



Scottish accounting firm reduces document turnaround from days to hours with BlackBerry solution

Johnston Carmichael is Scotland's largest firm of independent chartered accountants and is ranked as one of the Top 25 firms in the UK according to the Accountancy Age Top 50 report. Founded in 1935, it now has 45 partners and employs over 450 staff at its ten offices across Scotland. Johnston Carmichael provides a comprehensive range of high-quality accountancy and business services to over 8,000 clients, from individuals to large companies. The firm was the winner of the Scottish Accountancy Awards Scottish Firm of the Year in 2008 and 2009 and was named by the Sunday Times as one of the 'Best Companies to Work For' in 2009.

The Challenge

Johnston Carmichael has always paid special attention to providing a very high level of personal service by assigning a partner to each client. Partners and staff travel frequently, visiting clients around the country. Moreover, Johnston Carmichael's business is organised around fields of expertise, such as accounting, audit, tax and consultancy, with the firm's experts spread across its network of offices.

This decentralised organisation had always worked well for the firm, enabling it to deliver the quality of service and level of expertise its clients require anywhere in the country. Up until 6 years ago, mobile phones were the preferred means of communicating with colleagues and staff when working outside of the office. But as email became the preferred means of business communications, partners and staff who travel a lot faced new challenges. "The need for cooperative working, when out of the office, had become very important," says Douglas Rintoul, IT Partner at Johnston Carmichael. "The ability to see and respond in a very timely manner to both internal and external client communications was vital."

Benefits

Increased flexibility

Improved resource efficiency

Enhanced client service

Faster document turnaround

Low up-front cost

Another challenge facing Johnston Carmichael was how to improve the productivity of internal resources dedicated to critical business processes while maximising the efficiency of fee-earners when they were out of the office. The best example of this was dictation. When working at home or between client visits, partners would record letters, memos and other documents on cassette tapes that they would drop off on their return to the office. This process delayed the creation of paperwork and initiation of critical workflows. Further, secretaries in one office would often find themselves inundated with transcriptions, while others would have spare capacity. There was no way of sharing transcription tasks between offices.

The Solution

Several years ago, having reviewed various mobile email solutions, Johnston Carmichael deployed BlackBerry® smartphones to its most mobile partners and senior executives after a short trial. The firm chose the BlackBerry® solution because it was judged as superior to the competition in two key areas, according to Rintoul. The first was ease of use. "From my point of view, in terms of supporting it, it's the simplest solution on the market. There's less to go wrong," says Rintoul. The second was security: "BlackBerry ticked all the boxes. The data is encrypted, the devices are password protected, and if a device is lost we can wipe all the data on it remotely."

The BlackBerry smartphones are used for voice, email, calendar, contacts and web access, which is routed through the BlackBerry® Enterprise Server to take advantage of the company's firewall protection. "The users are very reliant on the BlackBerry solution," says William Murray, IT Skills and Application Developer at Johnston Carmichael, who is responsible for managing the fleet of smartphones. "They see it as a definite asset to their job."

In 2009, Johnston Carmichael decided to introduce a digital dictation application to overcome the workflow delays, and chose nFlow Mobile for BlackBerry. "We liked the fact that nFlow was quite simple to use for both the end user and the administrator," says Rintoul. Users can record dictations on their BlackBerry smartphones and send them immediately to support staff or store them for later. The dictations are encrypted and sent via the BlackBerry Enterprise Server to the nFlow system.

The Benefits

According to Rintoul, the BlackBerry solution has helped make Johnston Carmichael more flexible. "It was a natural progression of our efforts to overcome the challenges created by the mobility of our experts," he says. Now, when partners are away from the office they're still able to participate in projects and collaborate with colleagues and clients. Users can use the downtime between meetings or when travelling to handle their email, which keeps work and communications flowing.

By adding the nFlow Mobile for BlackBerry application, this newfound communications efficiency now extends to dictations. Before, fee-earners would either have to take handwritten notes during a client meeting and have them typed up when they returned to their office, or dictate the notes and deliver the tape to secretaries. Either way, work was delayed until they were back at the office. "Now they can dictate the notes sitting in the car after the appointment and the secretary can have them typed up before the user's back in the office," says Rintoul. The BlackBerry solution with nFlow has reduced turnaround times enormously. "It's been a dramatic improvement. Now the dictations are with secretaries in a matter of minutes, rather than days, and can be electronically shared among them depending on workload" explains Murray.

Ultimately, the faster turnaround has enabled Johnston Carmichael to continue providing high quality client service. "The BlackBerry solution with nFlow Mobile has delivered faster client response times, which gives us a competitive edge," says Rintoul, "Our clients see us as fast moving and responding quickly to their requirements. You can't put a price on that."

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