



Case Study: **Burges Salmon**



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Company background

Founded in the 18th century, Burges Salmon is a Bristol-based 650-strong commercial law firm. Burges Salmon specialises in high-value bespoke corporate legal services for companies who would traditionally use London-based solicitors.

Information Technology is the backbone of this thriving “city outside the city” practice. Jon Gould, Director of IT, explains, “The practice of law has not changed fundamentally since the time of Dickens but, instead of fountain pens and paper, we now use a keyboard and a screen. Technology, therefore is a vital component in the delivery of advice to our clients”.

Like other professional services, Burges Salmon’s product is intellectual property delivered as advice and disseminated in various forms of documents. As Gould explains, “We are still, in the final analysis, a document factory and ultimately IT is the delivery mechanism”.

“Slashing the number of servers by 90% saves Burges Salmon £30,000 each year in electricity and reduces our environmental impact”.

“Commercial IT Services strategy makes our office move far less complex as the server move takes place electronically”

“We no longer need a large server replacement budget as they no longer exist and we have much lower maintenance charges. Our data centre costs are much lower too”.

The challenge

The challenge for the IT department at Burges Salmon is identifying efficiencies which enable the firm to remain competitive. As Gould explains, “IT is the third biggest cost in a law firm after staff and building costs”. The impending move to a new building was the catalyst to rethink the technology strategy.

To ensure a successful office move, Burges Salmon’s IT team looked carefully at the risks. As Gould pointed out, “The business impact of some late IT projects is not great. But with the office move, it all has to work the next day”.

The big question was how to move more than 110 servers to the new building without disrupting the business. Gould considered “virtual” servers. Server virtualisation is a technology which consolidates data computers into virtual electronic servers running on a reduced number of powerful computers.

The firm invited Commercial IT Services, a company experienced in virtual server technology, to assess the cost saving potential and impact on the business in the event of a system failure. Commercial IT Services are a division of the business services group - Commercial Limited.

The Commercial IT Services team analysed how the number of servers could be reduced and yet still meet the business’s needs. The analysis showed Burges Salmon could reduce the number of servers in two phases yielding massive savings and simplifying the office move. Initially the team reduced 50 non-core application servers to five.

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Benefits and cost savings

As Gould explains, “Commercial’s strategy makes our office move far less complex”. A key benefit is the server move takes place electronically. First, Burges Salmon move existing physical servers to a virtualised environment in a new server chassis housed in the existing server room. Later, the team move each virtualised server to a new chassis in an external data centre – this move is done wholly electronically and doesn’t involve the (often risky) movement of physical servers. Lastly, the old server chassis and blades can be relocated to the new building where it can mirror the machines in the data centre. This dual-system approach means Burges Salmon’s IT has redundancy and is more resilient if a failure occurs. Gould explains, “This system redundancy ensures business continuity and dramatically lowers our risk”.

Further benefits include huge electricity savings and reduced environmental impact. Slashing the number of servers by 90% saves Burges Salmon £30,000 each year in electricity. And there are more savings, as Gould explains, “We no longer need a large server replacement budget as they no longer exist and we have much lower maintenance charges. Our data centre costs are much lower too”.

Why Commercial IT Services?

Gould describes why Burges Salmon selected Commercial IT Services; “They talked to us well before anyone else. They knew about virtualisation and understood it”. Gould highlights, “Commercial IT Services invested in their staff to get the expertise. They have good technical people who inspire confidence”.

“Legal firms are risk adverse and tend to distrust anything new. We weren’t sure that virtualisation was right for us”, explains Gould. “Commercial IT Services was good at hand-holding our team and taking us on a journey to a point where we now get it”. “Commercial was willing to invest time helping us understand the benefits”. Gould summarises, “It’s incredibly uncommon to find a company like Commercial IT Services in the IT industry.

They are an asset, a deliverer, a facilitator and an enabler. The Commercial proposition is compelling, the return-on-investment clear. We decided to just get on with it.”

What next?

Gould is a leader with vision for IT far beyond delivering operational efficiencies alone. He has real vision for how IT can bring business value to professional service organisations like Burges Salmon. After consolidating the remaining servers and moving offices, Gould has ambitious plans, “IT can play a real part in new market growth and find new ways to bring Burges Salmon closer to its clients. Commercial IT Services will be a key partner in this vision”.

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Lessons learned

It’s clear, Burges Salmon learned a great deal and there are lessons for all embarking on similar projects. Gould suggests:

First make sure you do a “reality check”. Do the analysis and have hard facts and figures. With this, Gould points out, “we felt more confident in the project”.

Second, explain the business value of the proposition. The Finance Director takes a keen interest so make sure you have the hard figures of electricity use before and after. Gould explains, “because of the Commercial IT Services analysis, all the figures were available to us. That made the financial justification easy”.

Third, help the internal team understand and support the new approach. Commercial IT Services helped by getting the IT team to visit Cheltenham to learn and build team trust. Gould highlights, “The team stepped back from their natural doubt of anybody or anything new. Commercial IT Services helped the team engage in the project”.

Fourth, preparation. Make sure you have a practical and phased implementation plan. Identify the “soft target” software applications first (for example, lower usage applications and servers) to build confidence and create impetus - then follow-on with the core software such as e-mail. Gould explains, “Commercial helped us deliver and were there and willing to come in when we ran out of steam”.

Finally, ensure you have a strong technology partner. Gould highlighted, “Don’t be swayed by low-price suppliers as the price is irrelevant if the project doesn’t work. Virtualisation is a technical area and Commercial were able to provide the expertise needed for success. That they were able to do so cost competitively was a bonus”.