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Citytech



MAY 18, 2007

LEWIS SILKIN EDITION No. 61



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Company wide subscription available at £500 + vat /\$1000 per year. Citytech is published Weekly (no issues over holiday periods). Roughly 46 issues. Publishers statement: 2,000 IT directors and their staff plus vendors read Citytech each week globally.



Tech leader Interview: Jan Durant Head of IT Lewis Silkin



Jan Durant, Head of IT, Lewis Silkin

lewisilkin

Jan Durant is a well known figure in the UK legal technology world. She is not only one of the most animated people you might wish to meet but her network is solid and extends into every corner of

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the legal tech world.

She had a circuitous route into legal IT. After learning French during her education she started off her career with a desire to use her linguistic ability and decided to travel to Europe. She did a stint in Brussels in a graphic art studio working for a New Yorker without language capability helping with translations with local staff. Jan says it was a comfortable expat' life that she enjoyed for a year and a half.

Her salary was generous and the tax regime favourable, so with a pot of savings behind her she set off for further globe trotting, heading out to New Zealand. She again landed in a design type company, working for a textiles importer in a sales capacity. Although her choices seem quite random, you can see Jan was quietly building an



arsenal of knowledge that would help her equip her with requisite skills for her arrival in the world of legal technology. Eventually she came back to London and took up a marketing role in a hotel company. She says she mainly spent time "looking at brochures and checking copy."

Her next role saw the shoots of a tech career emerge. She started work for Encyclopaedia Britannica at their head office "in the days when their billing system took up a whole room." She didn't do any specific technology work but got an ear for the language and problems. She spent her time phoning technologists who were supporting the main business.

Jan comments. "It was an admin role but I had to make sure everything worked for customers and sales.

A move into law followed with a role at well know law firm, Withers. This combined with meeting her husband and time-out to start a family. In between having two children she built expertise supervising those working in word processing, photo copying, proof reading and in the print room. Her interest in tech' really started seriously from here on in. "I started to write macros for WordPerfect and found it easy to do." Jan took courses to develop her skills then subsequently moved to Kingsley Napley as IT Manager and stayed for seven years.

Continued page 4../

The background of the advertisement is a grayscale image of a person's hands, one holding a pen and writing on a document, symbolizing legal work and productivity.

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In 1999 the bright lights of 232 user firm Lewis Silkin were calling and she moved into her second major career in legal technology. The move has proven a crystallising moment for both the firm and Jan as the technology capability and forward thinking approach has outstripped many larger firms since for innovation. Jan says. “When I first came at interview they said they wanted a document management system and remote access. I did that in the first year using DocsOpen and Citrix remote access.”

Jan says modestly of her outstanding progress. “I think Lewis Silkin are very good at trying new things.” Suggesting that she has the ‘creative’ freedom that has allowed her to

blossom. She continues. “I asked them in 2000 if they would try digital dictation and they were very supportive about trying it.” As the relationships between management and Jan seem so strong, I ask about it. She makes a wise comment. “I am spending a chunk of their turnover. If as IT Director I didn’t have the ear of my partners, I would find it very difficult to do as well as I am.” Although she alludes to a flat hierarchy within the IT Department . “I am not called the boss, it is important that we are all equal colleagues within the team.”

In terms of structure internally, she reports to the Managing Partner Ian Jeffery. Budget is done every February and March after Jan comes up with a list of



'must haves' like hardware or maintenance costs. She says she then has a list of 'would like to have' choices that go to the Finance Director to see what the firm can afford. After this the report goes to the management board "and they approve it or not."

Jan says. "Even when budget is approved and the money ready to use, it doesn't mean I can just go ahead. I have to do a business case document for the expenditure and explain who the 'stakeholder' will be and who will take responsibility for running any new projects. I also have to

highlight upsides and downsides." This review then goes to the Managing Partner who then agrees with Jan what will go before the management board. Jan adds. "We have three year objectives, so if we say we want to have more client visibility or collaboration then that becomes the main objective and I gear my software spend towards that." The Lewis Silkin tech' budget includes telephony and is between 4-5% of turnover.

