

# Briefing

October 2019

SMARTER LEGAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**BROKEN WORDS**  
Peter Rogers at Bevan Brittan on the potential risk in communication choices

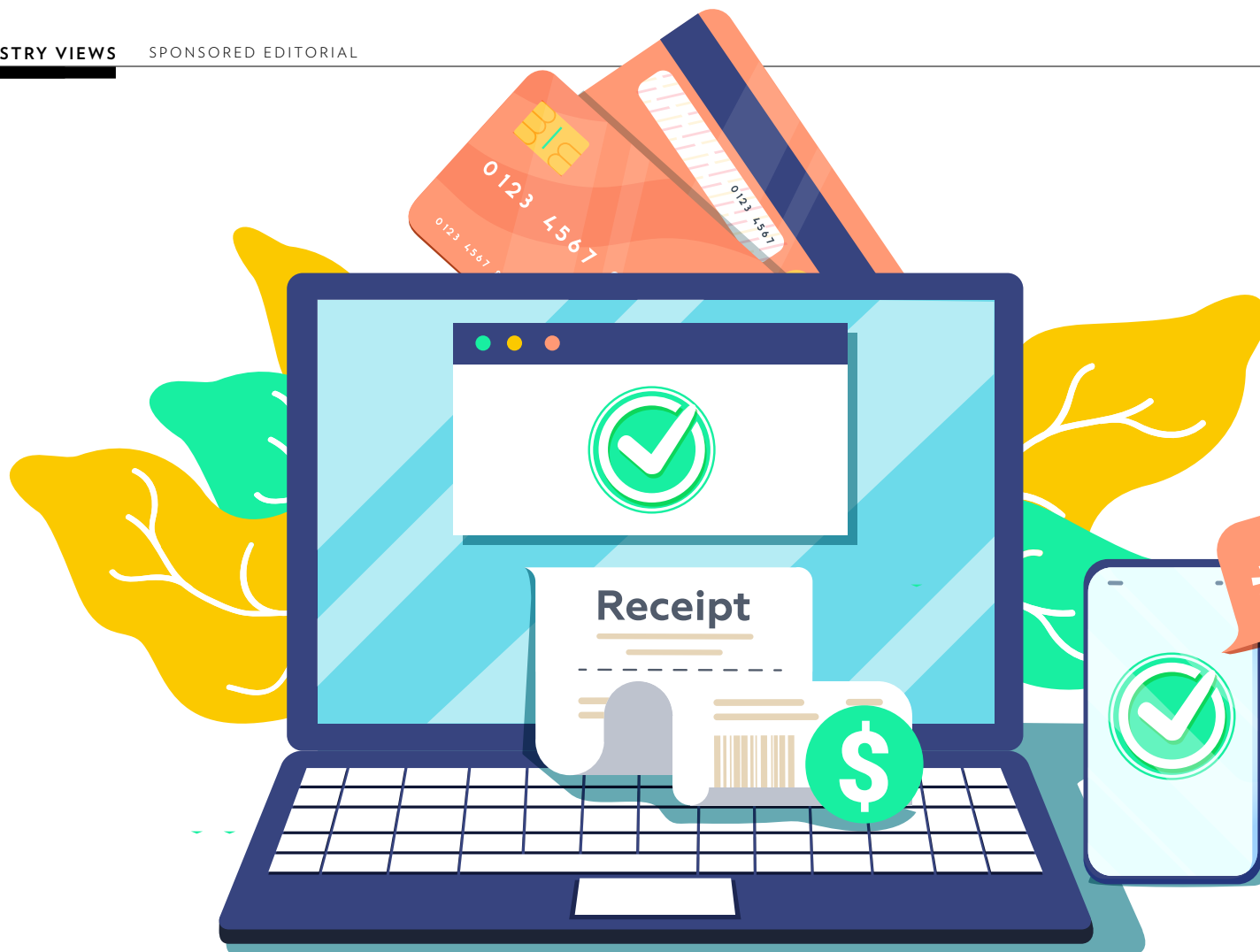
**GO PROPEL**  
The drivers of a new litigation combo for clients of Eversheds Sutherland

**FORWARD MARCH**  
Lucinda Case has Thomson Reuters' take on the future of legal technology



## *Buying signals*

*What do law firms make of the latest signs coming from the business of legal service procurement?*


**INDUSTRY ANALYSIS**

# Fit for the bill?

Christine Smith, senior SaaS software consultant at Aderant, explains how the right e-billing solution can result in efficiency, fewer rejected bills and happier clients

**W**ith growing law firm competition, it's more important than ever to ensure that efficiencies are maximised, and this includes billing. Billing is more than a simple submission process: it's a form of communication with clients, and directly impacts on firm profitability. Therefore, more firms are looking to streamline the current process.

