The legal firm Digby Brown in Glasgow (UK)

## Core Topic

- Professional PC based digital dictation solution in a multi sites legal firm
- Transfer of workload between offices
- Easy extension to speech recognition solution

## Key Issues

- How to reduce maintenance costs of analogue equipment ?
- How to transfer files between offices to reduce backlog and increase turnaround time for typed documents?
- Creating a virtual office out of a multi site organisation
- How to increase substantially the service to customers by guaranteeing completion of letters to clients within 24 hours.
- How to introduce latest speech processing technology without forcing the personnel of a legal firm to change their working habits and workflow.
- How legal organisations can substantially save costs and derive benefits from specific applications

# Legal firm Digby Brown in Glasgow (UK) increases its productivity by 50 % with latest speech processing technology from Philips.

Digby Brown is a renowned Scottish legal firm focusing mainly on personal injury cases. The firm operates from four offices, located in Edingurgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The 11 partners and 54 employees serve about 4000 clients.
Since May 3rd 1999, when Digby Brown moved from working with analogue dictation equipment to Philips' SpeechMike Executive digital dictation solution for its speech processing needs, its secreterial team has seen an increase in productivity of around 50%, leading to a reduction in typing personnel from 8 to 4 in the Glasgow office.
Through investments in its IT infrastructure, based on Metaframe, a Wide Area Network and a Novel LAN, the company has managed to create a virtual office connecting all sites together. With Philips' SpeechMike Executive Digby Brown has chosen for an integrated speech processing solution responding to the specific needs of its organisational setup and workflow.
Distributed over the four offices, 12 secretarial workstations and 37 dictation workstations are in use. A future extension into a fully integrated client/server based Case Management and speech recognition system using Philips' SpeechMagic and a Legal ConText is being considered.
With the huge time savings obtained through usage of the digital Philips system, the firm has been able to optimise the allocation of their resources whilst improving its service to clients.

### Problems

The legal firm Digby Brown intended mainly to increase the productivity and efficiency of the secretaries, given the fact that workload arose unevenly in the different offices and backlog was building up in one office whilst resources were free in other locations. As tapes cannot be distributed in real time to different offices, a new solution had to be found to address this problem. With a turnaround time of up to three days the firm could not fulfill its goal to deliver standard letters to its clients within 24 hours. Moreover the firm encountered maintenance and repair costs for their installed analogue equipment of around £500 per year.

The firm had to address the following constraints:

- Considerable maintenance costs for the installed bank of analogue dictation equipemnt
- Increasing backlog of legal cases to be transcribed and handled due to holidays or sick leave in certain offices.
- Problems transferring work from one office to another

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*Fraser Ewing, IT Manager*

Adapting to the new dictation solution did not pose any problems

*Digby Browns Edinburgh office at Albyn Place*

Digital tramscription enables equal distribution of workload between offices

## Objectives

The partners of the legal firm looked for ways to enable as much as possible the optimal usage of available resources for the typing services, leveling out peak situations in different locations and improving the workflow.

In chosing SpeechMike Executive, especially developed for heavy dictation oriented professions by Philips, a system has been implemented which combines all the advantages of a digital dictation solution plus the convenience and working habits of analogue dictation products. The firm wanted to increase the productivity of the back office and reduce costs, whilst improving the quality of the firm's services to its clients. The following objectives were identified :

- Adoption of a digital dictation solution to speed up the transcription of reports.
- Creation of a virtual office operating from 4 distinct sites
- Achieving a better workflow and throughput with minimal disruption in the way people are used to working
- Instant accessibility for all dictated reports, any time, even on weekends.
- Reduction of turn around times, faster availability of final documents.
- Improved client service
- Possibility to expand seemlessly to a speech recognition solution based on the digital dictation system

## Approach

When Digby Brown decided to exchange their analogue dictation products for a fully digital dictation solution, the decision was taken to equip all offices at once. In the four offices (Edinburgh - Albyn Place and Teviot Place, Glasgow and Dundee) 49 workstations were equipped with digital dictation capabilities, (37 for authors and 12 for transcriptionists). The installation took place over the weekend, so that the system could be operational on the next working day. Fraser Ewing, responsible for the IT operation at the legal firm looks back : "Of course there were some user errors on Monday after the weekend, but this was to be expected." With the introduction of digital dictation the company was able to create "a virtual office". As a result all client files no longer need to accompany each piece of dictation now stored centrally at one location. All fee earners have quantities of numbered plastic sleeves and relevant documentation for their dictation; this information is placed in a numbered plastic sleeve once the dictation is completed. These sleeves are transferred regularly by internal post from the author to the secretary. The fee earner dictates full client details and sleeve number at the beginning of each dictation. Fraser Ewing is hopeful that in the near future the typing workload will be equally distributed amongst the secretaries, and this has only been made possible since the introduction of digital dictation.

