

SILLS & BETTERIDGE CASE STUDY

Sills & Betteridge achieved FAST Platinum Award

Firm is one of only 3 UK law firms to achieve the FAST accolade.

Sills & Betteridge joined the FAST Compliance Programme in November 2003 and first achieved registration to the FAST Standard for Software Compliance (FSSC-1:2007) in 2005. In March 2007, following 3 consecutive years of registration to the Standard, the firm became the proud recipient of the FAST Platinum Award'

To begin the project in earnest, a FAST representative visited the offices to reiterate the importance of software compliance to Paul and six of the firm's partners and to talk through the process of achieving the FAST Standard for Software Compliance.

Case study highlights

- Clear IT policies give Sills & Betteridge good control over what is installed on all desktops
- Regular software audits ensure that the firm maintains software compliance
- Communication is key - employees were kept informed at all stages of the compliance project
- The IT team ensured buy-in and commitment to the software compliance project from the firm's partners

With recorded origins dating back to 1759, Sills & Betteridge has seen many changes in its history. Today the firm offers a full range of legal services for both private and business clients.

Following 3 recent mergers, the firm has 18 partners and 140 employees, its head office is in Lincoln and there are other offices in Spilsby Coningsby and Boston, Lincolnshire.

Two important factors in the growth of the firm over the last decade have been increased specialisation and the use of information technology. The firm is fully departmentalised and all fee earners and secretaries use a fully networked computer system.

IT challenges

With just two people managing and supporting the entire IT infrastructure and facilities for 140 staff across 4 offices, good management and control is essential. As such, in November 2003 the partners, guided by IT partner Gary Phillips, decided to join the FAST Compliance Programme to gain better control over its software assets. Paul Cowen, IT and Facilities Manager, commenced and managed the early stages of the IT compliance project.

“Our 'IT manual' is now much better and has tightened down a lot of things. I no longer have to request that screen savers be changed or that staff don't email pictures to each other, now it is set in a policy document.”

At this stage Paul attended the FAST Software Management training day and began the process of gathering software entitlement documentation. With the FAST programme well under way the firm achieved the Bronze stage in July 2004.

When Kristy Hill joined the firm as IT Assistant in 2005 she became actively involved in the project, attending FAST training courses to get up to speed. Next came the Silver stage. To achieve this, the firm had to demonstrate that its IT policies and procedures were robust and met the requirements of the FAST Standard. With some IT policies already in place, the firm had a good basis to work from.

“The support we’ve had from FAST at every stage of the project has been invaluable. FAST Advisors are always available on the end of the phone and for meetings to help and when we contact them we get a response to our query very quickly.”

“Our FAST Account Manager came in and advised us on what to change, so we updated our original policies and procedure document and made the changes to comply with FAST”, said Kristy.

The policies are displayed on Sills & Betteridge’s intranet to ensure that all employees have access to them and all updates are communicated by email.

Paul Cowen, IT Manager explains “Our ‘IT manual’ is now much better and has tightened down a lot of things. I no longer have to request that screen savers be changed or that staff don’t email pictures to each other, now it is set in a policy document. Everyone has the IT manual now and everyone knows what they can and can’t do.”

Prior to joining FAST, the firm had some processes in place to control and manage their software. In particular, purchasing was tightly controlled with all software purchases having to be approved by a partner. So, when the firm implemented a software audit tool (Visionsoft’s Visual Audit Pro), and carried out its first full electronic software audit, accompanied with a walk round audit, it revealed that from a compliance perspective they were in already in good shape.

Once all licence documentation had been found, the team created an Access database in which it recorded all software licence information. This provided a basis from which to establish what software was installed, what was being used and whether the firm had a licence for it. As part of this process software invoices are kept at an archive premises and hard copies of licences are stored in a locked cabinet.

Kristy comments “The licence reconciliation was the biggest challenge, but we overcame it by performing several licence counts, carefully recording all the information and methodically working through it.”

Following reconciliation, a small licence shortfall was rectified. Ongoing weekly audits, and a full annual audit, ensure that their compliance position is continuously maintained. “The controls we now have in place mean that we know that everyone is complying with the law. It’s given us peace of mind”, Kristy continues.

Once all the processes recommended by FAST were in place, the firm found it relatively simple to maintain registration to the FAST Standard for 3 consecutive years and achieve the Platinum Award.

Sills & Betteridge plan to maintain compliance and support the FAST Standard. They continue to utilise resources from FAST to keep up to date with IT legislation and other changes.

“The support we’ve had from FAST at every stage of the project has been invaluable. FAST Advisors are always available on the end of the phone and for meetings to help and when we contact them we get a response to our query very quickly.”

Knowing that they are one of only 4 UK law firms to have achieved the FAST Standard for Software Compliance doesn’t mean that Paul and Kristy can rest on their laurels. Their next challenge is to network all the offices together and roll the software compliance project out to the 3 new offices. Their FAST Account Manager, will be on hand to help!

For more information please call **0844 815 5742**, email **contactus@fast-compliance.co.uk** or visit **www.fast-compliance.co.uk**