Case Management Systems
Define and Refine Your Business Processes

by Todd Haley of Spriggs & Hollingsworth

Business processes at law firms often are related directly to the management of specific cases or a set of cases. Spriggs & Hollingsworth is no exception. Because of the numerous complex matters the firm manages, our technology department was tasked with bringing in a case management system ("CM System") to better handle the increasing amount of e-mail, contacts, calendar/docketing events, work product-related documents and discovery documents. Ultimately, implementing a CM System completely revamped all of our existing business process models.

Our Case Management System

Our system is a SQL-based client-server system with an object-oriented relational database that allows the system to interconnect multiple data segments into a congruent case model. Diverse pieces of information are essential to the overall design, *e.g.*, contacts (name, address, expertise, personal information), courts (jurisdiction, state and personnel), plaintiff and defendant information (litigation history, medical history, specific case data), employment history (employer, start/end dates), expert witnesses (expertise, exam outlines), court filings (complaints, pleadings, discovery) and discovery tracking (medical records, document productions).

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Each case and its data are consolidated into a user-friendly design format that can be easily reviewed on a series of screens. These screens may be associated with one another in multidistrict litigation or consolidated cases. They also allow for data population from higher level associations into the individual cases to minimize data entry. Because of this simplified design, non-technical legal personnel use the system without having to be concerned about the technical configuration of database tables.

Using lawyer-driven requirements as a guideline, our Database Support Specialist designed over 200 customized reports for the CM System. This makes it very easy to retrieve diverse case and contact information and consolidate it into reports as needed.

CM System Redefines New Matter Workflow

Designing a new matter request for the CM System redefined the business processes associated with it. Now, when a new client-matter is created, an e-mail is distributed to the legal and technical teams. Upon receipt, our database support specialist schedules a development meeting to review case specifics. This meeting includes the lead case lawyer, designated support team members (additional attorneys, legal assistants, secretaries or other personnel), the database support specialist, director of litigation support, and the chief technology officer. The legal team determines what information will be required to manage the case and presents it to the technical team for design. The requirements of each department are considered to allow the technology team to tailor a case screen or series of screens specific to the lawyers' needs.

Once the technical team completes the basic screen design, there is another design meeting to further develop case structure. The proposed screen configuration is presented along with an explanation of the logic behind each custom-designed window. Further clarification is obtained to match the screens to the attorneys' exact requirements and finalize the case design.

When the new case structure is completed, our trainer provides instruction tailored to each legal team member's role. The instruction covers the customized case screens as well as refresher training on any intermediate or advanced features of the overall CM System. The technical team monitors the progress of individuals working on the case and schedules follow-up training sessions as necessary to ensure compliance with the firm's case management guidelines.

The business process and workflow documentation created for the CM System includes all aspects of team interaction, allowing the firm to review its processes periodically and define or redefine the role of each team member accordingly. Individuals can determine the time and effort required to accomplish certain tasks with more accuracy when they better understand their roles, maximizing the productivity of each person and creating a more effective team.

Benefits to Litigation Workflow

Comprehensive, centralized data storage for all case-related information, including plaintiff/defendant, expert witness and discovery/production information is an important benefit of the CM System and essential in managing the increasing complexity of our firm's multidistrict litigation cases.

Prior to implementing the CM System, data was stored in multiple locations, none of which were linked, creating much duplicate work. Consolidation of the separate information sources into a single data store has minimized redundancy and promoted better workflow. The entire legal team now shares information much more quickly and efficiently.

The CM System can generate a broad range of standardized reports to determine requirements, similarities and differences among nationwide, multidistrict litigation matters and consolidated cases. Thus, it allows for overall better management of complex cases.

The dynamic flow of information improved as well. Previously, case data was "pushed" out to the team, usually via e-mail or voice mail. This method proved inefficient because the data was often provided at a time when the individual could not focus on it easily. The CM System makes it easier for each team member to "pull" information on demand. Anyone on the team can review any aspect of the case immediately and conveniently.

A Winning Combination

Our CM System has provided structure for a more balanced workflow. The associated fields and screens within the system allow all members of the team to know what information is expected in order to fulfill the case requirements. With these new CM System-generated business processes and workflows, Spriggs & Hollingsworth is winning cases much more efficiently and cost-effectively.

About our author :: :: ::

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