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*Fraser Ewing: "Quantifyable benefits!"*

***SpeechMike Executive: PC based dictation at its best***

The change from the former tape-based dictation system to a new digital dictation system posed no problems they continue working in the same way with the secretaries as before. There have been no problems to adapt to the new system. And the fact that they do not have a backlog anymore is a real big step forward.

The dictation microphone with integrated trackball is seen as very handy too, easy to use and efficient and works as conveniently as an analogue dictation device. Fraser Ewing is surprised that it took so long for a PC dictation microphone to be available on the market. And smiling he adds: "This microphone is a knight in shining armour!"

Since the introduction of the digital dictation system the situation has changed radically with tremendous improvements in terms of productivity. The biggest differences have been the cover during holiday and sick leave within the typing services due to being able to transfer files between offices. Also, the transfer of workload to another office can resolve backlog experiences in one office. The turnaround time of a document has been greatly increased since using digital dictation.

## Results

The introduction of the SpeechMike Executive digital dictation solution from Philips has delivered quantifiable benefits to the legal firm and improved dramatically the efficiency of the document generation process.:

- Cost containment: In the past maintenance of analogue products resulted in Repair Costs of £500 per annum.
- Better use of resources: Since using digital dictation, Digby Brown (Glasgow) now operate with 4 secretaries. "Fortunately this has been through natural wastage but has meant we have saved on investment in employment and training of new staff. Also, one member of the secretary support team has been retrained to another position within the firm", says Fraser Ewing. The ratio of fee earners to secretaries is now 5: 1.
- Time gain: The document turnaround time is now approximately one hour from dictation to completion.
- Improvement in workflow: Fraser is hopeful that the workflow between offices will be equally distributed among the secretaries, which was not possible with the previous system.
- In terms of backlog of work: Backlog of work has been reduced due the option of transferring files between offices. By the end of business on Friday there is no outstanding work. There is a backlog on a Monday morning due to weekend work but this is cleared by Monday afternoon or by Tuesday morning latest.
- In terms of better and faster service to the customers: A letter can be with a customer within 24 hours of dictation compared to 2/3 days when using the analogue equipment.

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## Critical Success Factors / Lessons Learnt

- Introduction of digital dictation resulted in a reduction of typing personnel in one office from 8 to 4
- The ratio of fee earners to secretaries is now 5:1
- The document turnaround time has been reduced to one hour from dictation to completion
- Equal distrubution of workflow between offices became possible
- Backlog of typing work disappeared as files can be transferred between offices
- A letter can be with the client within 24 hours from dictation compared to 2-3 days with analogue equipment.
- Easy to use system : in line with current working habits. Lawyers continue to dictate as they have always done.
- Productivity : better workflow management, no backlog.
- Speech recognition can be easily integrated in the SpeechMike Executive solution

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### Bottom Line Conclusion

The legal firm Digby Brown has considerably improved the document generation process and management of its legal cases. And the backlog of work to be typed has simply disappeared even with a reduction of typing resources.

This is a direct result of implementing SpeechMike Executive, the digital dictation software solution in all of their offices.

Overall Digby Brown is very pleased with their new system. They see it will give them the potential to employ more fee earners and therefore increase the firm's turnover without having to employ more secreterial staff.
And, as the system is ready for possible expansion to a full blown client server speech recognition solution based on SpeechMagic, the natural speech recognition engine from Philips , further productivity gains will be possible in future.

The throughput of the typing services has increased by some 50%. Letters take only one hour from dictation to completion. This provides a faster, superior service to the firm's clients and delivery of letters to them within a 24 hour time slot.

And this without changing the working habits of both lawyers and secretaries.

*Robert Swanney, Senior Partner - and serious promoter of new technologies*

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