



## Digby Brown Three years on - Digital Dictation is still delivering

**Renowned in Scotland as a leader in Personal Injury Law, Digby Brown was one of the first firms to install Philips SpeechMike™ Executive Digital Dictation solution back in May 1999. With 11 partners and 54 employees serving over 4000 clients from locations in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glenrothes and Glasgow, Digby Brown specialises in pursuing claims for those who have sustained personal injuries in a variety of circumstances and believes that technology has an increasing role to play in providing excellent representation.**

### BACKGROUND

The original objective for installing digital dictation was to increase the productivity and efficiency of its secretaries and to achieve a 24-hour turnaround on standard letters to clients. This was accomplished by using the benefits of digital dictation to create greater flexibility in the prioritising and sharing of workloads across Digby Brown's secretarial staff in its four offices. Moreover, has the additional cost containment benefit discovered on the maintenance and repairs of dictation equipment dwindled over time?

Soon after installation there was a clear increase in productivity of around 50%, which, through natural wastage over a period of time, allowed the team of secretaries to reduce from eight to four in the Glasgow office. The average time to complete a standard client letter fell from around three or four days to the target of 24 hours. However, many letters are now completed in as little as 3 hours.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

When the dictation system was installed, in May 1999, Digby Brown's office IT infrastructure was considerably different to that of today. Then it was a 'Metaframe' wide area network using Novel Netware servers and PC clients to establish a 'virtual office' environment.

However, to achieve this there have been a number of significant upgrades, the latest being completed in January 2002. The information services infrastructure is now predominantly based on Microsoft® products with PCs utilising Windows 2000 professional, Microsoft Office, supported by Microsoft eXchange and IIS servers. That said migrating the dictation software was as simple as loading new drivers. Today, the system supports 12 secretarial workstations and 37 dictation workstations.

### KEY ISSUES

- How to increase the productivity and efficiency of secretaries
- How to reduce document creation time
- To implement a system with minimal impact on staff working methods
- To cater for both office-based and remote users



“The platform is a lot more stable these days”, said Fraser Ewing, Head of Information Services at Digby Brown. “The SpeechMikes have been tremendously reliable,” he added.

Since the installation in 1999, there have been no specific SpeechMike failures; the only incident was when wires were dislodged by over zealous office cleaners. The SpeechMikes themselves are so reliable that many are on their second or third user as staff have left, or moved about the business. A stark contrast to before, where many users needed several portable dictation machines to remain efficient and meet deadlines. Over the years, Digby Brown has evaluated additional software products that offered potential system enhancements from speech recognition to case management. Continued user satisfaction was paramount to the ongoing success of the information services system for Digby Brown. The objective was to develop a system that mimics exactly the working practices of the users. One example is populating the central database with client information so that it can be used later for anything from the formal, administrative staff opening a matter, to transparently capturing new user data as a fee earner dictates the information for the first time directly into a letter. The challenge of creating such a bespoke case management and workflow system based on Digby Brown’s own base practice fell to Fraser.

“Nothing we looked at could offer a 100% fit with the way we like to do things,” commented Fraser. “We recognised the fact that if we wanted an exact fit, we would need to do it ourselves”, he added.

## RESULTS

The information services system at Digby Brown has been developed through constant evolution with new features being added as processes have been understood. It started with simple use of Microsoft Word Macros to capture user information and start dictation, to building a central database that collects all details about clients, their cases, correspondence as well as holding system information about which printer can print a certain type of document and which tray holds the header paper.

Digby Brown now has a full time Information Services department of four staff, run by Fraser; it provides support and training for the user population as well as continuing to develop the system further. A working group, chaired by Senior Partner and technology promoter Robert Swanney, develops the roadmap for future system developments.

Today the system easily caters for a wide range of users including remote and mobile workers. Employees who need to work outside normal office hours can request to have Philips dictation software including a SpeechMike installed on a suitable home PC connecting to the office’s central system via Digby Brown’s Virtual Private Network (VPN) or if they prefer they can use one of five Philips Digital Pocket Memos®. Using the Pocket Memo is simple. The user records directly onto the device and when returning to the office hands the DPM to their administrative staff who can download the recordings directly into the central system where it joins the work queue as normal.

In line with the reducing costs for fast internet access to the home, Digby Brown now has the capacity to enable some of its transcriptionists to work from home, as they will be able to have direct access to the central system without any sacrifice in response time. Because they are connecting to the central system, they are presented with all they need to action the next job in the queue.

## CONCLUSION

Fraser Ewing believes “The biggest benefit from our investment in digital dictation is still the ‘virtual office’ concept. It allows any member of staff to work from anywhere and to be as productive as if they were sitting at their desk. The process we have in place and are developing means we can continue to see further productivity and efficiency gains and further improving the use of our resources.”

So, the initial benefits Digby Brown found are still there and have been enhanced through a continuous process of keeping abreast with the latest technologies while developing its own unique system that lets it keep improve the service it delivers to its clients.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Turnaround times reduced from 4 days to less than 24 hours
- Transcriptionists and authors now able to work remotely, further reducing costs
- Equipment repair costs reduced considerably
- Greater flexibility in prioritisation and sharing of workloads