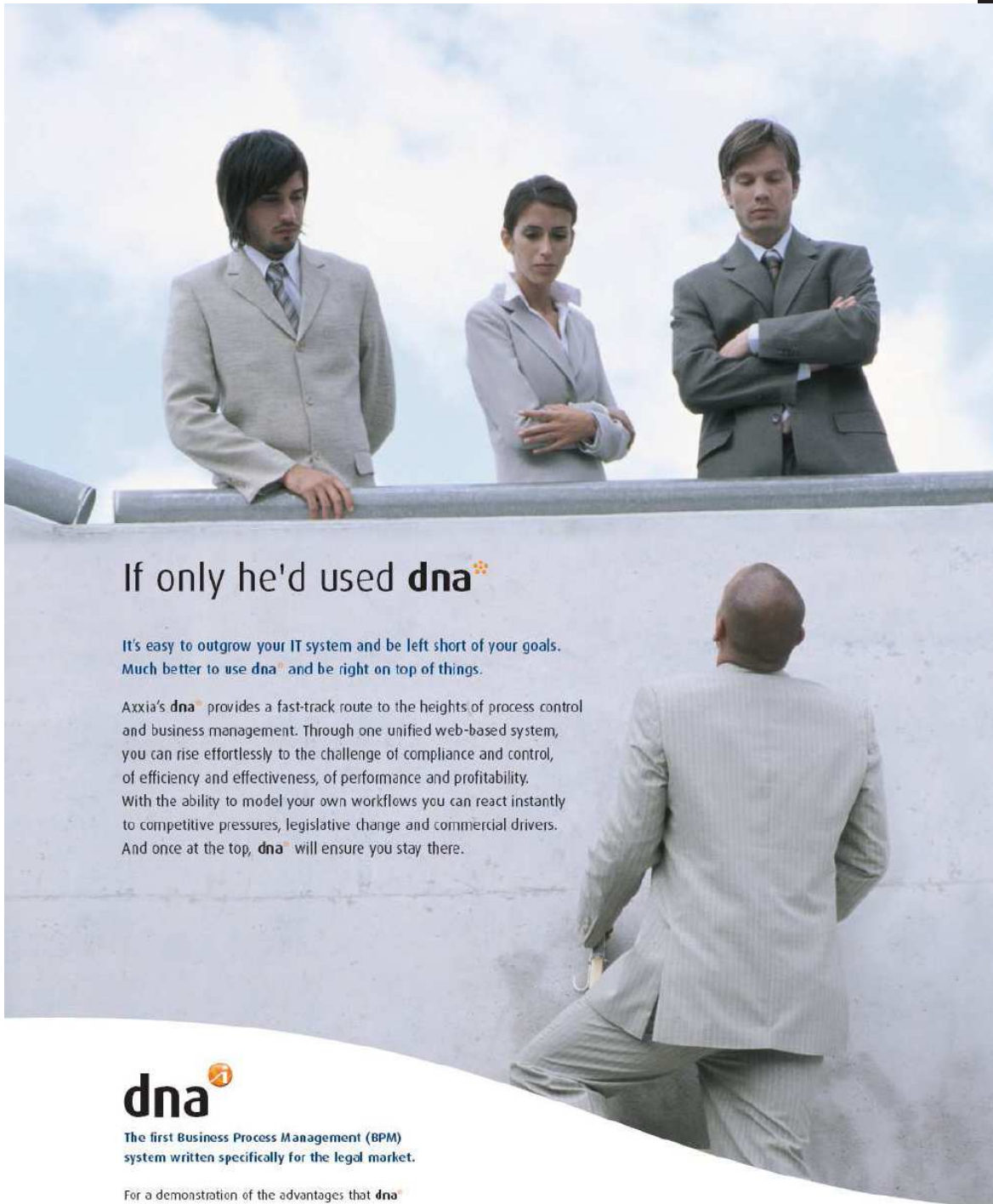
Her new pipeline project is SharePoint and it is something that Jan is excited and equally nervous about. She comments.

