

Technology takes firm to the next level.

By Phillip Hampton

The Consultant:

Phillip Hampton is the founder and president of LogicForce Consulting, a legal technology consulting firm based in Nashville, Tenn. He holds certifications in CT Summation and LexisNexis Time Matters software and has more than 20 years of experience in Information Technology.



The Firm:

Neal & Harwell is a 30-attorney firm in Nashville with multiple practice areas, including a litigation group that undertakes high-profile and complex civil and criminal defense actions. Since 1995, Neal & Harwell has outsourced its IT needs to LogicForce Consulting.

The Challenge:

Utilizing technology to gain an edge in litigating complex civil and criminal cases that involve large volumes of documents and electronic evidence.

Building on Success

Upon being hired by Neal & Harwell as the firm's Information Technology consultant in the mid-1990s, I realized I would be working with a firm that had a rich history of success on the national stage. From founding attorney Jim Neal's nationally publicized involvement as a prosecutor in the Watergate trial, to the firm's successful defense of clients in high-profile cases, the far-reaching influence of this small firm in Nashville, Tenn., can be seen in the press clippings that line the office walls.

While the firm enjoyed astounding success in the 1970s and 1980s, leadership accurately predicted technology would play an ever-increasing role in its ongoing success, especially with the explosion of less expensive computer technology and the evolution of the Internet. Managing partner Aubrey Harwell Jr. and William Ramsey, the firm partner in charge of technology decisions, wanted the firm's technology to be as top-notch as its legal talent. Early on, Harwell said he didn't ever want the firm to fall behind technologically. Having that kind of support from the top brass was crucial as we set about implementing sweeping changes.

Solidifying the Network

Because our ultimate goal was to enable the firm to take on increasingly complex and document-laden litigation cases, we first had to build a sound network infrastructure on which every other piece of our technology solution would be built. Probably the most common mistake firms make when trying to use the latest litigation, trial presentation or case management technologies is to install these systems on outdated,

undersized and inferior hardware. As a result, users end up frustrated, abandoning the technology when the systems don't work as advertised. Subpar computer resources will render even the most sophisticated applications useless.

Building a sound infrastructure at Neal & Harwell involved standardizing on a Microsoft Windows platform and the Intel Pentium chipset for all servers and workstations. Particular care was taken to equip computers with adequate memory and hard drive resources. The

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firm's aging network, a hodge-podge of daisy-chained hubs, was replaced with new network switches. Most importantly, an automatic upgrade schedule was initiated so the firm could budget for regularly replacing new servers and workstations on a three- to five-year cycle, depending on the function of the equipment.

Addressing Litigation Needs

Once we upgraded the network infrastructure, we set out to modernize the firm's litigation tools. The firm purchased a multi-user network version of CT Summation's Blaze LG Gold for the litigation support database, along with several standalone copies of the application to load onto laptops for use outside the office. The firm chose CT Summation because of its tight integra-

tion between deposition transcript processing, document database maintenance and the document imaging system. The CT Summation program has changed the way the firm's litigators work more than any other single technology tool.

Before implementing Blaze, I noticed that many of the firm's attorneys and paralegals reviewed and categorized case documents by creating an index either in a word processing document, a spreadsheet or a Microsoft Access database. To gain acceptance of the new software, I instructed the users to create indices in Blaze, where the litigation-specific fields and table structures already were in place. From there, we pro-

LCD monitors, a bar code scanner and plenty of cables.

We chose TrialDirector for the trial presentation system because of its tight integration with Blaze and its ease of use in the courtroom. In most litigation cases, the evidentiary documents are first loaded into Blaze, where the case team can work on a daily basis via the network. When the case moves to trial, it's copied to a trial laptop, which has stand-alone copies of Blaze and TrialDirector. TrialDirector can be activated from within the Blaze environment so the person responsible for presenting documents on the courtroom monitors never has to leave the Blaze environment to locate and present an exhibit.

On the Road

Because cases often are tried out of town, it's necessary to equip a war room that can function as a remote office for the attorneys and staff on location. Such was the case for Ramsey and his team in a large civil defense trial in a federal district court in Chattanooga, Tenn., in January 2002. In this document-intensive case that involved claims of Medicare fraud and abuse, every document had been scanned into Blaze and loaded into TrialDirector for trial presentation. We loaded the case onto two computers, one serving as a backup.

Because this case involved multiple parties, each with their own counsel at the defense table, we were faced with the challenge to provide everyone at the defense table a clear view of the documents being presented to the jury and judge. In addition to bringing in extra LCD monitors, we used a video graphics adapter distribution amplifier to send a video signal from our laptop to the court video system and the monitors at the defense table. Our attorneys used the Blaze database heavily before and during the trial to keep up with the huge collection



Neal & Harwell uses CT Summation's Blaze LG Gold for litigation and inData's TrialDirector for trial presentation.

gressed to loading deposition transcripts, scanned images and optical character recognition text into Blaze.

We ultimately implemented an in-house document scanning operation to handle the firm's litigation needs. However, outside vendors still are sometimes used for extremely large cases. The firm doesn't use outside document coding companies because the attorneys believe that those working the case can best categorize the documents in the litigation database.

The Trial Tools

We also installed trial presentation tools to use once the case goes to trial. We equipped the firm with an electronic court kit that included a Dell laptop for use during trials, inData Corp.'s TrialDirector software, Microsoft PowerPoint, an Epson liquid crystal display projector, a portable screen, a Hewlett-Packard multifunction unit for courtroom use, external audio speakers, a video input-output switch box, extra

Training is Crucial

Another pitfall for some firms when implementing new technology is the failure to dedicate sufficient resources (*i.e.*, time and money) to training. To avoid this, I became a CT Summation certified trainer and subsequently held classes for the firm's paralegals and attorneys. We also acquired certification for TrialDirector and provided training classes for that suite of programs.

At Neal & Harwell, paralegals attended eight hours of our Blaze core competency training curriculum, while each attorney attended two-hour basic training sessions, as well as follow-up lunches and additional sessions on various litigation technology topics. Furthermore, we provide pre-trial refresher courses on TrialDirector and Blaze techniques for those responsible for courtroom presentation of evidence. In some trials, a trained technologist from our company accompanies the trial team to court to operate the equipment.

of complex documents, which included medical records, billing manifests and financial spreadsheets. We used TrialDirector to present trial exhibits.

Universal Acceptance

The trial in Chattanooga was one of the first major tests of our new litigation toolbox, and it was a huge success. Through this, we set a proven record of success for the software and hardware systems in a pressure-packed, adverse environment. We also had a number of users trained to be intimately familiar with the systems. Suddenly, more attorneys were interested in using this technology for their cases.

Today, these tools are viewed as indispensable when managing litigation cases of all sizes at Neal & Harwell, and attorneys are confident that the firm's technology now matches its legal prowess. **loc**

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