

Barnetts Solicitors... UK Top 5 Conveyancer embraces the future and increases its competitive edge



E C L I P S E

Barnetts Solicitors is a nationally recognised conveyancing and remortgage firm, ranked in the Top 5 of the UK's property practices. A staff of over 300 operates very much as a commercial organisation, rather than a partnership practice, and this business-oriented approach has been instrumental in the Barnetts success story. The financial year 2005-6 saw the practice bank more than £5 billion worth of mortgage transactions – more than double its average figure of £2 billion in recent years. Completion times were reduced by as much as 17 days, and transactions completing within 3 days rose from less than 3% in Q3 of 2005 to more than 10% in Q1 of 2006.



Barnetts has been an Eclipse Legal Systems client for many years, utilising the firm's previous generation of software (entitled 'Chase') before upgrading to the Proclaim® Case Management software system in 2002. James Whelan (pictured), ICT Director at Barnetts, talks us through the ways in which Proclaim® has helped Barnetts become one of the country's top conveyancers.

Could you give us an overview of your Proclaim® setup?

We have nearly 300 Proclaim® users at the moment, all based at our purpose-built premises in Southport. All case handlers have full access to the Proclaim® range of tools, including document production, email, SMS text messaging, etc. Proclaim®'s in-built administration parameters mean that we can channel and tailor usage of these tools to ensure that case handlers use them to our specific guidelines, building a solid consistency of approach and ensuring a high overall service-level for our clients.

How do you use Proclaim® to stay ahead of the game? What gives Barnetts the edge?

I think it's how we embrace and use the system that really counts, and our close relationship with Eclipse that edges us ahead. For example, SMS text messaging from a case management system in itself is a clever tool. But we utilise this to its maximum potential, rather than seeing it as just a marketing trick or a technological fad! In fact, we issue over 5000 messages a month directly to client's mobile phones, and this is constantly increasing. In addition, we use things like online case tracking (with Eclipse's 'FileView' system) to provide secure instant access to live case information for private clients and case referrers (lenders, panels and estate agents).

As well as utilising FileView, we also distribute weekly electronic file updates to our referrers to help them track the progress of their matters. This service is 'white labelled' to allow them to forward on the information with their own logo, contact details etc – a value-added service that we are able to provide for no extra cost.



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How do you organise your relationships with case referrers and volume-work 'panels'?

One of the main benefits of Proclaim[®] is the simplicity of integrating it with external parties. The ease of creating routines within Proclaim[®] to import and export information is a fabulous benefit. We integrate with a number of lenders and 'panels', and the ease of putting these links in place is not lost on our business partners – they greatly appreciate the speed with which this can be done. This addition to our marketing clout stands us in good stead to work with more panels and lenders as and when market opportunities are presented.

Receiving cases electronically means that we can open a remortgage file in just 10 seconds (this includes creation of all relevant initial documentation). Originally (pre-Proclaim[®]) it used to take a junior member of staff around 12 minutes per matter. For remortgage transactions, we have cut the overall cost per matter by 26% and for 'sale' and 'purchase' matters, costs have reduced by 19%.



How easy have you found it to tailor Proclaim[®] to your preferred working practises?

The ease with which you can customise Proclaim[®] is another of its key advantages. In a market where software vendors and systems are generally very inflexible, Proclaim[®] can be swiftly and easily changed by our appropriate in-house staff and updated 'on the fly'. The system thus fits in with our needs and decreases the amount of administrative work necessary, speeding up the process from matter creation to completion.

Proclaim[®]'s reporting features are heavily utilised – we produce daily reports on our teams' capacities and performance to ensure that they are working efficiently and that all files are receiving the correct level of attention. We are also creating a 'capacity management' tool which will predict trends for fee earners. This information will then be used to calculate peaks and troughs and allow our account managers to distribute work more evenly.



What do you see in the near future for Barnetts in terms of your market standing and file progression capabilities?

Our new online division – clickconveyancing.co.uk – is an exciting move. Fully integrated directly into Proclaim[®], whenever a client instructs us online the file is created and opened within our system immediately, requiring no case handler intervention. All letters and relevant emails are distributed automatically and an SMS text message is sent to the client informing them of their case reference number and who their fee earner will be. In my

opinion, this type of streamlining is the way forward – trim out or automate everything that holds the process up, and pass the subsequent savings to the client.

In addition, we were the first law firm in the country to sign up for Sky TV's new e-business portal. This allows our clients (existing and potential) to monitor the progress of their case using the 'Sky Active' system from their remote control. It's this type of fresh thinking and use of technology that will keep us pushing ahead and driving the conveyancing and remortgage business to new levels of success. Proclaim[®] has been – and will be – utterly essential in elevating us to our position as one of the UK's top conveyancing practices.