"Three years ago we rolled out DM5 but we were getting to the point where we had to improve on what we had." Jan reviewed the market players and decided to go against the usual Interwoven/ OpenText grain and opted for SharePoint. She took considerable advice from DM experts and says on review, everyone she consulted felt SharePoint was ready to compete against major vendors. "No one gets sacked for doing Microsoft." She says with a giggle.

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The decision to go SharePoint was not an easy task according to Jan but made sense when they looked at the wish list. “We had features we liked from DM5 (OpenText) and wanted to bring in workflow. We also wanted a better portal for clients and a new intranet but ultimately we needed everything to be more joined up. We were hoping that SharePoint would do this and when we sat down were able to tick all the requirements off.” Although this sounds like the ‘magic bullet’ Jan does concede that it will mean a programme of major upgrades on the desktop including Outlook, Office and Exchange. As to whether SharePoint is ready for such major use, Jan believes it is as close as you can get. “With the latest version, it’s very nearly there. There are some bits that will need customisation but we don’t want to ‘break’ what we buy. We want to keep it as close as possible to the original to keep future upgrades simple.”

“It will be a massive change ” says Jan “but when we looked at it all we thought ‘we can do this’ and it will be more cost effective

than a DM maintenance contract. It would mean we’d also have workflow, saving cost on purchasing something off the shelf. Despite my suggesting this might all be a headache for Lewis Silkin lawyers, Jan disagrees. “Our lawyers are going to have a better experience for sure. The software is so intuitive, it will make life easier.”

A major hire from a DM vendor has helped the initiative with plans now being worked on section by section. “We will roll out within a year with at least one workflow.” Says Jan.

So what does this big change mean for Lewis Silkin as a firm? “We are future proofing our systems and removing maintenance fees which aren’t cheap. We will also offer an extranet to publish documents from our SharePoint DM for clients to look at.”

And is confident Jan worried by any of these immense changes? “Yes.” Says Jan resolutely. “It’s not like implementing digital dictation where lawyers have a dictaphone



JPC

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***Jan is sure
Mimecast is the
best product she
has ever brought.
“Look at their wins
every month.”***

on their desk if things go wrong and you can pilot it with a few users. We've taken someone on specifically to do this project and are buying lots of hardware so there is substantial investment alongside licence purchases of SharePoint.”

Of the technology sitting inside Lewis Silkin, the rundown is: Equitrac; CrysoServer for email archiving; Axxia for time and billing which is currently under review; BigHand for digital dictation, which Jan says they were the first to use and they are just upgrading to Version 3; InterAction for CRM; PortWise for secure application access and again Lewis Silkin were among the first to roll this product in the UK. They also use Mimecast for email management which “is a product on steroids.” Jan

says and is sure Mimecast is the best product she has ever bought. “Look at their wins every month they are replacing other services easily and you can access emails when the servers are down.”

The firm also use Cerberus which is a remote data backup system ; VOIP and Recommind which Jan proudly says was also a ‘first’ in a UK law firm. I ask about it as it seems to have remained a US product so far. “It’s brilliant and Recommind have been very helpful. We are still implementing it and there is work to do getting users to buy into it, but, our Knowhow committee are backing it firmly. It simply indexes everything you want it to including external websites .”

Jan’s biggest project, apart

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from two office moves, was the move from Novell to Microsoft. She says. "We went from NetWare and GroupWise and Windows '95 to 2000 desktops, Exchange and Microsoft server in one weekend. It was a clean big bang." I ask if this is her preferred method when implementing. "I don't like big bangs usually, I like to take time" she says "but if we didn't do what we did then we wouldn't have had people communicating." It was painful but necessary. We worked flat out around the clock for a whole weekend."

