

Accesspoint[®]

How to select your next PCMS[®]

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| What's inside

3

3

4

5

8

8

10

11

12

13

| Introduction

Over recent years, our focus here at Accesspoint has been on helping law firms maximise the value they get from their current Practice & Case Management System (PCMS). This has been achieved by a combination of sourcing third party applications to address specific business needs as well as Accesspoint developing add-ons to the core PCMS, such as Mozaique, to create functionality which wasn't available in the native solution.

Over time, this has served to reduce the reliance on the PCMS by the majority of staff around the firm as they have increasingly accessed the core solution via the various applications introduced.

Ultimately, this means that when the firm is finally ready to implement a new PCMS, the disruption to the firm is minimised given that most users will continue to work through those business specific applications and only the source of the data they are using is changing in the background.

But what happens when you're finally ready to replace the core PCMS? How do you go about it? Who do you talk to?

For many of you, your firm has been using your current PCMS since before you joined, so you may never have been involved in a procurement. Drawing on my 35+ years of working on the supplier side of the selection process and seeing what's worked successfully, this booklet will guide you through the key stages of the process and what you should consider along the way to achieve the best result.

The guidance in this booklet can be applied to any significant software solution purchase for your firm as well as to the selection of your new PCMS.

| Timing

Whilst there maybe no direct pressure on your firm to look for a new PCMS, there maybe several factors at play which have a significant influence on bringing forward any change.

1. Environmental Factors

If you're facing a significant hardware refresh, moving office, and or have made the strategic decision to adopt a Cloud First strategy for all business-critical applications, then you may find that your current PCMS doesn't comply with your move to cloud and, therefore, a change is required.

2. Supplier & Solution Influences

Perhaps your current solution is no longer the supplier's go forward product and you've noticed that development has tailed off and isn't keeping pace with your needs. Has it proved difficult to get the supplier to engage with the 3rd party apps providers to produce good integrations with the PCMS? Have the support



and ongoing costs of the solution increased to the point where, compared to the value being derived, they are no longer justifiable? Of course, the irony is that, whilst you've been investing in apps to plug functionality gaps in your PCMS, its costs have been rising year on year in direct contrast to the value your firm derives from it!

Just one point to mention here. Please do check your current PCMS contract as you may find that you have one time-limited opportunity to give notice each year. Miss that and you could find that you are still paying for the old solution long after you've implemented the new one! If you're not entirely clear on the timing on the live date of your new solution, you can usually give notice and then agree extensions with your supplier until you're ready.

3. Operational Issues

Are your colleagues becoming increasingly frustrated by the solution lacking functionality that they need and, as a result, productivity is suffering? Is the solution starting to hold you back in your strategic aspirations and no longer providing a suitable platform for the business to grow? Has your firm made acquisitions or been involved in mergers which have left you using more than one PCMS across the firm and now you need to consolidate to improve efficiency?

- ! If your firm is experiencing any of the above, then it might be time to consider replacing your current PCMS.

| Identifying Potential Suppliers

Unless you're actively engaged and conversant with the legal technology market, finding who to talk to can present a daunting task for most firms, but there are several reliable sources of information you can use to help you on your journey.

- Ask other firms what they're using and whether they'd recommend it.**
In your day to day interactions with other lawyers, take the opportunity to talk to them about what they use and their experience of both the solution and the supplier.
- If your firm is a member of a networking group such as Lawnet, then those organisations will usually track what PCMS solutions their members are using. Ask for the information and contact those firms on the list who are using solutions you're potentially interested in looking at.
- Ask those 3rd party app suppliers that you're using** which solutions they integrate with really well and which providers are the best (and the worst!) to engage with on producing a good integration.
- If you **keep an eye on the legal technology press**, who's been announcing lots of new client wins recently and are those clients similar in size and make-up to your firm.



Clearly, if they've been winning lots of new clients with a handful of staff and you're a 300 user, multi-branch firm, then their solution is unlikely to be right for you.

