintaining it correctly, not working with Norwel to resolve issues, not training staff sufficiently. That said, I was still keen to go to market and see what was out there and to see how Norwel compared. They had never been challenged by us in a competitive tender, and our need for a case management system to underpin our growing PI business seemed like an excellent opportunity to kill two birds with one stone – to make a proper market assessment and to put our incumbent supplier to the test.

How did Norwel measure up?

Well, we're still happily using Prescient case management five years on so that should tell you a lot. I have to confess to being very impressed. Norwel pitched against the biggest names in the industry and won – and won well. Why? Obviously the quality and functionality of the software was of primary importance. What we saw there was a supplier with a long track record in the sector having put all its knowledge and expertise back into the product – taking feedback and suggestions from clients and putting them into the product as part of a continuous improvement programme.

We were struck by how very dynamic that process was – and still is – and there's huge value for all Norwel clients in this: there are all these incremental enhancements and useful additions being made all the time, driven by users, refined by developers, and made available to all. It was this very sensible, pragmatic approach that we liked, and it was at least as influential in our final decision as the software – these were people who listened, who'd engage in a dialogue, try things, solicit opinions, rework, and then deliver, all in their efforts to give you an optimum fit when it came to IT systems

How have they supported you since then?

We've made significant progress over the last five years in developing systems geared to the support of a modern, forward-thinking law firm. Aside from case management, we've rolled out matter management and workflow to non-volume areas, consolidated four bespoke client and document databases into one core document management system, and deployed online authorization and custom screens across the practice. We are currently in the process of implementing the marketing module.

We've also transformed the speed and quality of management information via the EIS module, and recently added a business intelligence-cum-modelling tool, Corporate Planner, for which Norwel has done all the integration work. Similarly, Norwel has helped us become one of the first firms to get up and running with the RTA portal by building a custom interface for Prescient. It's been a collaborative approach that's allowed us to build and maintain a real momentum over the years – we wouldn't be where we are today without that relationship.

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You're an experienced user of Prescient software. What do you see as its main strengths?

Its strengths are two-fold. First, it's the fact that 80% of it works out of the box, a testament basically to decades of legal know-how and experience at the coal-face. It's vital that we can roll out modules and just run with them, getting the maximum returns as soon as possible rather than being hampered by missing functionality or getting bogged down in excessive bespoke work at the very beginning.

Second is the fact that we are not left high and dry as regards the remaining 20%, and just expected to put up with an incomplete solution. On the contrary, there are two layers of customization that enable us to refine Prescient according to our requirements. One layer is essentially user-definable, with a staggering array of options and customization availability within the software that we can manage ourselves very easily. The other layer is the ability to discuss functionality directly with the Norwel development team rather than going through layers of consultants or management. That I can discuss new functionality, required fixes or product improvements with the developers directly is I feel unique in the market place

This openness and resultant dialogue has been key to accelerating IT that is properly aligned to business requirements. Rather than getting stifled by a more bureaucratic, consensus-driven approach to system development, we've been able to push on as there's been an immediate and urgent response to our needs. And the Norwel philosophy is always to share the knowledge, with one-off enhancements typically rolled into the product for others to enjoy. It's that approach that has been instrumental in the rapid application development of a highly usable, relevant and feature-rich solution.

Tollers is one of Norwel's longest-standing users. To what do you attribute such longevity?

I think the answer to that is continuity – of approach, management and the software itself. There's this constant evolution, predicated on improvement, that's taking place at the technical level – something familiar that just keeps getting better is far more reassuring, productive and cost-effective than some big-bang change. That's supported by constancy of management – we've both invested a lot in this relationship and we are getting value from it everyday because of that investment on both sides. Norwel understand us, are aware of our objectives, know how we work and how we think, they're tolerant of our faults as we are of theirs, and that's down to us being able to talk to and work with the same people over the years. And they've been able to maintain this ultra-client-centric approach over all this time, and that is perhaps their greatest single strength.

When I arrived at Tollers, I was the first to presume that a 'small' vendor could not support us in our ambition. Very quickly I was made to see that where it mattered, Norwel wasn't small at all – in terms of delivery, quality and capability, this was a big-hitter. It's the 'boutique' approach – lots of very good things in a tidy package. And considering how the vendor market has changed and consolidated in recent times, often to the detriment of the customer base, we feel very fortunate to have had the benefit of 'boutique' as we build and grow this business.



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Client since: 1984

No of staff: 160

Modules in use:

- Practice Management
- Matter Management
- Workflow
- Document Management
- Document Bundling
- Norwel Automated Processing
- MIS
- CRM

Norwel in a nutshell:

- Decades of know-how and experience enabling a high calibre, 'boutique' approach to legal technology
- Bang out-of-the box but with bespoke options – 80% instant usability with 20% for easy personal tailoring
- Continuous feedback loop and rapid application development makes for ever evolving and improving product
- Constancy and consistency of management, support and R&D that adds inestimable value to the customer relationship.