And crystal ball gazing. Where is legal IT going for Jan and Lewis Silkin? "The future is Microsoft." She says. I ask if Open Source threaten this position. "I did think about Open Source before we took the SharePoint route and I came to the decision that we and other law firms aren't software houses. If we were then Open Source would be great. I believe in Open Source but I'm not here to do wild things, I'm here to look after partners money so Microsoft is the best decision for us."

Events Jan is attending in the UK include

Citytech website update: Whats going on in May

People are searching for

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Countries:

US is still outstripping UK for visitors 3 to 1. China is now in third position followed by the Netherlands.



JPC



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By Legal For Legal and the Turnberry event but Law 2007 is a “no.”

She also mentions a regular lunch group who meet to share information and says when pressed to name a network that she has “too many names to name them” but offers a few close allies: Peter Owen, Lights On Consulting, Derek Southall, Wragges, Julie Berry, RPC, Ann Elia, Travers, Tim Hyman, Taylor Wessing, Sue Hall, Baker & McKenzie, Janet Day of BLP and Simon Kosminsky, SJ Berwin.

On the ‘do you or don’t you’ hire consultants she says this is a yes but it is generally for projects that her team won’t be working on again. For instance moving from Exchange 2003 to 2007. Otherwise the in-house team of nine do all the tech’ work.□

www.lewissilkin.com



Varsha Bhat is the President of PensEra - developers of TimeKM working with Peter Zver who founded the company. Although living in Canada she previously lived in London for ten years. The main part of her career has been helping tech' vendors with strategic planning. Another key figure is Peter Zver who started PensEra, the company that owns TimeKM. He was instrumental in designing TimeKM and is VP of Product Development.

Varsha gives us an insight. "Time capture has been with us for about twenty years but past industry offerings couldn't deal with the volumes of information. Now new technology like TimeKM and the demand for mobile devices with relevant applications on them will deal with these issues with multiple capture points across the firm (ie desktop, mobile, portal, outlook, etc). This software relieves the month-end-crunch and injects speed and capacity into sending information and quantities of data."

They officially launched TimeKM at Legal IT Islington and says of the now famous Linklaters deal "Linklaters were working with a well known research company and we came out as one of the top vendors to review. They said straight away they were worried by our lack of market share, so we offered a pilot. It was a very interesting deal. They understood global implications and all IT decisions were centralised which really helped the process work quickly and smoothly. We had two calls a week for several months to manage the projects but this reduced to one a week as the project completed."

Varsha continues "Linklaters wanted to encourage staff to use their SharePoint portal so put TimeKM through it. It allows lawyers and secretaries to look at their billable and non chargeable time. It also mirrors the collaborative model that's common in law firms." Varsha explains "A lawyer works closely with a secretary and may feed back time recording for them to do. With TimeKM the secretary can see the time landing from the BlackBerry onto the desktop, then cleans it up and sends it out."

Other TimeKM law firm deals are White & Case,

New York which is rolling out globally from the London office. TimeKM got this deal before Linklaters. Eugene Stein (CKO and Global Head of Technology) and Cagatay Ergun (KM Director) from White & Case were integral to the initial deal, while Simon Jones and Claire Lister have been managing the deployment of TimeKM into Europe from London. Post Linklaters, TimeKM recently attracted Orrick Herrington who are also doing a global deployment.

"Standard implementation for a global firm is usually two to four months or we would expect a single site to take a month." Varsha says. "Not much customisation of our product is needed now. We've fine tuned everything during our time with Linklaters and our strong investment in R&D while working closely with client partners."

Of the progress TimeKM has made Varsha says "With these big firms on board, people are calling us now. They can see we are offering capture at the time of the event and capturing time leakage which is really interesting to law firms."

Key pointers on TimeKM

Time KM is device agnostic it can feed on to handhelds and the BlackBerry.

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Cost \$249 dollars a person with \$139 dollars for Blackberry. (Correct at time of going to press).

Language can be customised.

They have seven time capture areas.

<http://www.timekm.com/>