- e. There's also a great report on the current PCMS market written by longstanding IT consultant, Neil Cameron, and available from Legal Technology Insider. Neil assesses each of the current PCMS solutions available to look at the type of firms who use them, key features, and the product roadmaps for the next 12 months. [Click here](#) to sign up for your free copy of the report.
- f. **Ask for a brief overview demo.** Some suppliers will have demos on the website, but if you can get a one-to-one demo organised, then that will help give you a good feel as to whether or not that solution (and supplier) is worth pursuing. If you find that the supplier is insistent on carrying out a detailed "discovery" call before they'll even show you the system, then you might want to question whether you move on to someone else!
- g. Ideally, based on the above, select 3-5 suppliers to take forward in the process.

| Identifying your Requirements

It's important to know what you want from a new solution before starting the formal process and engaging with suppliers. You might not be able to identify absolutely everything you need at the outset and some of the things you need you won't find out about until you start seeing the potential solutions, but if you cover the areas below, you'll be well-equipped to move on to the next stage of the investigations.

1. Must Haves

What are the absolute essentials for any new solution, e.g. Cloud-based, great and accessible data analytics, efficient client onboarding, open api for ease of integration, existing integrations with your chosen apps providers and so on. These are the things that you cannot function without and will rule in or out a potential solution.

2. Nice to Haves

Still important to you, but not essential and you could live without them if push came to shove. However, if you can find a solution that caters for all the must haves and most of the nice to haves, then you're likely on the trail of the right PCMS for your firm.

3. Carry out a Staff Survey

Ultimately, it's your colleagues around the business who will be using the new system, so ask them for their opinions. What do they like about the current system and what don't they like? What



would they like to see in any new solution that they don't currently have? Have they joined from another firm where they were using another system which they liked? What was that solution and what did they like about it. If possible, ask them to quantify in terms of time what the "don't likes" or missing functionality is adding to their workload. Once you aggregate that across the firm, you should start to get a clearer idea on where the return on investment is likely to be greatest.

This serves three key purposes:

- You find out what's really important to your users for any new system which your firm implements.
- You'll learn where a new solution is potentially going to have the most positive impact on wider productivity and can focus in on these areas during your investigations.
- You start the process of getting buy-in to the change from the wider user base which will ultimately help with a better implementation. Most of us dislike change, but if we've influenced that change and know that it's going to make our lives a lot easier, then we'll put up with a bit of disruption for the greater, longer-term gains.

4. Best of Breed?

Traditionally the preserve of the very largest firms, nowadays access to a best of breed solution is available to any firm considering a change. Just because your current PCMS covers accounts, case management, and document management doesn't automatically mean that you adopt a similar solution for the next chapter. In fact, adopting elements of a best of breed solution over time, such as a **Document Management solution**, can help address user frustration and related business challenges much more quickly than the "big bang" approach of replacing all current functionality with a new, all-in-one PCMS.

Ask yourself where your firm's key challenges and priorities are. If the accounts and case management systems are broadly serving the firm's needs right now, but your users are crying out for better and more agile document management, then maybe that should be your starting point in a journey to a best of breed solution.

If you'd like to better understand how a dedicated DMS, such as NetDocuments, can complement your PCMS as well as how it compares with the DMS functionality provided in an all-in-one PCMS solution, then please click on the links below:



[Blog Post: Top benefits of integrating your Practice Management and Document Management Systems.](#)



ACCELERATE YOUR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE
by Combining the Power of Practice Management and Document Management Systems
netdocuments

[ACCELERATE YOUR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE by Combining the Power of Practice Management and Document Management Systems](#)

5. Generate a Request for Information (RFI) Document

Using all of the above information you have gathered, put together a *brief* RFI document to send out to the initial, long list of suppliers. This should include:

- **A short description of the current problems/ requirements and ask how the supplier's solution would resolve/fulfil it.** Name the 3rd party apps you want to use and ask about current and planned integrations. Try not to lead them by the nose too much, so outline your requirements in a manner along the lines of, "Here's our challenges, how would your solution help us to resolve them?"

The better suppliers will address those challenges with functionality available in their solution and will often cite real-world examples; naming client firms who have

overcome the same issues using their solution. Be wary of those who send you standard blurb which has just been copied and pasted off their website. If that's all the effort they're prepared to put in at this stage of the process to try to win your business, what are they going to be like after you've bought their solution?

