

LAW OFFICE TECHNOLOGY

New Firm Uses SaaS for Economical, Large-Firm Quality IT Solution

Author's note: Chaffetz Lindsey opened in Manhattan May 5. The firm focuses on financial and general business litigation and reinsurance and international arbitration. Previously, the five founding partners, Peter Chaffetz, David Lindsey, Charles Scibetta, James Hosking and Cecilia Moss, practiced together for nine years in the New York City office of Clifford Chance.

BY CHARLES SCIBETTA

Special to the Legal

Putting the right team of lawyers and support staff in place was the easy part. Having worked together for years, we knew we would be able to staff our cases as we always had: with hands-on, partner level leadership and a lean associate and paralegal support team. The real challenge was to make sure that our efforts to control costs did not compromise our ability to handle our clients' large, complex cases. In particular, we were concerned that we had become used to a level of IT systems and support that is common in large firms, but that we did not know how to replicate on our smaller scale.

The more we thought about this part of our project, the more complex



CHARLES SCIBETTA

is a founding partner in the boutique commercial litigation and arbitration firm Chaffetz Lindsey. He has 13 years of experience handling complex commercial disputes. Contact him at 212-257-6962

or at charles.scibetta@chaffetzlindsey.com.

it seemed. We needed at our desktops a suite of software applications sufficient to handle both large and small cases, applications that allowed us to conduct firm administration without distracting from our client work, and high-speed remote access and mobile communications capabilities to run our cases and our new business when traveling or working from home. We also needed responsive IT support when issues arose. At a big firm, all of this was provided. What would we do to meet these needs on our own?

THE SAAS SOLUTION

As it turned out, the IT solution was readily available. Of course we did our research, but the best input we received was from two friends who had successfully made the same transition we were making. David Graiss, one of our most respected competitors, founded

Graiss & Ellsworth about two years ago. Another friend, David Schulz, one of the country's leading First Amendment lawyers, left our previous firm six years ago and is now a partner in Levine Sullivan Koch & Schulz. These are both successful lawyers who practice at the highest level. When we learned that both of their firms had outsourced their IT functions and that both of our friends highly recommended their vendor to us, this caught our attention.

Ultimately, we took their advice. We signed up for a legal-specific Software-as-a-Service, or SaaS, solution called OASIS, delivered through a company called mindSHIFT Technologies Inc. Through our contract with mindSHIFT, we have outsourced our firm's technology needs to a single IT managed services provider. This fully managed SaaS solution gives our attorneys and staff access to all the business and legal-specific software applications that we need to handle our cases and run our firm, but with a much smaller up-front capital cost investment and without the IT management obligations that could easily distract us from focusing on our clients. Our SaaS solution replicates the level of technical infrastructure

and support that we had relied upon at our large firm.

The specific benefits that we have seen as a result of choosing this fully managed SaaS solution include:

- A responsive and capable support team. Even before we opened our doors at our permanent Manhattan location, our IT system was up and running so that we could meet our clients' needs while we worked remotely from temporary space. When our offices were ready for us to move in, our service provider delivered our hardware and came on-site to set it up and ensure a smooth and efficient connection to our permanent system.

- An economical, secure and scalable IT solution. With our SaaS solution, we use space on remote servers hosted at a secure site maintained by our service provider. We do very little computing on-site. Instead, we operate through "thin client" desktops that connect to our remote servers. Our up-front capital outlay for this solution was far less than it would have been for alternative, self-managed options we were considering, as we minimized our own hardware and on-site personnel needs. We also maximized our security and data recovery capabilities by contracting with a provider that has multiple secure facilities, with a dedicated team monitoring

operations. We pay for our ongoing system access and support monthly, with our fee based on the number of users in our firm. The system is scalable, and we pay for increased IT capacity only as our firm grows to meet our expanding workload. We did not have to incur hefty up-front costs to build in capacity to accommodate future growth.

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- Appropriate and user-friendly software applications. In addition to providing our base IT infrastructure and hardware, our service provider guided us through making software selections. They helped us obtain tried-and-true applications

with which we were already familiar. Where appropriate, they recommended applications that provided less costly but equally effective substitutes for applications that we have used in the past.

"Black-box" convenience and peace of mind. This is the bottom line. Anyone who has worked in a large law firm knows how impressive the IT systems and support teams can be. State of the art technology is serviced and maintained by a team of experts who effectively work in a "black box" from the lawyers' points of view. Generally things work, but the lawyers do not know how or why. If problems arise, support is a phone call away. Our SaaS solution gives us the same effect. Just as before, we can focus on our clients' cases while dedicated technology experts work in the background to maintain and support our IT needs. •

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