

MATTERSPHERE CASE STUDY
MAURICE BLACKBURN

USE YOUR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO SUPPORT ORGANIC GROWTH



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BY CHARLES CHRISTIAN

Founded almost one hundred years ago in 1919, the Australian legal practice Maurice Blackburn has recently emerged as a successful example of how a law firm can evolve to meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century client.

The firm prides itself on its advocacy for the under-represented and those seeking restitution from employers, large institutions, and government. Its approach to streamlining the legal business process in the areas of workplace, road accident, personal injury, and medical negligence compensation claims, as well as employment and industrial issues, superannuation, insurance disputes, and class actions has given it not only an unrivaled reputation in Australia, but also made it a firm that is closely watched by plaintiff compensation lawyers around the world. What Maurice Blackburn does today has become the template for what other law firms will do tomorrow.

With the corporate motto *We Fight For Fair*, the firm owes much of its success to the calibre of its lawyers and staff. However, in an increasingly competitive market, this is no longer enough. The firm also invests in technologies to improve the efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness of its people. Having already implemented the 3E® financial and practice management system to modernize back office operations, the firm began looking at updating its front office case and matter management infrastructure in 2010.

Steve Schuurmans, Chief Operating Officer at Maurice Blackburn, sets the scene: "With our incumbent solution, staff would have to access different tools in order to complete different tasks. This was hardly an efficient means of handling a matter."

In addition, the management team was unable to accurately measure the progress of files across the firm, and because of the system's inflexibility, it could not tailor the system to meet the firm's specific criteria of different practice groups. Furthermore, it faced workflow continuity concerns, cross-matter information issues, and lengthy document generation and processing times.

Justin Westbrook, General Manager of IT and Anthony Bleasdale, General Manager of Knowledge Management, were given the task of heading up the team to find a replacement solution and eventually evaluated a total of eight different systems. These ranged from the latest version of the firm's incumbent case management software to business process management (BPM) platforms and generic technologies, such as Microsoft® SharePoint®, before finally selecting MatterSphere® from Thomson Reuters Elite.

Bleasdale concedes that Maurice Blackburn had outgrown its existing software and had an aggressive replacement timetable, with a target of rolling out the new system to more than 740 users across 28 offices within 12 months. However, the "bigger vision" was always about helping the firm improve its business processes.

"We are into double-digit growth, having expanded across all the states where we have a presence and having opened four new offices in the course of 12 months. However, to continue doing this, we needed a solid infrastructure to support organic growth. The system we eventually selected—MatterSphere—reflects this strategy. It allows us to be a lot more flexible and client-focused to create proactive rather than reactive processes."

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Anthony Bleasdale
General Manager of Knowledge Management
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With the head office based in Melbourne, Maurice Blackburn has a staff of approximately 740 people, including over 150 lawyers in 28 offices across Australia. Founded in 1919, the firm is Australia's biggest class action firm and specializes in workplace injury, car accidents, medical negligence and asbestos exposure, social justice, employment law, insurance and superannuation, and personal injury.

CHALLENGE

Experiencing double-digit growth over the past few years, the firm needed a new solid infrastructure to support organic growth, while at the same time allowing flexibility and ease of use for users.

WHY MATTERSHERE

Embedded within the Microsoft Office system, MatterSphere provides a single platform that streamlines document and workflow needs and also integrates with the 3E financial management system.

BENEFITS

- Flexibility allows firm to adapt to each practice area to suit their needs
- Software Development Kit enables changes to be made in-house, resulting in major streamlining and an increase in efficiency
- Easy and immediate adaption, resulting in rapid ROI

Says Bleasdale, "MatterSphere has given users ownership of their own workflows. We have been able to get away from the mindset that the system makes them follow a process they don't need to do, and instead, they can now help evolve the product so they can work more efficiently. For example, half the firm time-records, but the other half does not. However, this does not create an issue for MatterSphere. And, because MatterSphere has its own Software Development Kit (SDK) environment, we can manage changes in-house, something we could not do with the previous system.

"The great thing about the new generation of lawyers we are employing at Maurice Blackburn is they are not afraid of asking the question 'Why? Why do we do handle a process this way, why not change it?' This element of interaction also has a strong business development angle. Case management needs to be more than just a document assembly system, and with MatterSphere, we now have the tools to make better use of our lawyers.

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Steve Schuurmans
Chief Operating Officer

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"We also took the opportunity to rationalize our precedent libraries (also known as 'templates' in the U.S.), cutting back 12,000-plus precedents in the old system to 4,000 unique documents," notes Bleasdale. "Then, based upon the core precedent management application within MatterSphere, we built our own court document bundling system."

"After struggling with an insufficient matter management solution," adds Schuurmans, "we turned to MatterSphere for a one-stop shop to have all of our document and workflow needs tightly integrated within a single package, an aspect that has proven most useful to our staff. As a plaintiff firm, the way we practice is a little different than most firms. We appreciate the flexibility of the system, its ability to precisely adapt to each of our practice areas, and the tools it provides to easily change things in the system to suit our needs."

As part of this overall end-to-end enterprise business management solution, MatterSphere also integrates with the firm's 3E financial management system and its HP iManage WorkSite™ document management system and is embedded within the Microsoft Office® environment.

"Three years ago," says Bleasdale by way of a final comment, "the firm had the vision of taking knowledge outside of IT and precedents and making it strategic by putting it into the business process. It has been a massive task undertaken by the firm, but the end result has been to empower our users. We have taken MatterSphere further than any other firm in the legal market."

For more information about MatterSphere, please visit mattersphere.com or email mattersphere@thomsonreuters.com.

