

Small Tasks, Big Impact

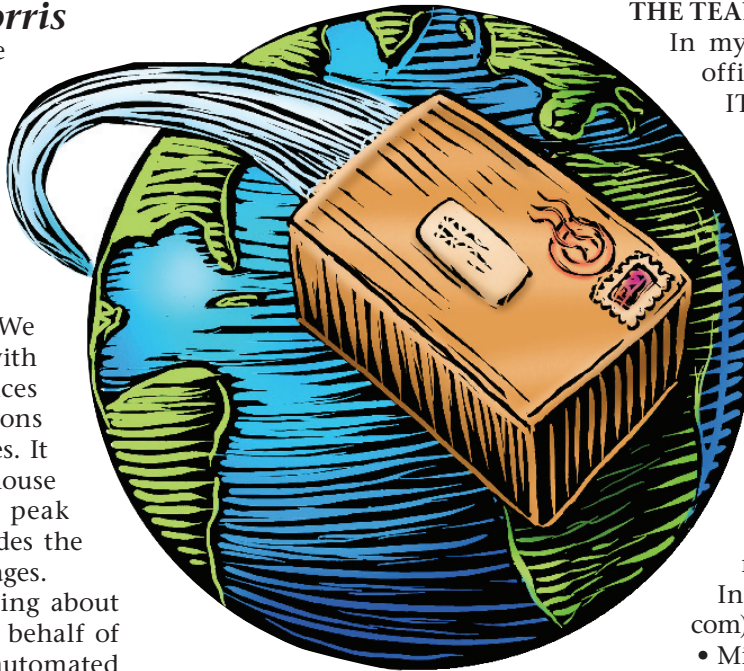
With 18 offices worldwide, shipping packages overnight was a constant headache.

By Adam Norris

Small tech can have a very big impact in a firm where a single task is repeated hundreds of times each week. At Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, (www.paulhastings.com) one such task is parcel shipping. We are an international firm with 1,200 attorneys in 18 offices serving financial institutions and Fortune 500 companies. It is imperative that our in-house operations perform at peak capacity — and that includes the shipping of overnight packages.

In 2004, we were shipping about 6,000 parcels a month on behalf of our clients, without an automated process. We also used handwritten air bills and vouchers, with information that was then re-keyed into the vendor's systems. The process, although effective, was decentralized, unorganized, varied from office to office, and had no focal point in terms of process management or cost control.

UPS (www.ups.com) approached to let us know they were evolving the technology we were currently using. The timing was right to look for alternatives to manage our global shipping operation from the initial labeling stage to the final billing stage.



We needed full client matter and timekeeper identification, as well as integration at the desktop level with Outlook and InterAction.

THE TEAM

In my role as chief administrative officer, I teamed up with four IT staff members, from our security, desktop, accounting, and infrastructure groups, to establish our criteria for an improved system.

We identified several needed features:

- Full client matter and timekeeper identification at the time of label generation.
- Integration at the desktop level with Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook and our existing client relationship management system, LexisNexis InterAction (www.interaction.com), for contact data.
- Minimal internal administration and maintenance.
- Easy to implement, easy to use.
- The option to simplify the processing of electronic invoices into Thomson Elite (www.elite.com), our financial and practice management software.

We were already familiar with Lynch Marks, the company that owns PS|Ship (www.pssh.com), and invited their representatives to come and discuss what they could do.

We were committed to remaining with UPS, a long-time firm client. We also knew we would be Lynch Marks' first ever global integration with UPS.

PS|Ship is software that helps firms

prepare, track and bill shipments. The PS|Ship Label Server is compatible with major shipping vendors, including UPS, FedEx, and DHL. It integrates with Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook, Lotus Notes, and most client relationship management systems.

A key component is that the system requires validation of departmental, cost center and/or client/matter billing data. The program can be accessed directly from the users' contact manager, or from a firm intranet or portal. The system provides tracking information directly to the sender. With the Invoice Server module, PS|Ship can streamline the invoice reconciliation process in accounting departments.

Another high priority was the security of the PS|Ship system and its network structure, which we carefully studied to be sure it would be a fit.

After about a two and a half week evaluation process, and after some re-configuring, we decided to go forward. During the testing period, Lynch Marks demonstrated that it could integrate the preparation, tracking and billing of shipments while helping us to recover shipping costs. Importantly, the system would help us maximize use of our workers at all levels and increase administrative control by integrating with our existing UPS Online Tools.

INSTALLATION

Once our management team signed off, the installation was easy — and fast. It took six weeks from the time we initiated discussions with PS|Ship until we had a firmwide rollout of 2,000 users.

We use a nationwide facilities management company, Williams Lea (www.williamslea.com), to run our mailroom. PS|Ship brought in its technology staff to work in conjunction with our IT department, and to train our Williams Lea mail-room staff. They, in turn, handled the training of the users, via one hour "Lunch and Learn" sessions.

An added benefit was the rapport building between "front office" (administrators, secretaries, paralegals, etc.) and "back office" (mail-room staff) users.

With PS|Ship's support of the Williams Lea staff, the rollout took about two weeks. Today, the small number of support calls we receive are directed to Williams Lea, as most questions are related to particular shipping needs, and not technology.

The group that facilitated the rollout was small: the administrator in each office, a Williams Lea manager in each office who has responsibility for the local office services team, and the folks within the IT structure who worked with the PS|Ship team.

A shipping operation is far more complex than the three obvious steps — packaging/labeling, tracking and billing. When our users generate labels and packages, they follow a process where they take the package to the mail-room, scan it into PS|Ship via a barcode, and put it in the right bin for UPS pickup.

Each evening, UPS staff arrives to pick up packages and make sure every parcel is accounted for. PS|Ship then automatically receives an update that UPS has the package and the mail-room staff and administrators can see this in their shipping history.

By using PS|Ship and UPS together, our average on-time delivery rate in all of our U.S. locations is 98.7%.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

When firms consider new technologies, they always want a quantifiable return on their investment. It's difficult to put a number on ROI for our PS|Ship installation — our overall cost recovery has always been high — but we estimate that the costs for this project were recovered in less than six months.

PS|Ship simplified the process and our billing accuracy now regularly exceeds 90%.

PS|Ship's systems start at about \$16,000 for mid-sized firms, and of course, vary based on firm size and project scope.

For Paul Hastings, it came down to how we were able to increase our overall efficiency and provide better levels of service to our internal clients, and ultimately to our external clients.

We save time in our finance department, our clients are billed on time, and we experience efficiencies in

the work we perform that carry over to other areas of the business.

We now have a better selection of shipping services and see all options before choosing which service to use. Packages are delivered at better rates, saving our clients time and money. In addition, e-mail notifications are sent to clients to let them know the status of their shipments, and they can easily track packages.

With the installation of PS|Ship, we now are processing 8,000–9,000 packages a month. We have standardized the shipping process in our U.S. offices, and now, and have expanded our global use of UPS services as a result of installing PS|Ship.

FUTURE

In the near future, we expect to further enhance the process by providing the PS|Ship label generation capability to our international offices and by using the PS|Ship Invoice Server. It will process electronic invoices from UPS, identify any non-billable shipments for further review, and then upload the accounts payable voucher and client disbursements directly into our accounting system. Essentially, this piece will do for the back office what the label generation product did for the front office. **LTN**

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