



# How SMEs Can Punch Above Their Weight

Small and medium firms face serious challenges in competing with larger businesses in terms of areas like finance, resources and scale. However, through leveraging the opportunities created by technology, SMEs can achieve both the feel and performance of larger firms, enabling them to compete for business in global marketplaces.



One such firm, Belfast-based solicitors practice John McKee & Son is using technology to gain competitive advantage. The firm acts for large financial institutions in project and recovery work. Much of this work comes from competitive tendering so being able to demonstrate efficiency is a vital tool in the armoury of the firm as it seeks to win new business.

"A lot of the contracts we compete for are high volume business, which traditionally would have gone to larger practices with expensive specialist systems," explains partner Chris Ross. "We invested in Microsoft Office 2010 and SharePoint 2010 which allowed us to develop a very efficient back office infrastructure without having to develop a specialist system. This has proved to be a very cost effective solution for our needs."

"We operate in a fast paced environment. Clients demand that we are flexible and responsive at short notice so it's important to have the right systems in place. Our solicitors no longer need to spend time supervising the creation and transmission of reports which can now be created at the touch of a button and this frees up time for more added value client serving work," Chris says.

All of the firm's key applications are now integrated so, for

example, the time recording and accounting functions are now linked which simplifies the billing process. The creation of a universal document ID also now allows staff to quickly allocate and track information throughout the practice from start to finish with greater accuracy and efficiency than ever before. What makes SharePoint 2010 particularly attractive is that it is easy to use with very little expert training required.

Another key feature has been the creation of a portal which allows clients to remotely access appropriate levels of information in real time.

Chris continues to work closely with the firm's IT Consultants, Endeavour Information Solutions, to roll out the SharePoint platform across every area of the practice. Lee Surgeoner, Managing Partner of Endeavour, comments "we try to think out of the box in terms of how SharePoint could be developed to help increase the efficiency of the firm. For example, integrating the practice's accounting and time recording applications directly into Microsoft Office 2010 via Business Connectivity Services allows staff to access key information without delay."

#### The Bottom Line

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John McKee & Son was one of only three SMEs in Ireland, invited to present a case study of the firm's experience of using Office and SharePoint 2010 at Microsoft Ireland's recent launch of the new platform in the Grand Opera House in Belfast. Mark Fitzsimons, Solutions Specialist for Microsoft Ireland, praised the firm's vision in the development of its IT systems. "John McKee & Son have invested in the Microsoft Office system over a number of generations and with each release have embraced the products capabilities and leveraged the functionality to gain business agility and increase their ability to meet and exceed demanding client requirements. Microsoft is committed to continuous innovation and

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