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Practice Management System Upgrades and Reporting

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The upgrade of a firm's practice management system (PMS) is always driven by multiple factors, but enhancing a firm's capability to produce, distribute, and consume information is always near the top of the business case. If the firm can make better, faster decisions, it should be more profitable and carry lower risk.

The front office (fee earners and secretaries) invariably think that more modern systems will equate to better information and user experience. But this aim is rarely reflected in the focus of the implementation program. The priority is always, and some would say must always be, the ability to efficiently process transactions.

Meeting front office expectations while ensuring that the basic elements of system functionality are delivered is not easy. Even well-resourced PMS change programs will need to prioritise the ability to process an invoice over the ability to produce information that is relevant to the audience and easy to interact with and understand. Hence comes the logic of advocating for firms to take the enhanced reporting capability out of PMS change projects or to make it the first phase of the program work.

Why reporting should come first when upgrading

Timekeepers record time today, and they will record time tomorrow. While the methods and systems will change on upgrade, the information that is required to support effective reporting exists on a firm system prior to the commencement of any project work.

Prioritising reporting in order to deliver some of the perceived benefit of the PMS upgrade early has several major advantages:

- It maximises the return on investment made. The firm doesn't need to wait until the final PMS solution is delivered to start to feel the benefit of enhanced reporting.
- Carving reporting elements out of the PMS program will de-risk the upgrade for the front office and reduce the scope of the main program. While there will be "behind the scenes" changes on PMS at go-live, the look and feel of the reporting layer will remain consistent. Additional content will of course be available and there may be additional functionality to train and learn, but the change and disruption should be limited.
- Good programs start out with the goal of configuring the PMS application to deliver the information requirements of the firm, and yet this aim tends to get lost somewhere along the way. Making enhanced reporting available to the business early on will help the program focus on additional reporting requirements as they come up. Front office will have a better understanding of the possibilities and be able to communicate these and monitor progress more effectively.
- An effective reporting framework will assist with the conversion process. If the converted and legacy data can be interrogated in the same reporting application, then differences are much easier to spot, understand, and correct.

How to enhance reporting when upgrading

Gather requirements

- Personas and roles (A partner running an office, a partner running a matter, a fee earner trying to do a good job). Who are your key stakeholders and what information do they need to impact performance? Only provide information that a given person can act upon. It is demotivating to provide information on an issue that the recipient can't impact.
- Where are the issues? (i.e. Collections might be a focus.) How can we incentivise people to positively impact these processes?
- Combine content and persona to govern access via a security model that considers organisational security as well as ethical walls restrictions

Create a delivery framework

- Select a framework that will allow you to develop rapidly and iterate often. Adopt a "fail fast" approach. In this context, "fail fast" means finding out what doesn't work very quickly and, through refinement, coming to an approach that does work.
- Adopt a project methodology that also supports this "fail fast" approach. In our experience, Agile is best for this.
- Start small and deliver often. "Rome wasn't built in a day, but some of it was." Engage with stakeholders and provide regular updates. This ensures that there are no surprises at the end of each phase of the program. Many projects fail or underdeliver due to the project methodology adopted. Waterfall does not work for business insights/reporting.
- Beware the report rationalisation exercise that most firms undertake. While it is useful to understand what information the business needs and uses today, a report rationalisation exercise can be extremely time consuming and a waste of valuable resources. A much better use of time may be to develop prototype reports to engage the business and encourage new ways of thinking.

Consider tools and approaches

- Are the firm's current tools still relevant?
- Consider licensing and information security requirements
- Run a proof of concept exercise. This should not take long. If it does, then you are probably using the wrong tool.
- Distinguish the data and information/interaction layer. Do you need a system that brings a proprietary data layer or just a reporting tool?
- Look at the availability of resources and content such as help guides and generic vs. specialist resources
- Validate alignment with IT strategy

Simply put, prioritising reporting as one of the first components of an upgrade helps firms accelerate time to value. Why wait to reap the benefits from your new investment when you don't have to? Taking this safe shortcut approach can expedite new insights and ultimately help you make better business decisions from the get go.

Data insights for enterprise

Elite now offers Data Insights for Enterprise®, a self-service analytics model that lets users create and view actionable insights from a single tailored dashboard. When Enterprise clients install Data Insights in advance of their PMS upgrade, they can compare Enterprise Data Insights and 3E® Data Insights reports throughout the conversion process with all the slice, dice, and drill functionality they need.

On migration to 3E, the Enterprise to 3E Data Insights transition takes place behind the scenes, so the front office will see additional content, but the look and feel will be consistent. The end result is a powerful way to gain actionable insights and make data-driven decisions that help keep business on track.

Pinnacle is currently offering a free reporting strategy session to clients who are interested in reviewing their approach in this area. Sessions cover the current reporting landscape and a firm's aspirations, before moving to a set of recommendations and a series of practical next steps. The aim is to help clients adopt a strategy that is aligned with their business requirements, in-house capability, IT strategy, information security policy, and licensing.

Arrange your reporting strategy session

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