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# LPM

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# UNITING TECH



Joanna Kingston-Davies, COO at Liverpool-based Jackson Lees Group, sets out how her firm's acquisition was aided by Nasstar's as-a-service solutions

Mergers and acquisitions are popular with SME law firms as a means to grow and attain competitive advantage. The then Jackson Canter Group acquired Lees Solicitors in 2016 to expand geographically and grow its legal offering – helping Lees buttress working capital requirements and benefit from the advantages of scale.

Joanna Kingston-Davies, COO at recently-rebranded Liverpool-based Jackson Lees Group (she was CEO at Lees Solicitors), says: “The acquisition was an excellent move for both sides, giving us geographical coverage, work sites, infrastructure and employee engagement strategies we didn't previously have.”

Technology was a key consideration for both firms during the transition – and is often a major challenge for firms scaling rapidly through M&A. “Both businesses needed to foster unity among staff and departments across offices in different areas of the region used to using different IT systems and

processes after the transition, and had to consider the cost and time it would take to expand the infrastructure.”

Fortunately, she adds, Lees had a hosted IT infrastructure with managed IT provider Nasstar, which was integrated into Jackson Lees over a nine-month period.

“Having an outsourced, cloud-based infrastructure made the process of expanding and unifying IT easier than it would have been if we'd had onsite servers. Systems were expanded quickly across the newly unified business to enable faster collaboration and information sharing.” She adds that Jackson Canter also recognised the benefits of having a managed IT infrastructure and were keen to follow Lees' example.

But, she says, perhaps the key benefit of having a managed IT infrastructure with Nasstar was that the firm had access to qualified IT professionals with considerable M&A and project experience to help guide them through the process.



“Nasstar is more like a business strategy partner than just an IT provider.”

### MERGER MOST MANAGEABLE

The greatest challenges for businesses undertaking a merger or acquisition are perhaps managing IT costs, limiting the disruption to operations and rolling out systems to new offices in different geographic locations.

But, Kingston-Davies says, because her firm's IT systems were cloud-based and managed by Nasstar, it was able to expand flexibly on an attractive pricing model based on scale.

“It was simply a matter of informing the provider of our needs, who then expanded our IT provision within their systems and increased our payment-per-user.” She adds that it was also easier to roll out their systems across different offices in different locations because everything is stored and updated in the cloud.

In terms of disruption, she adds, Nasstar worked with the collective business and its other key third-party IT suppliers in the background to ensure a swift and seamless merging of IT systems. Over several months of planning, the two firms were assigned a project manager and engineer by Nasstar, who conducted a systems audit and tests to carry over systems and documents to a hosted platform.

“The system went live over the weekend, and nothing changed from the user's perspective. Fee earners and support staff simply came in on Monday, followed a set of login instructions and went to the same environment with all the documents and applications that they'd left the previous Friday. We also introduced a new practice management system, hosted within the Nasstar environment, on the same day. That was a huge change for our people, but was made much easier by the stability of the Nasstar platform.” She adds that bringing everyone onto the same platform and enabling collaboration and information sharing between departments in a relatively short space of time significantly limited the transition's impact.

“Before that happened I couldn't do something as simple as see my boss's diary, which was a real pain. So, the fact that the transition was so seamless was a relief.”

### TWO-PHASE IT

Kingston-Davies says that getting everyone in Jackson Canter onto the same system as Lees was the first phase of IT development, but Nasstar is helping develop the firm's provision further.

“When we first instructed Nasstar time was of the essence and our priority was to get everyone onto the new system so everyone's systems could speak to each

other. We're now in the next phase, which is to completely rebuild our IT platform and infrastructure.”

The firm currently has six offices connected by two multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) networks – one for three of Jackson Lees' offices and one for another three. Part of the firm's second phase involves bringing both branches of the business under one network.

Kingston-Davies says that there's a clear commercial benefit of this move.

“Nasstar is able to provide an MPLS network which is cheaper and has a greater bandwidth than what we can otherwise get across both sides of the business.”

She adds that perhaps the key way Nasstar continues to assist with the acquisition is through its support and service.

“Nasstar project-managed the transition above and beyond what it was contracted to do – particularly when keeping the project on track and finding solutions to any problems we encountered.”

### AS-A-SERVICE ADOPTION

Nasstar's high-quality client service was a key reason for Jackson Canter wanting to adopt Lees' managed IT infrastructure as its own. Kingston-Davies says she could always rely on the Nasstar team to be there for advice and the firm's leadership was keen to keep that relationship.

“Lees began working with Nasstar in 2012 and to this day I can contact the team at any time, day or night, and any challenges we're having will be picked up quickly.”

But, she adds, Nasstar's service and expertise was only part of the reason that Jackson Lees was keen to host its IT.

“Lees brought on Nasstar because it realised that it could be much more productive, secure, efficient and adaptive if it had a managed IT infrastructure. Nasstar has IT resources that we simply couldn't afford as an SME law firm – Jackson Canter realised this as well.” She adds that one of Jackson Canter's drivers for the acquisition was developing better operations infrastructure, which included IT. With Nasstar's as-a-service solutions, systems are cloud-based, which enables effective business continuity. Licenses and updates are taken care of by the provider, and the firm has access to state-of-the-art systems at a fraction of the cost it would pay to have that facility in-house.

Though merger or acquisition can be beneficial to firms, the costs and stresses of rolling out a unified IT infrastructure can be challenging. But Kingston-Davies says that if firms have a managed IT infrastructure, they can scale easily and with minimum disruption, and benefit from cost savings, better productivity and efficiency, and have access to trained IT professionals who can guide them through any major IT challenges. **LPM**

#### LPM FIRM FACTS

**Jackson Lees Group**

**Revenue: £12m**

**Corporate status:**  
**Limited company**

**126 fee earners, 265 total staff**

**Offices: Liverpool, Manchester,**  
**Birkenhead, Heswall, West Kirby**

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