- **Include a request for a ballpark quote;** covering the named requirements for X users to include licensing, implementation, training, data migration, and ongoing support. It won't be 100% accurate at this stage, but it will enable you to get a good feel of those who are likely to be inside and outside your provisional budget.
- **Ask the supplier to name at least 3 of their law firm clients who are of similar size and make-up to your firm and who are using the same solution being proposed.** Be aware that there are several suppliers who have acquired other providers over recent years and are still marketing those acquired solutions. You need to be certain that the firms being quoted as clients are using the same solution that they are proposing to your firm.
- **Ask the supplier to outline the development roadmap for the solution over the next 1-3 years;** along with brief details of the key enhancements they have added in the previous 12 months. This is a really good way to get a feel for how committed the supplier is to the solution and whether its development will be adding real value to the software for years to come. It's also important to get them to tell you what they've added in the past 12 months because it's easy to say what they're going to do, but what is it that they have actually delivered?



| Should you use a Consultant?

It depends.

Probably, if you're unsure of your requirements and who to approach. Maybe your needs extend to technical aspects such as hardware, Cloud, cyber security etc for which you need advice on as you don't have inhouse expertise.

If you do decide to use a consultant, make sure you agree their remit and, of course, their fee. Be aware that they don't need to be involved for the whole process. Maybe you need help at the information gathering stage of the process and are happy to continue with the more detailed discussions yourself. Or perhaps you'd prefer some help further along the journey with the detailed demos and the proposal evaluations.



If they're going to send out an Invitation to Tender (ITT) document to suppliers on your behalf, then do make sure to check that the contents accurately cover your agreed requirements so that the responses from suppliers should be in line with your identified needs and wants.

Just remember, they won't make the decision for you. They'll guide and assist, but at the end of the process, their job is usually complete, and you'll be working with the chosen solution for the next 10 years plus.

| How to approach the Detailed Demos

You've had the responses in to your RFI or ITT and now it's time to take a closer look at those solutions you want to take forward in the process. This is probably the most important stage in the whole selection journey, so it's key that you set it up in such a way as to get the most out of it, enabling you to make considered decisions as to your preferred solutions.

Here are some tips to help you manage this key part of the process:

- Firstly, **make sure that you have an agree agenda.** Discuss with the supplier what you'd like them to cover during the day; subdivided between different interest areas, along with what they will also be planning to demonstrate. As a result, everybody attending on the day will know what to expect and the supplier can ensure that they are fully prepared to cover what's been agreed.

