GREAT MIGRATION

Michael McGuire, head of IT at Metamorph Law, explains how CTS supports its growth and strategy and shares top tips for other firms on the same journey

Metamorph Law has enjoyed significant growth in its first two years of business life – with everything up, from acquisitions and geographic expansion to headcount.

The firm focuses on acquiring and merging with high-street law firms that concentrate on private client work, in England and Wales.

Michael McGuire, head of IT at Metamorph Law, knows how important it is to have IT that supports growth and strategy, especially if you're in the business of adding new firms to the family. In just under two years, the firm's overall headcount is up to 435 from 130. And there are no signs of slowing down as the firm aims to triple its number of staff in the next few years.

"The call for a unified platform became louder with each acquisition Metamorph made," says McGuire. "CTS has come with us on that journey and we're now working toward the goals we've had in mind for quite some time."

ALL HANDS ON DECK

The drive to use CTS stemmed from a relationship that had already existed with Linder Myers Solicitors since 2012. McGuire explains that CTS had already successfully managed big projects and migrations at this firm, and feels confident in the collaborative plans developed with Metamorph. After Metamorph acquired Linder Myers as its first firm in May 2016, McGuire was appointed as head of IT, and the relationship with CTS continued.

Metamorph then acquired BPL Solicitors in October 2017, but McGuire says that this element of the group is a self-contained firm with its own case management system (CMS), which was developed specifically for conveyancing.

While there was a strategy to move any newly acquired firms onto one CMS, he says: "There was little point in moving BPL onto the system Metamorph was using as its CMS was actually better and has continued to improve over the past 10 years."

But Metamorph wanted staff who had worked in conveyancing at former Linder Myers to be able to work on BPL's CMS – and any other conveyancing firms that are acquired in the future for that matter – but still be able to print these documents at their own firm.

As it stood at the time, there were effectively two firms with two separate networks and the main hurdle they faced was finding a way to give each access to the other's IT system.

McGuire approached CTS, explained the challenge and asked if there was a way to get current and future users onto BPL's CMS without having to install additional communication lines and hardware.

"CTS proposed to implement a domain trust. Basically, it created a trusted link that allowed users on the Linder Myers network to log on and use BPL's system, without the need to install that software internally," says McGuire.

Following the latest acquisition of Terry Jones Solicitors early in 2018, Metamorph is now working on three IT platforms. "We've got two big projects on at the moment in IT. One is to have everyone working on one CMS, and the other is to have a single IT platform because at the moment we've got three," says McGuire.

Terry Jones will be incorporated directly as part of that greater project, and it is hoped that this will all take place by June 2019.

The plan to move everyone onto one IT platform comes from the board, which McGuire's IT team now needs to implement. "We'll buy the hardware and host it in a data centre so that it's geographically

THINKING ABOUT THE MOVE?
MICHAEL MCGUIRE SHARES HIS TOP TIPS

Operational leaders are aware of the growing footprint technology is stamping on the legal sector. However, most become nervous because of the anticipated pitfalls that come with implementing new IT infrastructure.

McGuire says you are more than likely to experience challenges along the journey, but these will change from one firm to another. McGuire shares top recommendations for smooth migration:

