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Cascade communication – August

Hello again!

I hope all of you are doing well and have managed to get some sort of a break over the summer months.   Well done to those of you who have been at home working during the very high temperatures during August without the luxury of air conditioning, thank you for struggling through that and indeed thank you to everyone for working in environments that might not always have been as excellent as those provided by our previous working arrangements at 10 Old Bailey!

This communication cascade follows the recent management meeting earlier in August where we discussed a number of projects and topics relevant to all of you, and this update provides you with some key outputs from those discussions as well as some reminders and information on next steps.

Of course, COVID-19 has had a big impact on clients in all sectors and countries, and therefore on our own revenues, and we are around 4% behind our Time and Service revenue budget, which though is already set at a low level, and this performance is also behind where we were last year by a similar margin, so we still have some work to do in addressing our low revenue with additional BD efforts and productivity.  However one measure which has improved from last year is write-offs, which are still too high at 18% but better than the mid-twenties we were seeing last year.  The target for write-offs is no more than 13%.

Linked to the finances, I want to thank those of you who are furloughed either on a full time or on a flexible arrangement.  The furloughing arrangements continue to help support the firm during these challenging times and we appreciate your contribution.  We will continue to be in regular contact with everyone who is currently furloughed to discuss ongoing options and consent.  The furlough guidance has recently been updated with the top up arrangements in place for September and October, which remain the same.  You can access the information in the updated COVID-19 Temporary Policy Changes document and Furlough FAQs, which are now available via HR General and on the furlough resources page.

As you all know, we are not yet in a position to begin transitioning back to a temporary or more permanent office base.  This is mainly due to collective concerns about the risks of commuting on public transport and general COVID safety, but we are keeping the situation under close and constant review, and considering Government advice, and we will continue to keep you updated.  In the meantime the Business Continuity team have been working through your office survey responses as well as your completed DSE risk assessments and following up with individuals and line managers to work through any issues or to find solutions that aim to improve your remote working set up and to keep you safe.  Outside of this process, and if any new issues or difficulties arise, then please do continue to communicate with your line manager or a member of the people team.

We are now turning our attention to thinking about what our future way of working might look like when we are able to return to a new (and hopefully better) normal.  We want to ensure we are as agile and adaptable as we can be as a business whilst retaining our excellent firm wide culture, so there is a lot to think about in considering how we balance all of that with ensuring we are competitive in the market in terms of retention and attraction of staff and clients.  We expect to replace the occasional homeworking policy with new arrangements for agile working that aim to meet the needs of individuals and the business in the future.  We expect to seek your input for key aspects of these arrangements as we develop them, so there will likely be more surveys to come!  One of the areas we plan to put some thought into soon is how we can best support role specific training, and more general training and learning within a more agile and partially remote working environment.  Our plan for moving this forward is to form a small focus group with representatives from different roles across the business, who can help us come up with creative solutions.  A separate email on this topic will follow in the coming weeks with more information, but if you would like to contribute to this project then please let me or Karen know.

For those of you who are not on a full time furlough arrangement, you should by now have had an end of year appraisal discussion with your line manager within the flexible temporary framework that is in place.  The 2020/21 appraisal forms were sent out in July.  If you are a fee earner then your appraisal form will contain the standard objectives relevant to your role, and for business services, your agreed objectives (which may be short term ones as you adapt to the needs of the business during the current situation) should have been recorded in your appraisal form.  If that hasn’t happened yet then please work with your line manager to complete this process by the end of September.

Work on the Inpro Billing project is in the final stages! Testing has been taking place in the last few of weeks and has thrown out some bugs in how it interacts with our server, and Vince has been working on these issues with CPA. Testing of the SUN system and Inpro invoices has been going well, and refinements continue as the testing program progresses. There is further testing to be done and in light of the remaining bugs and a number of people being on holiday in August, we are pushing back the roll out from 1 September to 1 October. You have all been waiting for a number of years so we hope you can wait for just a few more weeks.

I also wanted to update you on our Business Development plans for the coming months which are aimed at being adapted to the ongoing remote working environment that prevents us from the more traditional face to face methods of BD.   That said, the government has recently announced a lifting of restrictions on conference events from October, so we will consider if that is likely to open up any relevant opportunities for the firm.  But in the meantime, we are exploring taking a more active role in virtual methods of attracting new clients such as webinar participation and hosting, and if you would like to be involved, or have seen any opportunities, please let Alex know.

There have already been a number of notable webinars and speaking events recently in which the firm has been involved.  For example:

* Mike was invited by CIPA to address the IP Institute of Canada and again the IP Owners Association, and he gave his presentation on ‘Artificial Intelligence: Patentability and Inventorship in Europe’.  This was hosted with Heli Pihlajamaa (the Director of Patent Law at the EPO))
* Mike has also spoken at a CIPA Event in the UK, covering two topics  ‘Subject matter eligibility for patent protection in Europe and US’ and  ‘Rules of Procedure of the European Patent Office Boards of Appeal’

In terms of upcoming webinars:

* Sarah D will be speaking at the virtual FICPI event in October
* Mike has been invited to give a follow up webinar on ‘Artificial Intelligence: Patentability and Inventorship in Europe’ annually to IP Institute of Canada; and
* Ian has been involved with preparing an article on IP Valuation which will publish in September in the first edition of a new FICPI publication, and he is also expecting to then host some related FICPI webinars

Also, well done to those involved with bringing us our first patent cases for Estee Lauder, and all those who have won new clients and had work transferred to us from competitor firms over the last few weeks.

The Marketing Group are very keen to receive more content for publication, so if any of you have capacity to help with this then please do speak to Alex.  Remember you can help the firm to reach as many people as possible by sharing and liking any articles that are posted on LinkedIn and Twitter, and by thinking about and exploring your own networks and passing on any potential ideas and leads.

Before I finish, I thought I would let you know that the bio’s for members of our Diversity and Inclusion Committee have now been published on our website.  The bio’s explain reasons for members joining the committee, and we hope these will be a reminder to clients of our commitment, and an influencing factor for potential clients and employees who we may engage in the future.  If any of you would like to join the committee or would like to find out more about being an ally to the committee, then please speak to any committee member.

So that is it again for another cascade… we will continue to keep you all updated on how our plans are progressing and we appreciate everything you are doing.

Stay safe and well, and see you again very soon.