



# HARNESSING IT

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## INTERVIEWS

Paul Harvey

MANAGING PARTNER



**Morrisons**  
S O L I C I T O R S

**Taylor Made**  
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

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## INTERVIEWS



In a series of interviews with Taylor Made Computer Solutions, directors reveal what they perceive to be the issues if IT is to deliver key objectives.

**The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.**

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## INTERVIEWS

### **THE NEED FOR BETTER IT led to a kind of “rebirth” for law firm Morrisons, which was founded in 1729, says managing partner Paul Harvey.**

He recalls that in 1988, when he joined, the firm had two offices, both in old buildings that were becoming increasingly unsuitable. “The world was becoming more and more dependent on IT, particularly networks, and that wasn’t practical to implement in the buildings we were in,” he explains. “We needed open-plan offices where we could put down modern trunking and cabling, where we could work better together in a more collaborative way and have a more corporate feel.”

So in 1993 they moved to modern town centre offices, and started to expand by acquiring some smaller practices in other towns; the firm is now multi-office and employs more than one hundred and fifty staff and twenty partners.

“The way the managing partner at the time of the move put it was that the boat had been pushed away from the dock,” recalls Harvey, “and that a big driver of that change was IT.”

And in turn, the internet has changed everything. “High street practices used to depend on people walking past, but no one finds a solicitor these days by walking up the road,” explains Harvey.

“On the other hand, technology has given both firms and clients access to a wider geographical area.”

Of course the automation of processes has made law firms more efficient and cost-effective; assembling and editing documents is easier and quicker with document management systems, and the availability of more information has been a “game changer”, says Harvey. But it hasn’t come without its challenges. “What was probably not acknowledged in the early stages was the time it takes to ‘bespoke’ IT and develop it in the ways we wanted. What doesn’t help is that you think you have bought a solution only to find that IT companies often go to market with products before they are fully developed. Early adopters have to suffer from the undetected bugs in the system.”

Harvey though has become more relaxed about IT and more confident in the information it provides. “Technology enables the firm to measure absolutely everything, which provides invaluable insights,” he explains.

“We have gained a phenomenal amount of targets and provides information about their use of time. I know how many chargeable hours have been done on a day-by-day basis. We can see what’s going well and where we might need additional resource. I could produce a map of our world and show you where every pound in fees comes from, right down to postcodes.”

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But he cautions: “It can all become a bit of a navel-gazing exercise if you’re not careful. If you produce too much data no-one takes any notice of it. The challenge is harnessing that data because it’s perceived to be helpful, not just because it’s interesting.”

One thing Harvey believes IT can do is help law firms with the on-going challenge of how to distinguish and market themselves, by having systems that really enhance service delivery, such as portals which will enable clients to see what’s happening with their instruction without having to phone their lawyer.

“That has huge potential to facilitate communication and accessibility,” says Harvey. But he adds the proviso: “I always use the phrase ‘delivering tangible benefits’. IT is a great servant but a poor master. You have to keep a clear view of your objectives and vision and ask how IT can serve that. To use another metaphor, I don’t want the tail information about what we do. For example, we can track and record revenue over a rolling twelve months, to see exactly where our work comes from. All of our lawyers have a dashboard that tells them their performance against wagging the dog. I want to make sure clients really benefit from IT through better speed of response, accessibility and quality.”

For example, he is keen to see how IT can make the client ‘on-boarding’ and compliance process easier.

Of course there must be an expectation that automation will improve profitability, but Harvey says that’s not necessarily the case, because IT requires investment at a time when there is pressure on fees. “Clients are more demanding and want more for less, like all of us,” he says. “There is an expectation of getting more for their money. A large part of our challenge is keeping pace with the delivery of services at a price that the client is prepared to pay.”

It’s often said that legal services, conveyancing in particular, are becoming more commodified because of IT, but Harvey’s not convinced. He says: “This has been talked about this ever since I started in the profession, but I am sceptical about the extent to which you can standardise legal services. People buy people, they don’t buy products. If you are going through a marriage breakdown you want to be able to look in the eyes of the person giving you advice and know they understand your situation. Even with conveyancing, when it comes to it, people want to be able to speak to someone about the issues. They are buying their home, and there are emotional issues around that. I say to staff, when you look in the mirror, do you see a commodity?”

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“I still think that the heart of a business like ours is building enduring relationships and having a knowledge of how the client ticks. We did a fascinating piece of work as part of our strategic planning; we visited clients and asked them what they valued, and overwhelmingly it was the personal relationship. That was five times as important as the next most important attribute.”

Client satisfaction is measured through an annual survey where clients are asked to benchmark the firm not only against other law firms but also against their best supplier (which could be providing tea and coffee, stationery, anything).

“Increasingly lawyers have to think not just in terms of their competitors but also other sectors,” Harvey says.

Relationships also enable a firm to compete against cheaper rivals. “There is a temptation when times get tough to drop your price,” concedes Harvey. “But it’s not sustainable to sell a BMW for the price of a Ford Focus.”

Fraud and IT have become synonymous, but Harvey says it doesn’t have to be the case if a firm has “structured and strict procedures.” As an example, Morrisons double check any request to change a client’s account details, even if it comes from the right email address. “We start from the assumption that it’s not true,” he explains. “We will check by phoning to speak to the person concerned. And nine times out of ten we’re right; it’s not true.”

The firm’s IT has been fully hosted off-site for at least seven years. “The benefits outweigh the negatives,” Harvey says. “The resources of the hosting company are far more than we would ever

be able to apply ourselves, which means our data is more secure. For a firm of our size, on a cost-benefit basis it is far better to outsource.”

Harvey muses on how IT has changed everyone’s working life. “I remember years ago standing by the fax machine waiting for documents to arrive. But recently I’ve been in a field in Somerset, and standing on a street corner, editing documents. This is an incredibly different world. People can work all day and night if they want to.”

Not that Harvey expects them to. “I passionately believe in being flexible but it has to be accompanied by promoting a healthy work-life balance. I don’t like seeing staff send emails at all times of the day and night because there are risks associated with working when you are tired. You must balance the requirements of the firm with the health and well-being of the staff.

“I have always been a great believer in being at my desk at seven thirty in the morning, but I realise that not everyone is compos mentis at that time; some only come alive later in the day. So we allow staff to make their decisions about that, and that’s going to be more important going forward.”

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I N T E R V I E W S



**Established in 1994, Taylor Made Computer Solutions are one of the largest and most highly-ranked IT service and support organisations in the south, currently employing over 110 staff.**

Taylor Made are the first technology company in the region to have gained a third consecutive gold award from Investors in People. Taylor Made are also ISO 9001:2008 certified.

The company has been ranked in the top 10 managed service providers in Europe the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) in a leading annual industry survey from MSPmentor since 2012.

Taylor Made are a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, HP Preferred Partner and a NetApp Silver Partner.

#### **Services include:**

IT support, IT strategy, IT consultancy, hosted telephony, project management, Securo online back-up, hosted solutions, remote management and monitoring, cloud solutions, disaster recovery, remote access, outsource engineering, security, service desk support.

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