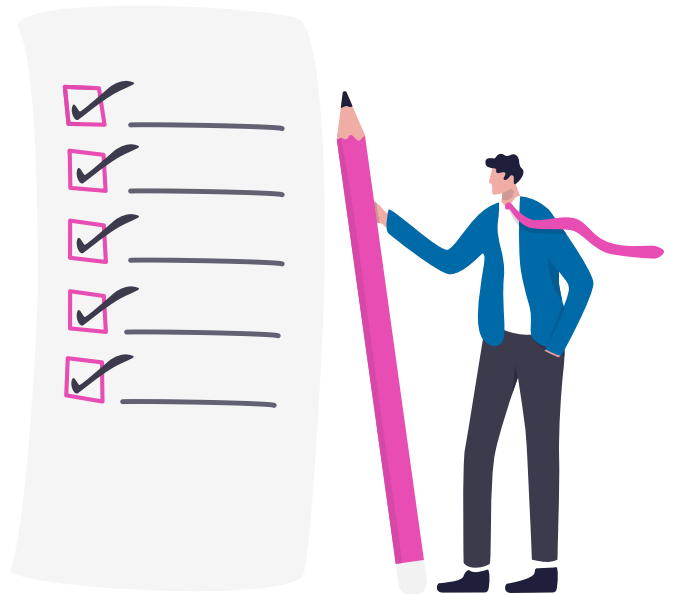


- **Ask each supplier to provide a number of on-site, focused demos covering key groups within the firm;** typically, departments, the senior management board, accounts & compliance, business development & marketing; subject to the remit of your particular requirements. It's too easy for suppliers to propose a Teams/Zoom demo nowadays and, whilst that maybe easier logistically for both parties to arrange, you'll miss out on all those touchy-feely benefits of a face-to-face presentation. If you have one or two colleagues who can't make it into the office, then they can still be connected in via Teams/Zoom whilst the rest are on-site.
- Give each colleague attending a **scorecard** based on identified requirements on which they can mark the supplier and solution so you can assess their opinions both objectively and subjectively.
- **Look for how well do the demos match your requirements.** The supplier should be able to demonstrate their proposed solution to the identified requirements in the RFI; ideally covering each group who contributed to them. If they just rock up and deliver their standard "day in the life" demo without any reference to your actual requirements, then be very wary; although the scoring from your colleagues will probably rule them out anyway!
- How well do they know their solution? Are they confident under questioning and able to demonstrate the answers where needed or are they more often than not saying they don't know and they'll have to get back to you?
- **How many of them attend?** If you're asking colleagues from across the firm to give up valuable time to review the demos, then you should expect to see matching commitment from the supplier in the form of at least two representatives, with ideally one or two additional "subject matter experts" in attendance to assist in areas like accounts or legal aid.
- **Are they engaging? How well do you get on with the people who attend? Could you work with them?** You're going to be working with this company and its product for the next 5-10 years at least, so if they don't feel right at the beauty parade end of the process, that may well give you a taster for what the ongoing relationship might look like.
- It's likely there'll be questions which can't be answered by the supplier in the demonstration. **Do they respond with the required information promptly?** A target of 24 hours isn't unreasonable, but if you haven't heard anything a week later and are having to chase for the answers; again, that's not a good indicator of the likely ongoing relationship.
- It's important to **gather the subjective views and scorecards in from your colleagues as soon as possible after each demo.** Ideally, have a debrief session immediately after the supplier has left the room because then it will be fresh in everyone's thoughts. Remember, they'll be seeing several demos over a relatively short period, so it's easy for them to soon lose track of which one did what.

| How do you Shortlist?

There are several factors to consider here:

- Your **overall assessment** of each supplier and solution based on the results of your scoring system. This can help with the decision process if there are differing, subjective opinions amongst those involved.
- **Overall likeability** of both the solution and the supplier.
- How well does it do the job?
- **Their responsiveness post-demo and your experience beforehand** in getting the meeting organised. Believe it or not, some suppliers can take weeks to get a demo organised because they have to go through some long-winded, internal process to secure the people required to show their product.
- Price is important, but remember, it shouldn't be the most important factor.
 - You need to **ensure that you're comparing apples with apples**. Devise a spreadsheet and transpose the costs of each quote into it so that you can easily see where there may be gaps in a supplier's proposal when compared with others. Have they included data migration or end user training, for example?
 - **Extrapolate the costs over at least a 5-year term** to determine the Total Cost of Ownership of each system; especially when comparing Capex to SaaS. Sometimes, those solutions that seem less expensive on the surface can quickly escalate in price when you look at the longer term TCO. Ask the supplier to provide their typical annual increases so that you can factor these into your TCO calculations.
 - **It's ultimately about the VALUE you will get from your chosen solution**. The highest cost option may provide the greatest value as it best addresses your requirements. There's no point buying the cheapest if you derive minimal value from it and your colleagues will never forgive you!



Ideally, try to shortlist down to one preferred supplier, but keep one in reserve just in case. Be honest and prompt with the suppliers you haven't shortlisted and be prepared for some questionable salesmanship following rejection. You've made the decision for good reasons, so don't be swayed by sudden offers of significant discount or tittle tattle about your selected supplier.

| Use of Reference Sites

Once you've selected your provisional, preferred supplier, always, always, always ask for reference sites that you can contact to speak to and ideally be able to visit at least one of them.

Make sure that you choose who to approach from the selection provided. Be wary of a supplier who seems to be pushing you towards one particular client firm. This could be their one and only pet reference site, so you're unlikely to get an unbiased view of their experience.

The firms you choose to approach should be similar to yours in size and work types and, therefore, likely to have had similar challenges prior to implementing the system.

