

# Courting Counsel

*Learning to lose spam and love litigators in New Zealand*



Andy Hopkins, IT Manager,  
Kensington Swan

In a world where technology and business move rapidly, Andy Hopkins confesses that the pace is more deliberate at Kensington Swan, the New Zealand law firm where he serves as IT manager.

“We’re implementing a new document management system (DMS),” Hopkins says. “It took me 18 months to get that approved because the partners said, ‘We’ve got a DMS, why do we need to replace it? Why do we need to spend all this money?’”

Hopkins explained to the partners the need to migrate from older, unsupported software. He pointed out that the software the firm used couldn’t store email, support mobile work, or support the firm’s disaster recovery

By Fred Sandmark

goals—all of which are important for Kensington Swan’s long-term needs.

Presenting the case for technology change to skeptical, budget-conscious partners is just one of the challenges Hopkins and his team face. They also deal with regulatory compliance, the increasing usage of laptop computers, disaster recovery, and document management.

## Shop global, act local

When your budget and your options are limited—as they often are in remote New Zealand—it’s important, Hopkins says, to take a disciplined approach when choosing IT products and services.

At Kensington Swan, Hopkins starts by surveying what law firms worldwide

use. (He subscribes to TechnoLawyer, an online legal-tech community, and other news sources.) Products without local support are eliminated. Through further evaluation the list of potential solutions is narrowed to one, which is then carefully examined.

“We just don’t have the resources or the budget to do in-depth studies of multiple products,” Hopkins says. Even when a solution is budgeted, it must pass one more test. “When it comes time to implement a project, we re-review it,” he says. As long as 15 months may pass between budget creation and spending the money, so the re-review confirms that technology change hasn’t rendered the decision obsolete. “Only if we can re-justify the need do we go forward.” The process results in less wasted money.

“Our IT spend is typically less than the other law firms around town,” Hopkins says, based on figures provided by FMRC Legal, an Australian consulting firm. “Our department has a reputation among the partners for managing its spend pretty well.”

Take email. In early 2005, half of the email arriving at Kensington Swan was spam. A custom antispam solution caught just 30 percent of it, causing the firm’s 240 users to waste 200 hours per month on spam. This put the IT department in an unenviable position. “Fighting spam doesn’t add any value to the business at all,” Hopkins says. “We could spend all day fighting it and that doesn’t make us another dollar.”

Starting in April 2005, Kensington Swan evaluated Symantec Brightmail AntiSpam for six weeks. It captured virtually all spam and didn’t require constant staff attention. “We configured Symantec Brightmail AntiSpam during its trial, and since then we have spent almost no time supporting it,” he says. “This allows our IT team to accomplish tasks far more valuable to the firm.”

### Having an out-of-office experience

These days, a technology must support user mobility to get the green

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light at Kensington Swan. Nearly a third of the firm’s computers are laptops, and the next refresh will raise the number of laptops to just under 50 percent.

Remote work capabilities and mobility are important components of IT-business alignment. “If you come to me with the best application in the world but it doesn’t work when you go remote, then we’re not interested,” Hopkins says. Mobility creates extra challenges in an environment where client confidentiality and document security are paramount. Though New Zealand’s regulations on document management trail behind those in the U.S. or Europe by several years, by Hopkins’s measure, client confidentiality warrants a strict rule: No data is allowed to reside on a laptop.

Instead, everything is kept on servers and managed by the DMS. “It’s important for us, as a law firm, to manage emails in the same way as in the old days when we would manage paper letters to and from clients,” Hopkins says. “Our new DMS has that capability, and that’s aligning technology with business needs.”

The DMS also sets the stage for the future. “Law firms have traditionally been paper-based, but I’m seeing attorneys worldwide move to electronic files,” Hopkins says. “We want to be prepared.”

Despite its challenges, mobility also creates opportunities, especially around disaster recovery.

“If we lose access to our premises but people have laptops, they can carry on working from

wherever,” Hopkins says.

Remote work will be supported by the new DMS—Interwoven WorkSite 8—which will store synchronized copies of documents on laptops. “This creates yet another security risk,” Hopkins acknowledges. It’s a risk his team will tackle before the DMS goes live.

Kensington Swan’s back-office infrastructure already supports offsite work. The firm’s servers in Auckland and Wellington back each other up automatically, and Hopkins hopes to add a remote data center to the mix.

As the firm grows more dependent on technology, demands on the IT staff increase. Hopkins estimates that his team spends 30 percent of its time on projects that add value to the company. To improve that number, Hopkins seeks IT products that manage themselves, like Symantec Brightmail AntiSpam, which receives updates every five to 10 minutes around the clock.

“We don’t want to employ people in white coats who sit at the computer terminal all day, monitoring what’s happening on the system,” he says. “That is a waste of money. We’d rather have a product that just needs a health check once a month. That’s what we want out of everything we run.” ■

*Fred Sandsmark’s work has also appeared in Packet, Make, and Red Herring magazines.*



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