

Lewis Silkin Implements ContactNet Bringing Power of Social Networking into Corporate Setting

In 2008 Lewis Silkin, a successful commercial law firm based in the City of London embarked on a project to better utilise what it considers to be one of its most important firm-wide assets: relationships.

CASE STUDY

"We are using ContactNet to understand better the breadth of our relationships. When we target a vertical for new business, it's a good starting point to understand what profile we have within that sector."

MARK GRANT,
Director of Business Development, Lewis Silkin



Recognising the growing popularity of social networking applications in the consumer market, Lewis Silkin set out to implement the power of networking connectivity within a corporate setting, in an effort to transform the way it leveraged its relationship assets for new business initiatives.

To achieve this the firm decided to implement ContactNet, the leading global industry solution in enterprise relationship management (ERM) software for professional services firms.

Jan Durant, Director of IT, for Lewis Silkin says the firm's aim in implementing ContactNet was to turn firm relationships into knowledge.

"We wanted to find a way of leveraging these relationships better in order to help us win new business and cross-sell services to existing clients. We decided to integrate ContactNet with our CRM system, giving users of both systems access to a broader range of relationships."

While many firms have implemented CRM systems to record and organise relationship information, their ongoing effectiveness is dependent upon high user participation. Lack of familiarity with CRM applications and the reluctance of lawyers to undertake time-consuming, manual data input has severely limited the effectiveness of CRM systems at law firms. Entering contacts into a CRM system is considered a non-strategic, low-value task by most lawyers.

In contrast, ContactNet enables a firm to effectively throw a net over its email traffic, address books and CRM systems, to automatically collect and organise all of a law firm's contacts and relationships. It does not require lawyers to actively contribute to the process and it removes the necessity for costly and error-prone data entry practices.

Acting in a similar manner to the Google search engine, ContactNet gives Lewis Silkin the ability to search the entire firm to uncover 'who knows whom'. It extracts information from the email server, normalises and ranks the strength of each relationship and allows the firm to report on that information and integrate it into other line-of-business systems.

Mark Grant, Lewis Silkin's Director of Business Development, says ContactNet provides the firm with a more comprehensive picture of its relationships which is critical when putting in place effective client relationship management.

"For example, when we undertake new business prospecting we can now query ContactNet to find out which lawyers within the firm know the particular person or company we are targeting. Ordinarily, while this type of relationship knowledge is extremely valuable, it is very difficult to uncover efficiently. We might be aware of several existing relationships, but be completely unaware of other lawyers within the firm that have a much stronger relationship with the individual concerned."

Depending on a firm's objectives, ContactNet can be configured for use firm-wide by all employees, and/or by marketing and business development groups. Lewis Silkin chose to adopt a staged approach to roll out, initially to its business development team, with outputs available to all the client services division within the firm.

Advanced privacy configurations have enabled the firm to strike the right balance between data privacy and information sharing. These provide groups, or individual users, with 'opt-out' options in order to cordon off contacts which they wish to keep private. ContactNet's flexible settings also abide by EU privacy laws.

"Introduction of the system was carefully handled to assure staff that the content of emails would not be logged, and that any communication with a newly discovered contact is agreed with the 'owner' of that contact in the first instance," Durant says.

Since implementing ContactNet in early 2009, Lewis Silkin has increased the number of relationships it captures and measures by 55%. Prior to the ContactNet implementation, the number of 'email only' relationships at the firm was just over 12,000. Once ContactNet was up and running, this number rose to over 34,000.

"ContactNet was installed in a day with virtually no IT resources," says Durant. "We were in pilot mode within three days, and the software was being used by our teams within 30 days, a testament to how easy to use it is for such a powerful enterprise application."

ContactNet has several key advantages over other professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn. Such sites are 'opt-in', which mean users have to go to the site to establish their own profile and then invite other people to join their network.

"As a result of using ContactNet, Lewis Silkin has been able to uncover over 22,000 new 'email only' relationships in less than six months and with no data entry required by our fee earners."

JAN DURANT,
Director of IT, Lewis Silkin

Only people who are also on the LinkedIn network can participate in this process. The site requires heavy user participation and profile maintenance, and the accumulated contact network can only be used for the benefit of the individual involved.

In contrast, ContactNet is installed by a law firm's IT department and it runs passively behind the scenes – automatically opting-in the firm's lawyers and all of their contacts. It is a corporate social networking tool where information can be collected and managed on a firm-wide basis.

Since its inception at Lewis Silkin ContactNet has uncovered tens of thousands of relationships that other products had not revealed, despite years of successful CRM usage. It is focused simply and quite elegantly on managing relationships or 'who knows who'. This allows Lewis Silkin to capitalise on its rich database of business contacts and gives it added competitive edge to compete with other firms in a contracting economy.

ABOUT LEWIS SILKIN

Lewis Silkin LLP is a 45 partner commercial law firm based in the City of London with an additional office in Oxford. In delivering legal services to three broad sectors:

Mediascape – the converging worlds of media, brands and technology

Peoplescape – the global workforce

Landscape – the built environment

Lewis Silkin draws on its five departments – Corporate; Employment and Incentives; Litigation and Dispute Resolution; Media, Brands and Technology. The firm regularly advises on international matters through membership of Ius Laboris, an alliance of leading law firms providing specialised services in employment, labour, pensions and employee benefits law, and GALA, the Global Advertising Lawyers Alliance.



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