



Venerable Kansas Law Firm Benefits From Transition to Philips Digital Enterprise Dictation Solution

Kansas

Established in 1886 by Frank O. Johnson, a charter member of the City of McPherson, Wise & Reber is one of the oldest law firms in the state of Kansas. During the past 125 years, the firm's dictation practices have undergone many iterations as one new system was superseded by a newer, better one.

The firm's dictation evolution followed a predictable path. In the old days, attorneys gave dictation directly to stenographers, who took it down by hand on their shorthand pads. This gave way decades ago to more practical, hard-wired telephone dictation recording devices. In the 1990s, the attorneys and their secretaries took advantage of more modern mini-cassette recording equipment.

Faced with buying parts or replacing expensive and antiquated tape-based equipment, the firm began its search for the right digital system. This search ended in 2009, when it selected Philips SpeechExec Enterprise software solution with Digital Pocket Memo 9500 digital recorders. As in past transitions, application of this new technology brought benefits and process improvements that propelled the firm years forward.

When it was necessary to replace two transcribing machines, at a cost of \$300 to \$400 each, it became abundantly clear to Wise & Reber, a commercial law firm in McPherson, Kansas, that it was throwing good money away on antiquated technology. "It was past time to take advantage of 21st century dictation processing," says Brett Reber, the firm's managing member.

For several years, the cost-conscious firm had been considering the move to digital dictation technology. "We wanted to get rid of the 'hassle factor' of handling tapes," says Reber. "And our old equipment was breaking and expensive to fix."

The firm was looking for the best system on the market that its money could buy. Fortunately during its evaluation, Reber met with Voice Products, a certified Philips Speech Processing dealer - and discovered its pricing would fit nicely into the Wise & Reber budget. The firm implemented SpeechExec Enterprise on its network in December 2009. Voice Products took care of a seamless integration of the new system as well as user training to offer as much comfort as possible during transition.

Innovative 21st century technology had definitely arrived for the law firm with a pedigree dating back to the 19th century. Philips SpeechExec Enterprise is an intuitive, Windows-based interface with centralized configuration tools, allowing recorder maintenance, programming and upgrades to be delivered centrally to each user. The feature-rich solution can be customized to meet specific preferences of different users on a variety of computers.

Shifting workloads becomes manageable

Even a small office can experience productivity improvements. Currently, Wise & Reber has seven lawyers and seven administrative staff positions. "One of the primary business reasons for acquiring Philips SpeechExec Enterprise dictation technology was to resolve work-sharing issues equitably," Reber says. At times some lawyers and administrative assistants were overwhelmed with dictation, while other transcriptionists were looking for work. The Philips solution enables the firm to put processes and procedures in place to distribute work more evenly and achieve more level workloads across all transcriptionists, especially during peak periods.



For the first time, the firm is now able to easily draw on administrative support from its other office in Hillsboro, Kansas. The administrative staff there is connected to the central McPherson network and can access dictation files directly. That means there's no longer a need to physically ship tapes to that location or mail transcribed documents back - it's all done electronically. This helps with local clients as well as during crunch times by increasing the speed of transcription turnaround.

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Brett Reber, Managing Member

In today’s economic environment, where flex-time and job-sharing are as common as traditional 8:00 to 5:00 work days once were, the SpeechExec Enterprise dictation solution provides coordination across attorneys and different staff members. Over time this will increase overall productivity for the firm.

Wise & Reber’s office manager, Julie Silsby, says, “It’s much easier now for all of our assistants, both full-time and part-timers, to pitch in and pick up other people’s work. This ability becomes really important when someone is out and the transcription can’t wait.” Prior to the Philips digital solution, transcriptionists would have to search another assistant’s desk to find the correct tape; now dictation is easily located online in well defined electronic files.

Electronic solution streamlines processes

“The Philips solution is state of the art,” Reber says. “After using some of the features for just a few months, we see a number of advantages.” For one, he appreciates the benefit of being able to prioritize his pending dictation. Attorneys can designate files for completion in any order they choose, ensuring timely turnaround for short deadlines, while relegating less urgent work be done as time allows. “There’s no need for an administrative person to sort through a whole tape to find the time-sensitive dictation material,” he adds.

Reber also welcomes the ability to instantaneously send dictation to a specific transcriptionist, without having to clip a tape to the file and walk it over to the administrative area.

Everyone values saving digital files on the network in a client’s file. “Not only is this more convenient to access later,” Reber says, “but it means dictation can never be lost, erased or recorded over. It’s there forever.”



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Julie Silsby, Office Manager

“What I like best about SpeechExec Enterprise,” says Silsby, “is the information it gives us before we even start a document.” Transcribers can see type of dictation, length of document and its priority status. “Knowing whether it’s a 30-minute project or will take just a few minutes



Associate Attorney Mark Pemberton

to do, lets us plan our day and our work more efficiently, while still getting the attorneys what they need when they need it.”

Additionally she is grateful for the improved sound quality. “Now we don’t have to strain to hear words on worn-out tapes or stop and replay as often,” Silsby says. “Our assistants love the new system.”

What lies ahead

While attorneys at the traditional firm are getting used to the new technology, they use their office computer docking stations to upload files from the Digital Pocket Memo 9500. “We haven’t started sending dictation by email or added the Blackberry version yet, but expect to in the future,” says Reber.

The firm recognizes the potential for improving productivity in another area, and foresees creation of an assistant pool structure, rather than having an assistant for each attorney. Right now the processes and people in place work well. “When our firm strains under a heavier load,” explains Reber, “we will have the system in place to manage the increased capacity.”

Consideration has been given to recording on a BlackBerry, but the firm is satisfied using the ergonomic handheld for mobile use. According to Reber, “We have chosen to add features incrementally but know with SpeechExec Enterprise, we have more features and functions available to serve us well for decades to come.”



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