



Setting Up Multiple Offices for a Professional Services or Law Firm



July 2024

Published by  bilabl

Welcome to our July newsletter!

In this newsletter we bring together many experiences, including the critical steps for planning the cross-border expansion, key organisational requirements, and, perhaps the most critical of all, some of the must-have digital tools necessary for successful execution of the plan. We also provide some thoughts on the risks involved and how to mitigate them.

Expanding a professional services firm or law firm to multiple offices, particularly across different countries, has been a complex but ultimately rewarding endeavour for several clients within the bilabl community.

1. The Critical Importance of Digital SaaS Tools

One of the central, recurring themes amongst our community of cutting-edge, growth-centric, professional service firms has been how powerful it has been for them to get the technology right. The benefits of incorporating a formally aligned, seamless and integrated suite of digital SaaS tools cannot be overstated. For the vast majority it has been both the reason that multiple office set-ups were possible and then it has also been the engine for sustained growth downstream of the implementation runway.

Fair enough, that is a view that we can get fully behind! So, let's zero in on some of the specific packages and features that have contributed to this positive performance.

a. Data Management System



A sophisticated data management system (DMS) is essential for handling large volumes of data across multiple locations. NetDocuments or SharePoint is the solution of choice for the many and is fully integrated into the functional universe of bilabl's capabilities.

Some of the benefits that the bilabl community have typically experienced:

- **Centralised Data Storage:** Enables easy access to information from any office so firms can say goodbye to the irritation and resource drain of duplicated or lost files.
- **Improved Collaboration:** Facilitates collaboration among team members in different locations. Moving all documentation from physical drives on the desk to a
- **Data Security:** Ensures that data is securely stored and protected against breaches. At the same time, continuous back up ensures that nothing is ever inadvertently deleted and that recovery of archived work can be instantaneous.

b. Practice Management System

It is widely understood within the industry that a practice management system (PMS) plays an essential role in streamlining operations, improving efficiency and delivering growth. Whilst bilabl is extremely powerful for a single office firm, the power of the business analytics, resource allocation and tracking capabilities are magnified many-fold once multiple offices are connected into the ecosystem.

This is a selection of the key benefits quoted by the enthusiastic bilabl user community:

- **Billing and Invoicing:** Simplifies billing processes and ensures timely invoicing. This improves both cashflow management and the ability to forecast ahead. Critical integrations to accounting software such as Xero, Quickbooks and Zoho Books complete the functionality.
- **Client Management:** Tracks client interactions, manages project workflow and improves client service with more accurate billing and detailed logs.
- **Automation of the Mundane:** Routine tasks that typically absorb excessive resources are automated away, allowing staff to focus on more strategic activities that generate meaningful income for the firm.
- **Team Workflows:** Managing projects, tasks and matters between colleagues in different offices and jurisdictions is streamlined, transparent, sequenced and tightly laid out. No more dropped balls, forgotten tasks or bottlenecks from missing pieces.
- **Seamless Integration:** Standalone software is so last decade. Put bilabl at the centre of the technology stack and have it fully integrated with all the other critical point software including the CRM, DMS and accounting functions.



2. Other Key Processes and Organisational Requirements

With the technology issues dealt with, we delved into the question of what, in hindsight, the community felt were some of the success-related factors that were equally mission critical. Perhaps predictably, more strategic planning in advance was mentioned most frequently. Both market entrance strategies and financial planning proved to be the key elements of this.

a. Market Research

- **Demand Analysis:** Evaluate the demand for your suite of services in the potential markets. Mapping growth rates and pricing were seen as being critical inputs to budget planning.
- **Competitive Analysis:** Identify key competitors and their market share. A lot of the bilabl community have focused on understanding how the competitive environment is changing and why. Then they develop a plan for the market opening process that the firm will need to execute. One common denominator, that ultimately de-risks the decision, is that respondents within the community have had several key clients with cross-border requirements to act as cornerstones to the expansion decision.
- **Regulatory Environment:** Understanding local regulations, including licensing requirements and tax, that typically impact profitability and cross border activity with clients was also viewed as essential.

b. Financial Planning

- **Budgeting:** Estimate initial setup costs, ongoing operational expenses, and projected revenues. Within the bilabl community the average allocation for funding the new office trends to around six months of working capital during this start up phase and provide sufficient contingency buffer.
- **Currency Exchange:** Many mentioned planning for fluctuations in currency exchange rates as being particularly important, given the impact on profitability. Obviously the degree of sensitivity will depend on factors such as the degree of alignment between billing

currencies and costs as well as the actual currencies. FX rates in emerging market, for example, can be more volatile than more developed markets, or those that manage versus the USD.

- **Taxation:** Understanding tax obligations in each country, including corporate taxes, value-added tax or goods and services tax, and any double taxation treaties, is another predictable priority. There are potentially significant variations between regions and jurisdictions that need to be properly planned.

3. The Risks of Expanding Offices

Every opportunity comes with risk. So finally, it is worth distilling some of the experiences of where problems may occur and how these might be offset.

a. Information Exchange

- **Inefficiency and Miscommunication Risks:** Poor information exchange can lead to inefficiencies and miscommunication between offices.
- **Mitigation:** Use unified communication platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams for real-time communication, use best-in-class digital SaaS tools like bilabl, SharePoint or NetDocuments and schedule regular meetings to ensure alignment across offices.



b. Electronic File Storage

- **Data Loss and Security Breaches Risks:** Inadequate file storage solutions can result in data loss or security breaches.
- **Mitigation:** Implement secure cloud storage solutions like NetDocuments or SharePoint. There is a pattern emerging here! And establish regular backup protocols to safeguard data. These are easily done within the aforementioned SaaS products.

c. Network Security

- **Cyber Threats Risks:** Expanding offices increases the risk of cyber threats.
- **Mitigation:** Invest in firewalls, antivirus software, and intrusion detection systems. There is absolutely no money to be saved here. Once you know you need them, because of an attack, it is simply too late. Conduct regular cybersecurity training for employees. Incorporate clear SOPs into workflow that is most vulnerable to these risks.

d. Business Analytics

- **Inaccurate Data Analysis Risks:** Without proper analytics tools, making informed business decisions becomes increasingly challenging across multiple locations.
- **Mitigation:** Use business intelligence tools like bilabl, for accurate data analysis, resource management and reporting. Profits will grow as a result. We have the data to back this up! Implement strong data governance policies to ensure data integrity and invest in the IT capabilities to execute this. .

4. Conclusion

Setting up multiple offices for a professional services firm or law firm requires meticulous planning, robust infrastructure, and effective use of digital tools. By leveraging advanced SaaS solutions, firms can streamline operations, enhance collaboration, and ensure data security. Understanding and mitigating the risks associated with international expansion are also crucial to achieving the many elements that constitute the long-term success of the firm.

With the right strategies and tools in place, firms are able to navigate the complexities of global operations and unlock new growth opportunities. To discuss how bilabl can be part of the solution for you, contact us here



Book a Live Demo
to see how bilabl transforms your law firm

Contact us here and we can explain everything:
sales@bilabl.io | www.bilabl.io | LinkedIn

