



Interoperability: The New Buzz for E-Discovery Software

Imagine that a new associate has just joined your firm's e-discovery practice group. On his first day, he declares that he can slash the time your attorneys spend on busy work by as much as 50 percent with a few changes to your software portfolio.

Welcome to the future of electronic discovery project management — a world where all the tools you need to get the job done work together. This is the world of interoperability, a world in which first-

year associates send out holds for clients quickly and review more relevant documents sooner in the litigation lifecycle, and where in-house attorneys cut costs by performing early case assessments and reducing prep time for meet-and-confers. Interoperability delivers value for clients and competitive advantages for law firms.

The primary drive toward a more efficient e-discovery process boils down to a concern for

the bottom line: costs skyrocket as e-discovery drags on, or if early stages are mishandled. An IT professional's time is stretched thin and they may not be available to assist attorneys with tricky data transfers between Electronic Discovery Reference Model (EDRM) tools.

CONNECTING EDRM TOOLS

Most corporate legal and IT teams use a variety of software tools to complete the EDRM process. Whether they are housed behind corporate firewalls, hosted or provided as a service in the cloud, teams value an open integration approach to legal and e-discovery project management. They require software that connects all the different tools — from HR and asset management systems to collections and review tools.

It is now a well-accepted best practice for law firms and corporations to ensure that any software they purchase will interface with existing technology and be flexible enough to “talk” to any future software. It is essential for practice support managers to have the skills and tools necessary to move through the EDRM efficiently. Part of this involves making the smart, up-front decision to:

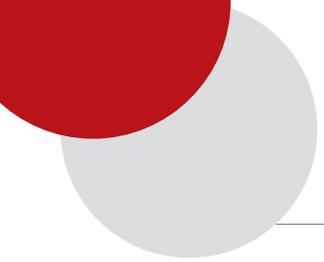
- **Enable cost savings**
- **Ensure user adoption**
- **Deliver competitive advantages to law firm clients**
- **Enable budget management and cost control for e-discovery projects that are managed in-house**

There may be a lot of buzz about market consolidation of technology in the e-discovery space, but legal teams won't be swapping out the tools they already have for a one-size-fits-all platform anytime soon. In the past few years, the e-discovery software market has been quickly consolidating with a number of mergers and acquisitions. Last November, Greg Buckles, of the eDiscovery Journal, provided an excellent list of major acquisitions. Many industry experts expect this trend to continue and the number one takeaway from anticipated outcomes has been the importance of interoperability.

Will newly consolidated vendors be able to provide end-to-end solutions for bringing e-discovery and risk mitigation in-house? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Brian Hill, of Forrester Research, writes that, “While integrated vendor advances can provide concrete benefits and help rationalize application infrastructure, no single vendor can address the full range of enterprise legal risk mitigation needs.”

In fact, Cathleen Pedersen, Director of Document Review Services at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, recently mentioned that she has been seeing a trend where legal departments adopt several different endpoint applications to tackle risk mitigation, litigation preparedness and each stage of the EDRM as they bring efforts in-house. Using several solutions only intensifies the need for interoperability.

Brett Burney, Principal of Burney Consultants, said in a recent Exterro, Inc. webcast, “You can't look at any of the EDRM



steps in their own silos. The reality of this comes down to finding the best solution to address the challenge you have whether you're a firm attorney looking for the best solution for document review or a corporate lawyer looking for information management, identification and legal hold solutions. Ultimately, you've got to have a seamless way to share information."

APPLICATION INTEGRATION TO ACHIEVE INTEROPERABILITY

Bill Ives at The FASTForward Blog says, "[enterprises] cannot expect to end up with a single provider." His conclusion? Application integration is paramount. With this in mind, it's a safe bet that interoperability will become a more recognized term in the next year and that open integrations will be seen as a critical factor for success. More and more software providers will build application programming interfaces (APIs) and connectors into their technology to meet market demand for integrated e-discovery solutions.

The day you find out that the solution you've selected for a particular task won't interface well with other e-discovery software solutions is not a happy day. This is especially alarming when one considers the sticker price of the application and efforts made to gain buy-in from the business and IT departments and achieve cross-departmental process implementation.

The importance of interoperability was emphasized by Ralph Losey, a Partner at Jackson Lewis LLP and E-Discovery Team leader, in a webcast predicting e-discovery trends for 2011: "[Interoperability] definitely should be on the checklist. You should be very cautious about using any product that can't flow through and export out to another

product. In today's world that's just a must; you've got to have it or you move on to something else."

SELECTING E-DISCOVERY SOFTWARE

There are, of course, other concerns when shopping for an e-discovery software vendor, but the importance of interoperability supports a general guideline: software should be doing most of the work for you. Two specific capabilities to look for are open integration with the myriad software applications in daily use, and automated business process management. With open integration, legal departments win the ability to maintain their organization's current technology investments, which can amount to a huge cost savings. With automated business process management, legal can relieve itself of much of the burden of coordinating projects that can span multiple organizational silos and dozens or hundreds of matters.

So what should savvy attorneys look for in e-discovery software? Although no one checklist can possibly cover every facet of a process as complex as purchasing legal process management software, the following are a few recommendations:

- **Legal project management: It is essential to have the ability to seamlessly move data and tasks through the entire lifecycle of the EDRM.**
- **Interoperability with current and future EDRM tools: This can be enabled through integrations, APIs, Web services, or through an open integration software platform.**
- **Robust support structure and services: This should include the often-difficult implementation and user adoption phases.**

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- **Configurability:** Business processes should not be revised for a software solution (unless these need revision anyway). The software should be flexible enough to suit existing practices.
- **Commitment to a best-of-breed approach from the software vendor.**

It's easy to forget that part of an application's feature set is whether it's being supported by a vendor who is willing (and has the capability) to configure or customize its products to fit customer needs. In 2011 and beyond, as more legal departments turn to vendors who will support them in taking e-discovery and risk mitigation in-house, the most attractive software will offer interoperability, open integration and automated business process management. **ILTA**

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