

SECURED TRANSITION

IT director Adele Summers explains how Northern Irish firm Wilson Nesbitt chose IT provider CTS to help it grow and ensure the firm's security would remain up to scratch

Wilson Nesbitt is a full-service law firm with commercial offices in Belfast and volume services offices in Bangor. Among other areas, it handles significant proportions of debt recovery and residential conveyancing matters in Northern Ireland and handles approximately 65% of all the residential remortgage transactions in the country, acting on behalf of many banks and building societies, including eight of the top nine UK lenders.

While ensuring the security of residential clients' personal information is, of course, of the highest priority, Adele Summers, IT director at the firm, says that one of the biggest day-to-day challenges Wilson Nesbitt faces is meeting the stringent standards imposed by banks and other financial institutions.

"There are a range of ever-emerging security requirements, audits and assessments we have to satisfy on a continuous basis. It's always a challenge, for any firm or business, to make sure you're exceeding those requirements, rather than chasing your tail," she says.

A big piece of completing that puzzle is, obviously, getting a firm's IT functions up to scratch. The firm had been with a private cloud IT provider from 2013, but expansion plans drove a review of its medium- and long-term IT infrastructure needs. "The move to hosted services six years ago was an important step forward, but we needed a secure and stable platform compatible with our ambitions. Around 2016 the firm started looking for a new partner."

TECH IT OUT

In addition to data security, Summers says that there were a number of other considerations. "We wanted to find a vendor that would have in-depth knowledge of hosting our applications,

specifically Visualfiles and iManage case management systems, because those are key platforms for us." She also explains that Wilson Nesbitt has developed highly automated case management workflow systems to improve efficiencies – and a new provider would need to keep up with those high-volume business areas and associated IT requirements.

After a year-long tender process, which required vendors to prove their ability to support the server platform and adhere to ISO certification and other security standards, the firm finally chose its partner. "CTS came out head and shoulders above the other potential suppliers – there aren't a huge number of IT companies out there that specialise in legal, and CTS understood the compliance and security aspects we needed, as well as our software applications."

As the firm had been an early adopter of cloud technology via an external IT provider, she says that moving back to in-house infrastructure wasn't a viable solution, as the firm has a large IT operation for a firm of its size. There were other benefits to an external partner, however, including freeing up the internal team to develop business intelligence tasks. "Maintaining the level of IT infrastructure support needed in-house would be a significant cost and, with the right IT partner, you get a high level of expertise. It would be much more difficult to recruit for and maintain that level of knowledge as an SME law firm purely in-house."

Summers also explains that the firm felt an external partner would be better placed to facilitate features such as remote working and, significantly, disaster recovery – the firm now conducts regular exercises around this business-critical feature. "We perform two full disaster recovery tests per year, because clients demand that level of resilience."

ABOUT US

CTS provides law firms with mission-critical managed cloud services, including IaaS, hosting, business continuity and security services.

www.cts.co.uk



LPM FIRM FACTS

Wilson Nesbitt

Revenue: undisclosed

Corporate status: partnership

59 fee earners, 84 total staff

Offices: Belfast, Bangor



SCALE-OUT CAMPAIGN

In September 2019, the firm moved its Belfast operation to new city centre offices, which offer the firm significant room for expansion, improved meeting facilities for clients and open-space working. It was a significant project for the firm: "It's a big step up in terms of what we're able to offer clients and staff," Summers says. Getting it up and running was aided by the partnership with CTS, she explains. "The new office was a major investment and being in the cloud helped – we didn't need to move a large amount of server architecture. It was far more seamless than we could have expected."

As part of the move over to CTS, and in conjunction with the Belfast office move, the firm also made a major improvement to its communications network, including a full leased line, to provide faultless communications between the offices and the data centre.

As part of the firm's crucial reputation management and client engagement efforts, Summers explains that the decision was made early in 2019 to build on its existing Cyber Essentials credentials and go for Cyber Essentials Plus certification. While the platform provided by CTS was already primed to put the firm in a good position, Summers says that the company also

actively supported the firm and worked with it on assessment points to achieve the certification, all as part of the ongoing relationship between the firm and CTS. "It's a relatively rare achievement in the legal world, so we're quite proud of it," she adds.

More recently, the firm also passed an independent GDPR audit, further solidifying its safety standing. "It demonstrates the firm's commitment to GDPR and information security, and it all dovetails together," she says.

Although the move over to CTS's systems was completed in July 2017, Summers says that the relationship is very much a continuous, collaborative one. The CTS helpdesk offers 24/7 365 days a year support to the in-house professionals around IT requests and support.

"They proactively liaise with our internal team, on a daily basis. CTS feels like an extension of our IT department, rather than a separate entity."

On a more strategic level, Summers says she works frequently with account and project managers to keep IT efforts moving forward, both mid- and long-term, which currently includes a complete refresh of the firm's server architecture. However trying that task might be, Wilson Nesbitt will be going into it safe, secure and supported by a capable partner. **LPM**