• Be transparent about what you set out to do. Have a clear objective for what you want to achieve, how that will be implemented and the impact it will have on your employees.
• Take your people with you and keep the communication lines open. Make sure they understand what is going to happen so that the change doesn't come as a sudden jump that nobody was prepared for.
• Set realistic milestones for a project – and try your best to stick to them. My own team was panicking about not being ready. I said, we'll never be fully ready. And I pushed and encouraged the team to stick to the deadline.
• Accept that things can change. As much as we were committed to the agreed timeframe, we had to take a step back when we acquired Terry Jones because we then had another 120 people to think about. So, we introduced another step into the project. You have to keep flexibility in mind because in the real world, things change and we never know when the next acquisition is around the corner.
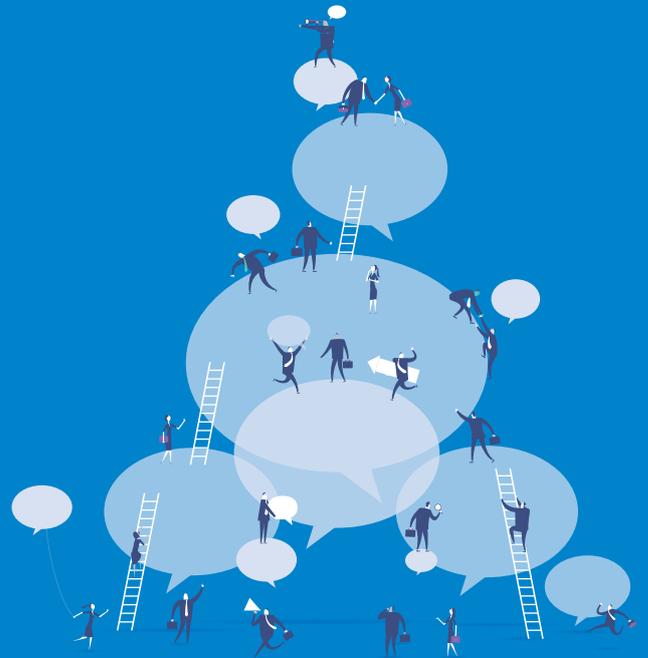
independent. Luckily, we've got the resilience, but there are other services we need as well."

One of the services McGuire is focused on is the helpdesk. BPL has a helpdesk that currently supports 170 people, but it could not support the combined firm's workforce without employing more IT staff. Unlike BPL, Linder Myers and Metamorph don't have an in-house service, and so they currently use CTS's helpdesk.

"Our total headcount is now at 435 and that number could double in the next few years. It's not realistic to constantly recruit more IT staff each time we need to manage the change that comes with new firm acquisitions.

"Going forward, we will have our hardware that we own and operate from a data centre, and then

we will add tiers of service on top."

McGuire says CTS's proficiency is evident in the fact that helpdesk tickets are consistently around three or four per day – dramatically down from the regular 35 there used to be.

"The fact that we have so few tickets now shows how CTS has improved the infrastructure and made it more reliable," he says. And once everyone has transitioned to a single platform, CTS will be the only helpdesk managers.

THE WAYWARD JOURNEY
Together with Chris Cann, CTO and head of compliance at Metamorph Law, McGuire was also tasked with coming back to the board with a sole CMS recommendation.

"As we focus on private client work, the key departments that we needed to get on board were conveyancing and probate – they're our big users of the CMS."

McGuire and Cann reviewed several competitor systems but, after demonstration sessions with the key departments, Visualfiles from LexisNexis came out on top as the CMS of choice.

When the time comes to transition onto Visualfiles, conveyancing will be first to go, followed by probate. Although BPL already had a highly developed conveyancing system, the firm will be gradually moved over to the new CMS with aid from CTS.

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like these is to try to stick to deadlines and timeframes as best you can, but things change. One thing that moved the goalposts for us was the acquisition of Terry Jones earlier this year – another 120 people to factor in all of a sudden is a lot to think about," says McGuire.

With such a high intake of new staff, McGuire says Metamorph is now challenged with managing the same departments in all combining firms – so the skilful juggling of systems must continue.

"If we consider family law alone, we've got a team in Manchester at Linder Myers as well as a team at Terry Jones in Shropshire. They're doing the same work but using different systems, which makes for a lot of similar data being held in different places. From an operational standpoint it is very difficult to manage – it's vital for us to have everyone working together on one system," says McGuire.

The IT team was in conversation with CTS about moving everyone onto Visualfiles but, he explains, there were concerns surrounding the doubling of potential problems – as there will always be glitches when moving onto a new system. "Understandably, people don't like change, and IT doesn't like change when we're on the wrong end of it," he says.

