Bryan Cave embraces unique extranet technology to support its clients and lawyers.

Law firms never have been symbols of technological innovation. Most calculate shifts in policy on cost-intensive matters such as infrastructure development based on market trends, rather than inherent needs or strategic focus. And then there are firms like international firm Bryan Cave.

A *bona fide* “big” firm, it has a diversified national and international practice focusing on corporate, transactional and litigation matters in 15 offices around the world, from its home office in St. Louis to Shanghai. It represents a wide variety of institutional and individual clients of all sizes. Its Web site boasts a “360 degree vision,” addressing issues from both a business and a legal perspective. Despite the firm’s size and diversity, it purports a “one firm” philosophy.

When it comes to technology, a firm of this size has two choices, follow or lead. A few years ago, Bryan Cave chose to do the latter and has not had time to look back. Too busy building a global technology platform promoting reliability, connectivity and availability, the firm leveraged its advancements to benefit its clients and bolster its bottom line.

According to Partner John I. Alber, who is responsible for setting technology strategy and managing the Client Technology Group, the reputation of law firms as slow adopters of technology is changing with the emergence of global firms. He cites recent industry-wide investments in Voice over Internet Protocol technology, business intelligence and infrastructure development as evidence of the change.
The Technology
Bryan Cave supports approximately 2,000 internal users and tens of thousands of client users. All of the firm’s applications are developed in .NET C# over Microsoft SQL Server. The firm generally uses Microsoft Office XP and Windows 2000. A number of computers run Windows XP. The firm plans to move to Windows 2003 soon.

Bryan Cave also supports Active Directory, Software Update Services, Internet Information Server and virtually the entire Microsoft suite. In terms of legal applications, Bryan Cave uses LexisNexis as its data center provider, along with LegalKey, PeopleSoft, Thomson Elite and Hummingbird. It’s all backed by a Cisco infrastructure and VoIP, and integrated using SQL Server Reporting Services and its Online Analytical Processing cube data warehouse tools.

All of the firm’s offices are linked by secure wide area networks, which support voice and data communications, as well as video conferencing. The firm’s 850 lawyers have the requisite BlackBerry devices and remote Citrix-enabled, Web-based capabilities. In 2005, that is all standard practice for the firm, but Neceraj Rajpal, director of information services at Bryan Cave and responsible for all IS-related activities, said this technology now allows the firm to open a satellite office within weeks, rather than months. This ability is part of Bryan Cave’s focus on scalability and client service. “We want to be able to turn on sites in a matter of days,” Rajpal said.

Alber said Bryan Cave strives for mainstream competence in its base technologies, stating that is common in many large firms. “We try not to be bleeding edge in, say, infrastructure or document management systems,” he said. However, the firm’s lawyers do “strive to be leaders in creating client-facing technologies and business intelligence applications,” Alber said.

The leadership is partly the result of the attorneys, developers, business analysts, graphic artists and even a screenwriter who serve in the firm’s CTG. Created to focus on client needs and develop ways to extend the reach of in-house counsel and firm attorneys, the members of this multidisciplinary team “want to do more than just find problems — we want to help our clients prevent them,” Alber said. And they have helped. Bryan Cave has purportedly deployed more client-facing applications than any U.S.-based firm, making its lawyers recognized in that sphere.

To date, there are more than 350 extranet applications operated by the CTG, ranging in substance from sexual harassment compliance and duties of officers and directors, to campaign finance regulations and international trade restrictions. “The single most unique aspect of Bryan Cave’s technology is the breadth and depth of its extranets,” said Mark W. Brennan, a partner at the firm working in the CTG.

The extranets are divided by purpose and include training, compliance, litigation, special projects and engagement status. The extranets can be accessed through the Bryan Cave Web site (www.bryancave.com), and some have direct access.

