



**Gibson & Gibson Lawyers**  
partner Jon Redman,  
practice manager Nikki  
Rollason and partner  
Rachel Cosentino

## Gibson & Gibson Lawyers

**Location:** St Georges Terrace, Perth CBD

**Staff:** 34 in total, 4 partners, 15 fee earners

**Key practice areas:** civil litigation, debt recovery, employment law and industrial relations, equal opportunity and discrimination, estate and succession planning, estate litigation and will disputes, family law, personal injury and workers compensation, property, sports and migration law

**G**ibson & Gibson Lawyers in Perth is a medium-size firm committed to ensuring its fee-earners have access to the same resources as its large law counterparts. Practice manager Nikki Rollason knows the benchmark is a high one, having previously worked for Allens Arthur Robinson, Malesons Stephen Jaques and Freehills.

Rollason's specific area of expertise is legal technology, but her current role sees her more involved in the practical running of the law firm, including marketing, human resources and research management.

The role of practice manager is a relatively new one at Gibson & Gibson, first created by the partnership three years ago. According to partner Rachel Cosentino, the addition of a practice manager has had an enormous impact on both the firm's day-to-day operations, as well as its technology strategy.

"It's a scary thing for the partners to take on and implement change without the support of a practice manager," she says.

Cosentino, who joined Gibson & Gibson as an articulated clerk eleven years ago, has a young family and works one day a week from home. She says this is just one example of the immeasurable impact of technology on the practice of law in the past decade.

One of the most significant technology investments made by the firm since the introduction of the practice manager role was in the LexisNexis Affinity practice management system, which Rollason now manages. The system has assisted with the implementation of processes and policies such as staff induction, knowledge transfer and succession planning.

"It was shortly after we had a practice manager employed that we joined the Affinity program," Cosentino says. "The partners would have been reluctant to do that without the practice manager's support."

Managing compliance and keeping abreast of changing legislative requirements is a central part of

any practice manager's role, and Rollason is no exception. Gibson & Gibson is one of the 42 firms in Western Australia that hold a Law Society of WA "Quality Practice Certificate". To maintain their accreditation, firms are audited annually, and the Affinity practice management system has assisted with meeting the strict statutory requirements for file management, trust accounting and client communication.

According to Cosentino, the firm's internal compliance policies and procedures meant the firm was also well prepared for recent legislative changes in WA, including the commencement of the WA Legal Profession Act on March 1.

Now that she has settled in at the firm, one of Rollason's first priorities is to rationalise the firm's existing client database. "Coming from my database background, I'm big on consistency, and that's something that we haven't done very well across the firm [in the past]. Different practice groups have been doing different things in different ways."

"For example, when entering the name of the client there are different abbreviations in use," she explains. "So you might end up with different client numbers for the same client. That's where the [remote support staff] in Sydney have been quite helpful in helping me develop ways of merging clients so we have one client number but we don't lose any data."

The remote management of the Affinity database has also taken some getting used to for Rollason, who has technical database experience and programming skills. However, resisting the urge to roll up her sleeves and delve into the technical side of the practice management software has become easier for Rollason as she adapts to the competing demands of her new role.

"It probably goes back to the role of practice manager: you are the conductor, you do have all of these outside people that you outsource to — our IT company, the library — I manage those relationships."

Another ongoing challenge for Rollason at Gibson & Gibson is the task of balancing the interests of the business against the philosophy of the firm. But it is one she welcomes. In contrast to her large law firm days, Gibson & Gibson's commitment to client service and its fee-earners means that fiscal concerns are not always paramount.

"Part of my role is to make a profit, which means higher billable rates, but you have to balance that against the philosophy of the firm," Rollason says.

Both Rollason and Cosentino agree that their firm's commitment to providing service for all kinds of clients, as well as allowing the partners to enjoy variety in their work, sets Gibson & Gibson apart from the competition.

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### CV: Nikki Rollason

Nikki Rollason is the practice manager at Gibson & Gibson law firm. Prior to joining the firm, Rollason took a break from the legal profession and worked as a project manager and business analyst with ANZ bank in Perth.

Rollason's specific area of expertise is legal technology but her current role sees her more involved in the day to day running of a law firm. She has worked as a practice and project services manager at Freehills and a legal support group site co-coordinator at Allens Arthur Robinson prior to that.

She was a conveyancing clerk with Malesons Stephen Jaques in Queensland before moving to Perth in 2004 to take up a position as the applied legal technology paralegal coordinator with the firm.

Rollason has a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) and a Bachelor of Law.

**By Laura MacIntyre**