

HERE IT COMES

Natasha Rawley, the file queen at Archive Document Data Storage (ADDS), gives firms the GDPR breakdown for improving data management processes

Although many law firms in the SME market have been adopting cloud technologies in different forms, moving fully away from the traditionally paper-heavy industry is quite the task – that’s a lot of data being recorded and passed around on physical and digital files.

And with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ‘doomed’ to hit businesses at the end of May, SME firms need to know how to manage all of their data – wherever it may be.

The file queen, Natasha Rawley at ADDS, says: “SME firms should focus on getting the right processes in place to fully prepare for the GDPR. There are some simple steps you can take to ensure the precious client data you hold is being managed carefully.”

LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

Step one on the journey to being GDPR compliant, Rawley says, is the information asset register. Firms should register anything and everything within the organisation that contains and controls information.

“For example, if they have laptops, a practice management software, hardcopy files, mobile phones that contain email attachments and other contact information, we encourage firms to put everything on an information asset register – this defines exactly what they have and will make it much easier to be GDPR-compliant.”

Once firms know what they have, the next step is to control that information, she says. ADDS uses a physical and electronic record management system called ActiveWeb, which allows firms to barcode all of their physical information and electronic equipment – it allows you to barcode and track matter files, deeds, wills as well as the tech used by staff such as mobile phones, USB sticks, hard drives, and so on.

Rawley says: “You can run a monthly audit to make sure that everyone still has their tech hardware and there haven’t been any data breaches.

“It also means that if you have a file room onsite, you can keep track of all of those devices and physical files. They can be signed in and out to fee earners or wills can be sent out to clients if requested.”

ADDS allows its clients to use ActiveWeb software as part of their service when they store files offsite, and they can implement it in house as well. Regardless of what EDRM system a firm uses, control in this way is an absolute necessity, you need to know where your data is, who’s touched it and audit it accountable she says.

After firms know and control the information they store, step three is to ensure it is secure. Rawley says that a good factor in security is to put different access levels in place so that people have to request files and only get access to information relevant to that person – both inside and outside of the business.

“Wherever information is held, on a document or practice management system, firms need to have the right security standards set in stone. And fee earners of certain departments should only access certain files and at certain security levels. Outsourcing this records management to someone like ADDS takes the burden away from the firm,” she says.

The final step is accountability – a data protection officer is a must, Rawley says. If the firm can’t spend the resource to hire one, then they need to put the practice manager in charge, or a personal assistant or secretary.

“You need to have a gatekeeper – someone needs to take charge of the firm’s records and information management in correspondence to GDPR.”

HASTA LA VISTA, BABY

Rawley says another thing ADDS encourages, which is a massive part of GDPR, is a record retention policy – it’s there to make sure that the firm is destroying the information it should, at any given time.

“One of the biggest improvements brought out



from the GDPR is that it forces firms to take better care of the personal information they hold, and to ensure that it isn't being held onto any longer than necessary."

This not only covers their client files and information but also internal information - things like HR records, she points out.

"At the moment, everyone is so busy concentrating on the external information that they store, they're not looking into internal information. They shouldn't be hanging onto internal HR information for longer than they should after employees leave the practice. Firms need to record and destroy any electronic or physical documents pertaining to internal data as well," Rawley says.

And when it comes to the point where things are ready to be destroyed - whether they're destroying hardcopy files, hard drives, or USBs - firms need to make sure they're destroyed by a reputable company.

She says: "Firms shouldn't close their eyes when it comes to the actual destruction part. Hard drives can be shredded as well, rather

“Firms need to record and destroy any electronic or physical documents pertaining to internal data as well.”

than just being recycled or wiped."

And, obviously, Rawley adds, firms need to ensure they hold someone accountable - whether that person sits in the firm itself or they outsource these services. Firms should confirm that the companies they work with are aware and compliant with the GDPR and have the right ISO certifications in place.

It's all very daunting, yes, but the GDPR can be broken down into component parts and attacked subsequently. Rawley says that there's more information and tools provided for free on the ADDS website that SME law firms can follow to prepare. [LPM](#)

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

ADDS has provided record data management services since 1987. As a legal sector specialist, it's helped firms of all sizes streamline and improve record and information processes.

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