Training
The firm is heavily involved in training of all types. CTG members conduct training with partners and counsel who are learn-

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Bryan Cave offers more than 350 extranet options that users can access directly or via the firm’s Web site.
comprehension and certify completion. The entire course, including taking and passing the comprehension test, can be completed in about half an hour for employees and one hour for supervisors.

In addition to harassment issues, Brennan said the firm created programs to address insider trading, fair housing laws and the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, among others.

**Compliance**

Like “No Zone,” the CTG created “TradeZone” to help firm clients determine if certain international trade transactions are permissible under the governing law, and the requirements that are necessary to follow. “The tool operates as a decision tree, asking employees questions about the transaction and guiding them to a conclusion based on their responses,” Brennan said. Green, yellow and red lights are used to indicate if a transaction is permitted, requires additional legal analysis or is prohibited.

Firm client, Carl Bauer, vice president associate general counsel and assistant secretary at St. Louis-based Emerson Electric Co., has worked with Bryan Cave for more than 12 years at two different companies. He focuses on international law and acquisitions and was in the market a few years ago for a tool to allow him to communicate among Emerson’s 60 operating divisions and 700 subsidiaries throughout the world (Emerson employs more than 100,000 people in numerous countries). Bryan Cave created a customized version of TradeZone, and the program now is available to more than 200 compliance officials at Emerson, with Bauer controlling the access. In addition to legal documents, the program houses internal memoranda, frequently asked questions, corporate policies and international trade research.

According to Alber, all TradeZone tools and services are provided on a fixed annual fee basis and generally include “all-you-can-eat” legal advice in that area of law. Creating TradeZone permitted Bryan Cave lawyers to harness their knowledge about the risks of international trade for the benefit of clients without concern for the billable hour.

“In areas where we can bring lawyers and clients together, we can gain huge leverage,” Alber said. Clients using TradeZone are not worried about paying lawyers for minor issues, and lawyers are not wasting time on repetitive work. “Now, clients and lawyers are free to collaborate on finding solutions to the critical issues,” Alber said.

Bauer said the program is well worth it. “I had never seen anything in the trade area to communicate issues like TradeZone,” he said.

In the past, all of Emerson’s compliance officials or lawyers had to compile key information on their own, but now information is completely centralized and questions are archived into a fully accessible knowledge base.

**Litigation**

For a firm that handles large complex adversarial disputes, litigation management is key. This is why Bryan Cave began designing state-of-the-art, Web-based systems using FTI Consulting’s Ringtail Legal 2005 (formerly called Ringtail Casebook) to serve as virtual file rooms, which are central to its biggest cases. Such a system allows attorneys and client representatives to collaborate together with experts and co-counsel. It also houses discovery, pleadings, correspondence and evaluations prepared by attorneys handling the matter. With the increasing expense and complexity involved in electronic evidence, Bryan Cave developed the internal ability to handle the maintenance of digital information in a native format, which enhances client service. “This capability saves clients significant expense because it avoids the onerous costs of converting all electronic files to images and the expense of third-party services for hosting online document reviews,” Brennan said.

In addition to serving as a repository and meeting vehicle, this extranet has search capabilities and allows lawyers to thread disparate documents and related evidence into a seamless presentation. “Despite its sophisticated features, the system can be quite easy to navigate,” Brennan said, highlighting that the home page of each client-tailored extranet contains news, a calendar and a document directory for ease of reference.

**Special Projects**

Notwithstanding the litigation extranets created for specific projects, occasionally due to the level of complexity or customization in a particular case, a more advanced extranet is necessary. According to Brennan, if a client, such as an insurance company, requires a tool to track loss reserves, expenditures and case status updates on a variety of matters because it self-insures or insures others, the CTG will develop specialized programs.

In one instance, Brennan said Bryan Cave assisted a client with the inspection of hundreds of properties across the country to identify defects, remediation and claims against those responsible. Rather than the typical open system where users have access to the entire database, this matter required the ability to give different individuals access to different aspects of the collected data (e.g., field inspectors needed to input inspection findings and management officials needed progress reports). The firm implemented specific access rights to allow users to see and edit only the materials to which their role applied.