Speak to at least two of them and, if possible, arrange to visit the one which seems most akin to your firm. Whilst speaking to them and on site, **keep in mind these key questions to raise as part of your assessment:**

- How well is the system used/liked by staff?
- What's the support like?
- How often do you get software updates and are they adding material value to the solution? Do they make sure that you are informed about what's in the update?
- How valued do you feel as a client? Are they responsive to your enhancement requests?
- And the killer question: If you were looking now, how likely is it that you'd buy the system?



Those questions alone will give you a great feel for how the firm feels about the solution and the supplier, but do also make sure you cover some of the more specific requirements that you have for the new software.

If the supplier has a User Group, ask to speak to the chairperson as they will have a good overview of how clients generally feel about the solution and the supplier.

| Final Negotiations

It's worth pointing out at this stage that **making the decision is not signing the order**. Over the years I have seen many instances whereby there's a collective sigh of relief amongst the leaders in the firm once the decision is made, but what they don't tend to realise is that there is still work to do before the supplier can get on with the project. Make sure that you have a clear plan to conclude the negotiations and get the contract signed off. You've built up lots of good momentum and positive anticipation across the firm, so build on that and take it forward into the implementation.

You're about to embark on a long-term partnership with your chosen supplier, so whilst you've got contracts and prices yet to negotiate, do approach this final phase in the manner you would expect the relationship to be managed going forward. In other words, it shouldn't be viewed as an opportunity to try to force the supplier into providing large discounts and completely rewriting their contracts. For what it's worth, I'd suggest that you don't leave the negotiations in the hands of the Dispute Resolution partner!



During this phase of the negotiations, there are a few more steps that you should consider:

- a. **Ask for a pre-sales project planning meeting/call.** This will enable you to meet some of the key people who will be running your project as well as enabling you to get a good idea of the likely timeline for the implementation of your new system. In my experience, these meetings are just as helpful to the supplier's project team who can then hit the ground running once the deal is signed off.
- b. **Ask to speak to the CEO or another member of the c-suite.** Their willingness (or otherwise) to do so tells you a lot about the kind of business they are. Ask about the company's financial status and its ambitions over the next 3-5 years; both generally and with regards to the solution you're investigating. If they have external investors, what's their exit strategy and how might that impact the supplier?
- c. If there is much to discuss either contractually and or commercially before sign off, you will **usually see the involvement of senior management** from the supplier and again get a good indication of what they're like to do business with.

Always remember, the salesperson you're dealing with has a target and will have forecast your potential order to their business based on their selection as preferred supplier and the timescales discussed with you to date. If those timescales have slipped, then discuss that with the salesperson at the earliest opportunity and agree a new target date for concluding the deal. This may prompt an increased offer of discount if you can stick to the original date, but you wouldn't be having this discussion if you could!

Where a discount had already been offered which is linked to a deadline, be very wary of suppliers who retract this if you're unable to complete the deal on time due to genuine delays. In my experience, a supplier who is prepared to do this now will have few scruples when it comes to commercial practices down the line! (Clearly, if the timescales slip significantly, then you wouldn't reasonably expect the supplier to be able to honour the deal offered.)

| Summary

Try to keep the process simple, inclusive, and on point throughout the discussions and, ideally, with good momentum to avoid disinterest creeping in from colleagues and even suppliers. Aim for 3 to 6 months from the start of supplier engagement to sign-off and try to avoid those times of the year where holidays are likely to impact on that momentum, such as Xmas and August.

Selecting your next PCMS is a decision which will underpin your firm's success for the next 5-10 years at least. Each firm will add its own nuances to the process outlined above, but if you ensure that these key steps are covered, then you'll have the best chance of achieving the right outcome.

Whether you just need some friendly guidance on who to consider or you'd like us to implement your new system and manage the data migration, Accesspoint has the expertise and resources to help. We're constantly expanding our implementation partnerships to ensure as broad and agnostic a service as possible.

Moving to a new PCMS can be a daunting prospect, but we're well-equipped to hold your hands as much as you need to help you along on that journey. We're here for today and guiding you into tomorrow.

Want to learn more about how we can help you?

Contact us for more information

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