

## **Company Profile 003 – Greenberg Turner**

Software and Law are two fields that one would not necessarily associate with one another. Thanks to law firms like Greenberg Turner that common perception is undergoing a radical change.

We spoke to Howard Greenberg, a Toronto immigration lawyer, about how software has become part of how Greenberg Turner, the firm he is a partner in, does business.

### ***The company***

Greenberg Turner is a human resource law firm. Its services range from helping multi-national corporations deploy Information Technology professional teams or individuals where they are needed, to assisting skilled foreign workers and business people move to and from Canada, to advising and representing corporations on all employment and labour law matters.

The firm's clients include companies in business, Information Technology, financial services, manufacturing and entertainment that do business all around the world, as well as highly skilled professionals and entrepreneurs.

### ***The challenge of human resource law***

Human resource law is all about getting key people to the places where they are needed. Getting them there as quickly as possible is critical. The people who are most in demand will not wait for an immigration visa or a work permit if they can get another job offer elsewhere. "Problem solving issues to do with the movement of key skilled workers to locations worldwide and determining what the most appropriate procedures are for completing documentation for immigration officials in the destination countries are key to what we do" says Howard Greenberg.

The exciting part of the work is negotiating the "application of local laws to different situations to serve individual requirements and using technology.

### ***Technology and Human Resource Law***

What makes Greenberg Turner unique is its approach toward people and technology and maximizing the potential of both by building on their individual strengths. Taking the attitude that technology serves as an effective tool to speed up and streamline the paper flow involved in processing, the firm has created the solutions to do what it does well even better.

Howard Greenberg, with a background in law and the arts and no formal IT training, nevertheless chose to make use of the latest technology to serve his firm's needs. In making that decision he adopted both new technology and a new way of doing business.

### ***Becoming an e-business law firm***

Greenberg Turner can now handle twice as much work as before and charge less for their service. IT has made the transition to being an e-business law firm while retaining the ability to deal with firms who operate in the traditional way.

It took three steps to get there:

#### ***1a) The technology***

The firm developed an interactive, web based communication network for corporate clients that permits the instantaneous exchange of securely encrypted key information. Doing business with the law firm on-line using a secure client Internet processing system means clients saving money and time, with no more telephone tag or long waits for forms to be mailed back and forth. "All our software is custom designed to meet our particular needs – both in terms of the software which is used by our clients to convey information to us and our database for storing information," says Greenberg.

He uses Macintosh hardware because he finds it easier to design and adapt software for that platform. The firm has created its own proprietary database called **GT-Visatrakker** and this is continually being refined and updated as employees find new ways of streamlining their processes.

### *1 b) The process*

Greenberg Turner took the volume of paper documents that are associated with traditional legal and immigration processes and converted them to electronic data while still retaining the paper files. Bar codes and handheld scanners are used to track documents similar to the system used by courier companies.

When a client, usually a corporation wanting to hire someone from another country, wants to start the paperwork to bring in a foreign worker they log on to a secure Web site, where they fill out a form that prompts them to supply all the information required to initiate a visa application. The form asks them for contact information for the people doing the hiring and the person or people being hired, and anyone else required to supply information to immigration authorities. Everyone is e-mailed automatically and asked to fill out on-line forms.

"One person sits down for 10 minutes, completes a form, submits it to me and instructions instantly go out to everyone associated with the process. All this information flows through the server and comes to me as one document, which tells me everything I need to know," Greenberg says. "I haven't utilized any resources to do this and I have saved from five to 10 phone calls," he adds.

"We have turned processes that took weeks or months into days." Aside from having the assurance of being able to track precisely what point the legal process has reached; clients can tell "billable hours down to bits per second."

Applying the same technology to the practice of law consistently creates something that Greenberg likens to the McDonald's experience. Clients are guaranteed a consistent level of service. "The processes we use from client to client resemble McDonald's hamburgers. They'll taste the same no matter where you eat them and our cases will be processed the same no matter who you are."

### *2) The people*

Changing the technology also changed the way the firm does business and required the staff to work together in a new way. "In a traditional law firm" says Greenberg, "cases are assigned to individual lawyers and their support staff. Trying to discuss a case often involves leaving voice mails or messages with a secretary. The progress of the case depends on the workload and schedule of the lawyer who is handling it."

At Greenberg Turner the seven lawyers and a support staff of 14 are organized into teams that each handle different stages or aspects of each case. There are no traditional secretaries. When everyone on the team has ready access to the information, clients don't have to wait for someone to find the right person to retrieve it. Greenberg says "I never have to tell a client who's calling long-distance to hang on a minute while I'm screaming down the hall, 'Who's got the file?' "

### *3) Making it work for clients*

Ironically the very efficiency created by combining people and technology caused a disconnect and dissatisfaction among some clients. They were alienated by the fact that they did not have to interact with people in order to check on files online. Some thought they might be missing something because the process was so quick and required little apparent effort on their part.

This perception brought Howard Greenberg back to the drawing board to backtrack. People still need the human touch, he concluded. Now clients can access their own files online or call into Greenberg Turner's call centre to ask employees to retrieve or add information. As Greenberg puts it, they "get hugged".

Now, phone calls are made to clients when documents have been filed or received, while the on-line forms include a question-and-answer section designed to help clients understand the process better.

"We learned that technology is not the heart of the practice, but a tool, and it should never be viewed as more than that," Mr. Greenberg says.

### ***Questions about the Future***

#### **Does combining IT and the law appeal to you?**

We asked Howard Greenberg about the advice he'd give to high school students considering a career in law. His suggestions:

- "Research present and future trends, including the Internet
- Visit similar businesses and firms and determine what their future plans are
- Investigate the types of clients you would serve and see what their future plans are.

#### **What kind of experience and education will get you into a firm like Greenberg Turner?**

"Studying a wide range of subjects to provide a broad experience base and getting experience any way you can, including volunteering."

#### **What new developments do you expect in software and information technology? How will affect your work?**

"In my field the conveying of information to end users who will assess and make decisions will be "one stop" – a form will be filled in on one end and a visa will appear on the other. Also, administration aspects of the job will decrease as computer use for data generation and storage becomes more developed".

In closing we asked Howard Greenberg what he will be doing 5-10 years from now. "I'll be in Hawaii, opening a bar or being a wind surfing instructor." Given half a chance, Howard Greenberg will combine the technology and people skills to make that happen too.