With the ultimate objective of getting everyone onto Visualfiles, McGuire explains that there will be two moves involved. He says: "We've introduced a new stage in the Visualfiles project. The plan is to move everyone from a particular department, for example family law, onto the same system – whether that's using Linder Myers' or Terry Jones' respective systems. This way they'll all be on one system and thereafter we'll move them onto Visualfiles."

There has been great debate surrounding whether it's better to migrate employees over in two smaller moves or one large one, he adds.

"Overall, I think it's the best option to do the move in two stages because there will be a more consistent view as to how we want things done in future. We'll move everyone onto one existing CMS, then let people settle for a few months before throwing up more change. The complete move to Visualfiles will happen some time in 2019."
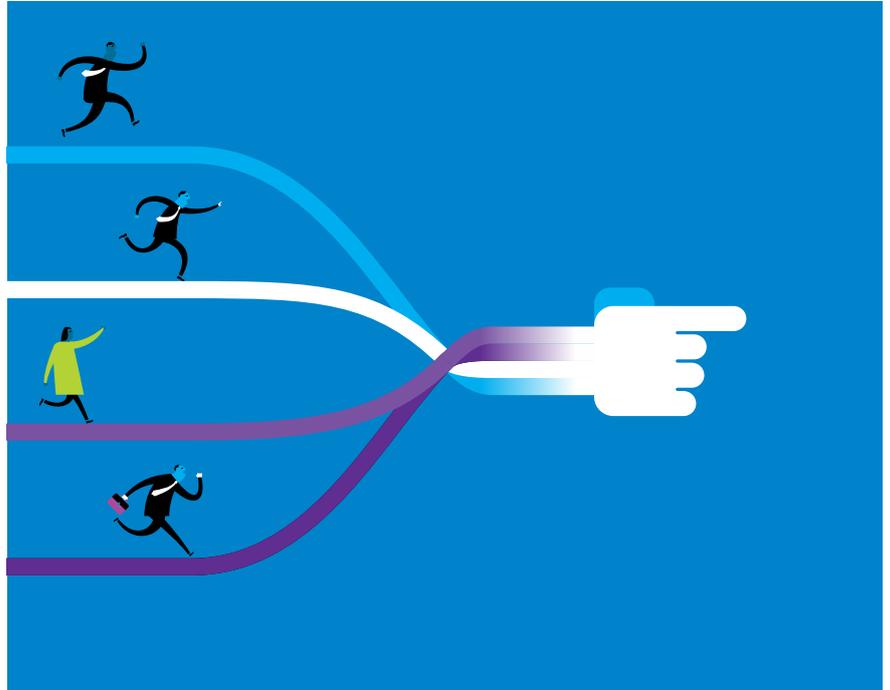
PARTNER UP

CTS has been involved in the majority of Metamorph's IT integration strategies – and has become even more heavily involved as the firm works toward the single IT and CMS platforms. The service that CTS offers all leads back to and supports the firm's wider business objectives to continuously grow and expand, McGuire says.

He says CTS helps to make that possible by managing the infrastructure, allowing employees to work remotely (thanks to hosted desktops), managing IT enquiries through the helpdesk and enabling the firm to focus on more strategic issues.

McGuire sees a clear advantage in working with a specialist provider for the legal sector, as CTS understands the workings of a law firm and its applications. "If I call CTS and say I've got a problem concerning compliance or a regulatory issue, for example, they understand. They're also familiar with the CMS applications that support the legal sector, so that's very helpful."

There are trusted lines of communication between Metamorph and CTS, and McGuire says that he's often happy for the CTS team to go ahead and make changes they deem necessary without having to run it past him first.

"I speak to our account manager on a regular basis and CTS can also relate to our challenges at the moment as they're looking to expand. They've recently brought on a new CCO and CFO, both of whom Cann and I went to meet to exchange ideas about our respective businesses' future plans."

CTS has already seen Metamorph through its early challenges, and there is clear confidence in the value of its service as the firm factors projects into the many more to come. **LPM**