“Bryan Cave’s lawyers and [the CTG] have the creativity and expertise to build Web-based solutions that allow us to work together in ways that recognize the client’s business needs as well as its legal ones,” Brennan said.
Engagement Status
While some of Bryan Cave’s extranets are quite complex, “Client HQ” is described as a standard client extranet. It’s generally used to post and comment on documents related to a particular matter and share calendaring information. It requires little or no training compared with the firm’s other collaborative tools, but is similarly customized for ease of reference.

The Third Generation
With its extranet program firmly in place, Bryan Cave has entered the third generation of law firm Web site development. In the first generation in the mid- to late-1990s, firm Web sites were online brochures touting basic capabilities and staffing. In the second generation, which many are only now reaching and experimenting with, more substantive content and legal analysis is posted.

Bryan Cave is among a group of elite firms that have entered the third generation, providing advanced interactivity and client-oriented tools to enhance its representation. Alber said many of the firms offering client extranets and online-based services tend to be from the United Kingdom. U.S. firms active in this area are on a different scale than Bryan Cave. This is due, in part, to firms trying to serve client needs using overworked IT resources. CTG is separate from Bryan Cave’s IT group. It’s less a technology group and more a group designed for solving problems. “It’s fun and productive for lawyers and clients,” Alber said.

Return on Investment
Brennan revealed that many of the tools the CTG creates do generate a return or at least pay for themselves, but are evaluated based on the degree to which they contribute value to client services. Alber wrote an article on return on investment stating that to be successful, knowledge management projects must be undertaken with specific, measurable goals. He also highlighted that such initiatives should be incrementally developed and success gauged by closely tracking a firm’s business and the interests of its clients.

In relation to the firm’s overall technology budget, the CTG only spends about 10 percent and “the payback is huge,” Alber said. Some of the return is in relationship building. “A tenth of an uptick in leverage is huge. It makes us more profitable in the end,” he said.

The extranet developers in CTG bill for their time. CTG’s goal is to at least break even on the development of client-facing applications. It’s the intangible profit to clients in ease of access and their lawyer’s familiarity with their businesses that pay countless dividends. “We get the benefits of preventing problems, rather than reacting to them,” Alber said, noting the firm’s technology is of tremendous value on a global scale.

Internally, the technology adds to the firm’s success. As a paralegal in the firm’s Washington, D.C. office, Eileen Weiss regularly uses Ringtail for document management and has used InData’s TrialDirector, an electronic presentation database. “Ringtail is a huge assistance in document management,” Weiss said, recalling the former burden of reviewing and organizing hundreds of thousands of documents in hard copy. “Now, I can manage those documents in electronic format [and] search electronically and find the document in minutes.”

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The Future
The use of technology in the firm will continue to grow, Alber said. He sees a multiplication of the 400 applications that have been developed by the CTG and an advanced campaign to integrate more of the programs. Since many software vendors are not doing this kind of work as well or as often, Alber said he anticipates his group will continue developments in-house. He said he is particularly excited about workflow extranets. “We are able to make all of our enterprise applications talk to each other,” he said. “The payoff is to use that information to change the way work is done.”

One of the biggest challenges to success appears to be the entire legal industry’s time-based model. “[It] is antagonistic to technology development,” Alber said. “In the areas where we use technology the best, we have moved away from the hourly model.”

Alber, of course, has a unique perspective. He was an attorney with the firm, left for almost a decade, became a client, and now has returned. He said he is convinced a firm should step back, ask what the problem is and then try to address it head-on.

“When I was a client, I developed certain expectations as to how easy it should be to work with lawyers,” Alber said. “The applications we develop are aimed at meeting such client expectations. That is why, when our lawyers use those applications to serve our clients, they find our clients respond positively. I don’t think clients are used to law firms thinking of new ways to make their lives easier.”

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