But will an e-billing solution truly add value, not only for the billing experts but also for the firm? From a quantitative and qualitative standpoint, e-billing must clearly demonstrate improvements in efficiency and profitability in order to make the transition worthwhile.

## The cost of inefficiency

Many firms process hundreds, or even thousands,

of bills each month. Fee earners are busy with multiple different matters and accurate time entry can often be forgotten. Once time is entered and vetted by either fee earners or billers, the invoice is finally sent.

However, the client's bill might not meet agreed client guidelines – resulting in the bill being rejected. With an overwhelming number of bills, appeals are delayed because of lack of notification of rejection, deadlines are missed, and the firm does not receive payment.

This is the reality for many billing departments. Complex billing rules and guidelines, from both clients and firms, can result in delays and rejected bills – impacting on partner profits and client relations. Billing departments manually check on matters, and many managers have to help billers

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stay current, or hire more billers. For firms searching for an answer, some key challenges can be met with a complete e-billing solution.

In the 2019 Aderant business of law and legal technology survey ([www.aderant.com/research](http://www.aderant.com/research)), one respondent said: “There are too many e-billing platforms and they all put law firms at a disadvantage. The legal industry should develop an e-billing platform that meets its needs and the client’s needs, so the exchange of data and the management thereof is balanced.” An e-billing solution must bridge the gap between a firm’s process and a client’s software system to ensure that complexities and expectations are met in a timely manner. Thankfully, solutions to these challenges are not as beyond reach as firms think.

### Collaboration and analytics

Delayed or inaccurate time entry produces bills that don’t meet client standards, whereas catching these inaccuracies before submitting the bill to the client can prevent rejections. However, addressing these issues and others with an e-billing solution is not the responsibility of the billing department alone. It should also fall to fee earners, and it depends on the communication among them.

So, with a high volume of bills, how can billers realistically address the challenges?

This is where efficient collaboration and centralised comprehensive analytics come in. A solution that clearly visualises current billing data, and minimises the manual process, reduces the need to hire additional billers just to stay up-to-date. Managers who previously needed to help the team with the manual process can work on developing faster strategies to fix gaps – whether uncovering the reasons for consistent rejections, or identifying that fee earners are unknowingly making mistakes that could be remedied with training. Visibility of the billers’ process allows for better understanding among fee earners and the firm as a whole. Accurate analytics and notification of rejections allow the team to collaborate on addressing challenges proactively. And acclimatising the team to an e-billing solution now, as it grows more popular as an innovation, will allow for successful adoption in the long run.

### Happier clients

Client relationships can also be improved with an efficient billing process. Every client contact is an opportunity to make an impression that solidifies the relationship – bills are no exception. Prepare an invoice as if it were a client email, phone call, or in-person meeting.

When the billing process is streamlined with transparent analytics and effective collaboration, the client receives the bill agreed upon and it isn’t rejected by a client’s spend-management solution. Meanwhile, as innovative solutions and trends continue to roll out, client expectations will only increase.

Aderant’s 2019 business of law and legal technology survey also found that the majority of those firms taking an average of a week or more to send out a client invoice see other law firms as the main source of their competition. One of the best ways that a firm with a similar outlook can stay ahead of the competition is to ensure that its clients receive the best possible experience – from first contact to receiving the final invoice. Investing in innovation that meets such expectations will result in greater client satisfaction.

In the long run, happier clients not only continue to give their business to the firm, they also help to maintain the firm’s positive reputation among potential clients and competition.

### Who decides?

Billers and managers might see the need for change in the current billing process, but convincing decision-makers to invest in an e-billing solution can be a challenge in itself. The key is to focus on how the value, both monetary and qualitative, outweighs the financial investment. Discuss the current inefficiencies – and how an e-billing solution effectively addresses them – to benefit the entire firm, including in terms of partners’ profits. An e-billing solution goes beyond streamlining the billing department’s daily challenges – it decreases a number of risks and strengthens the firm as a whole. The value of transparent analytics, leading to increased profits and better client billing interactions, is worth the firm’s innovation investment. ▴