

Remit Case Study: Stiles Harold Williams

How does a small-medium sized property services business get cost-effective IT consultancy on demand? When surveyors Stiles Harold Williams asked Remit Consulting for help, we offered the services of an experienced CIO for a day or two a month. The result? Senior-level direction and advice at a fraction of the cost of a full-service consulting project.

Property business seeks external perspective

Stiles Harold Williams (SHW) is an independent property advisory *business* that specialises in commercial and residential property. It serves clients across the UK from its seven offices in London and the South-East, and has 180 staff, of whom 70 are chartered surveyors and 35 are partners.

As a relatively small firm, SHW does not have the capacity to support a full-scale full time IT team. IT Partner Carol Williams oversees day-to-day issues, with additional support provided by an external IT company.

In January 2017, a number of pressing issues prompted SHW to review its IT management and services. The firm considered recruiting a full-time IT Director, but realised that this approach would be both over-lapping with existing resources and expensive.



At this point, SHW Managing Partner [Martin Clark](#) contacted [Andrew Waller](#) of Remit to ask his advice. Martin explained that he wanted:

- An external perspective on the company's IT capability.
- Support in restructuring the resulting projects.

Cost-effective, ad hoc advice from Remit

Andrew suggested that Remit could provide SHW with ad hoc support and advice through our associate, [John Hayward](#). John is a highly experienced CIO who has led many complex technology projects in the property industry.

"I thought this would be an efficient, cost-effective way for SHW to get the expert support they needed, exactly when they needed it," [says Andrew](#). "They could book John for a day or two a month and draw on that time either via phone calls or for face-to-face meetings."

Martin adds: "To employ somebody like John on a full-time PAYE basis would be uneconomical and there would be a massive overlap between his job and Carol's. We couldn't have justified it. But this arrangement is wonderful value for us."

Together, we're a team

"Now John has come in and he's taken charge of the overall direction of our IT," [continues Martin](#). John's role reminds me of captain Kinross played by Noël Coward in the film, *In Which We Serve*. John's the captain of the ship up on the bridge, he's the one who directs which way the boat is going and is great at explaining why and where next.

Sharing best practice and impartial advice

John believes that the IT challenges that SHW were facing are typical of many small to medium-sized businesses. "Companies are often concerned that they have the wrong systems or that their systems could work better. They wonder

if they're spending too much money, if their technology is fit for the future and whether they have the right people inside the firm to drive IT changes forward."

Remit can help by sharing its broad experience of best practice within the property sector. Because we're independent, we can offer impartial advice on how, when and whether to invest in new technology.



Martin adds: "John is brilliant at cutting to the chase and showing us where we need to be, what we need to do to get there, and the correct sequential order to get there most efficiently. For example, he deconstructed all the different ways we could deal with our EDM needs, came up with a clever low-cost solution and explained it to us in plain English.

John's consultancy support for SHW has included holding a number of sessions with Carol, meeting with suppliers and writing communication notes on IT for the partnership. He has attended board meetings with Carol when she submitted plans and budgets for the year, and was able to provide industry benchmarking that persuaded cost-conscious partners that the company was adopting the right approach.

A 3-step roadmap

In answer to Martin's request for an external perspective on the company's IT capability, John identified a simple three-step roadmap of the steps that SHW needed to take:

1. Consolidate all IT in a secure off-site location. This move was already in the pipeline. John oversaw the plan with SHW's IT outsource provider and the company's IT is now hosted in a Tier 1 secure data centre.
2. Implement new email and office productivity tools based on Microsoft Office 365. Once the data was hosted securely off-site, the next step was to take advantage of the increased productivity and efficiency offered by a common working environment.
3. Work smarter by analysing the data that is now available on one unified system. For example, using predictive algorithms to assess when to contact clients about new properties that are coming onto the market.

Don't let the grass grow

The data centre move took place in July and the shift to Microsoft Office 365 is scheduled for October. John's not an advocate of waiting around. "With Remit, we have lots of experience of major projects and major transformation, and we know the pitfalls of letting a project drag on. If you're going to do something, do it quick and get on."

As well as getting quick results, SHW has benefitted from extremely cost-effective consultancy. "By doing the majority of the work themselves with our advice and direction, SHW probably saved 70-80% of the consultancy fees for a full-service consulting project," says Andrew.

The company has also gained the reassurance that their IT strategy is in line with current best practice in the property industry. As Martin says: "John is very calm and confident. There's never a hint of uncertainty. John has three "action watch words" which are Simplify, Consolidate and centralise! - they are a great test against which any idea can be examined. He simply explains where we need to go and what we need to do to get there and with the back-up of John's logical explanations, you know it's the right thing to do."

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