

CASE STUDY

INDUSTRY	LAW (TRIAL PRACTICE)
LOCATION	CINCINNATI, OHIO
COMPANY	JOHN J. MUELLER, LLC.
ORGANIZATION SIZE	SMALL

"MasterFile combines into a single, integrated application the case-analysis tools and document-management tools the firm needs, with the argument-analysis tool the firm sought. Notably, MasterFile offered case-analysis tools that are similar, but superior, to the case-analysis tools that CaseMap offers. On using MasterFile, the firm discovered it could manage players and documents far more easily in MasterFile than in CaseMap. ...

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COMPANY OVERVIEW

John J. Mueller, LLC, is a 4-person firm with offices in Cincinnati, Ohio. From that one location, we practice law in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and New York, specializing primarily in legal matters involving claims of lawyer malpractice, lawyer professional-responsibility issues, and the defense of lawyers in professional disciplinary proceedings. To a lesser extent, the firm's practice includes rendering assistance to lawyers and law firms involved in breakups and mergers and matters relating to lateral moves by lawyers from one firm to another.

THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Our firm faced the challenge of finding a single, integrated application capable of managing discovery evidence – keeping track of myriad records for each client including calls, notes, contacts, e-mails, court-related documents such as pleadings, interrogatories, motions, etc. – and managing facts developed therefrom, as well as managing the firm's internal "case file" relating to the matter. For us, a critically important feature of any solution would be the ability to record, analyze, and, then, test arguments – legal and factual – advanced by the firm or opponents.

Equally important was portability and remote accessibility. A lawyer frequently handling matters distant to Cincinnati needed remote access to the entire contents of the case file – sometimes, this need arose even locally, when the lawyer was disconnected from the office. The application therefore had to allow for remote access and synchronization of the work by various staff working simultaneously, or at different times, and in different locales, and had to allow for portability of the entire database.

THE SOLUTION

We had used the CaseSoft suite of products (CaseMap, TimeMap, NoteMap, and TextMap) for case analysis over a considerable length of time. But, CaseMap offered no realistic or practical document-management functions and therefore, the firm had been using a document-management application, Replica RLS, to manage litigation and other documents including case filings, discovery requests, and written discovery responses.

After extensively searching for and comparing numerous options from among the available applications, the firm chose MasterFile and its optional OCR/PDF Evidence Cruncher. MasterFile combines into a single, integrated application the case-analysis tools and document-management tools the firm needs, with the argument-analysis tool the firm sought. Notably, MasterFile offered case-analysis tools that are similar, but superior, to the case-analysis tools that CaseMap offers. On using MasterFile, the firm discovered it could manage players and documents far more easily in MasterFile than in CaseMap (with its reliance on “short names” to manage those matters) and that MasterFile’s document-management capabilities and features were vastly superior to the tools that Replica RLS offered.

Furthermore, MasterFile contains an innovative feature: doc-link technology. Simply stated, doc-links are descriptive hyper-links that one can create with a single mouse click to reliably connect and associate documents, extracts from documents, fact-entries, authority-entries or research-entries, and the like as well as to substantiate argument, in MasterFile – and these links account to some degree, for the ease in managing documents, knowledge and information in MasterFile. More important to the firm, MasterFile stores all case documents and other material, in any format, within the case database, with no external file links whatsoever. Together with its doc-link technology, this eliminated what had proved a recurring and rather annoying problem when using CaseMap – the need to replace CaseMap’s links to documents, since it had no repository, when using a replica of the CaseMap database on a portable, remote, or non-network computer

This highlights another aspect of MasterFile that has truly impressed us: the unique way MasterFile synchronizes databases. CaseMap has a “master” database that users duplicate to their notebooks. But, because CaseMap stores no documents in its “master” database, no documents move with a replica to your notebook. The replica contains the original path to linked documents and this explains why, in CaseMap, one needs to replace all of CaseMap’s links to documents whenever one uses a replica of the database on a portable, remote, or non-network computer. Secondly, in CaseMap, to synchronize a replica to its “master” database, a user must reintegrate the replica into the master – called “mirroring” – and this occurs in one direction

only: from the source [notebook] computer to the “target” computer on which the “master” resides. Any loss or corruption of a replica can create far-reaching problems in CaseMap. To continue working on the notebook, after “mirroring”, one has to re-create a new “replica”.

Not so in MasterFile.

In contrast, MasterFile uses a two-way synchronization between replicas of the database and the original or master. Its security and reliability is critical to us because it allows all members of the firm to work on the same matter, both in the office and out-of-office, simultaneously, to be kept up to date with each other and remain completely confident of the integrity of the database. Synchronization is simply the matter of any user selecting the appropriate cases and in one mouse click, updating them all.

We found too that the application provides a more comprehensible analysis of the case. For example, MasterFile provides views that offer a visual snapshot of the facts, their analysis and the case time line or chronology. One can “see” the case more easily with this visual snapshot than one could “see” the same case in CaseMap.

Last, but not least, “Issues and Topics”, a feature MasterFile offers but should more aggressively highlight, has been invaluable. Using this feature, the firm integrates its own “case file” materials into the litigation case database while simultaneously segregating those internal “case file” materials from case-preparation materials for easy reference and uses. This really allows the firm’s lawyer, when out of the office, to access everything that relates to the case – case papers (such as letters to opposing counsel, experts, and third parties), papers filed in or with the court, discovery documents, deposition transcripts ... and the case analysis of the facts developed during discovery.

THE OCR/PDF EVIDENCE CRUNCHER

The firm decided to acquire the optional MasterFile Evidence Cruncher as well for several reasons. The Evidence Cruncher is an OCR module that uses the ABBYY OCR engine to convert images and other scanned documents to searchable PDF format with a remarkable degree of accuracy.

When one installs the Evidence Cruncher, it becomes an integrated part of MasterFile, allowing seamless operation of the separate application functions. The Evidence Cruncher automatically loads the “PDF” document it creates, and searchable text generated, into MasterFile’s document repository. Previously, the firm used Replica RLS, in conjunction with the standalone applications OmniPage Pro and ABBYY Fine Reader, but this process required a substantial amount of staff time first scanning the documents to Replica RLS’ required format and then initiating the OCR process. The OCR file had to be then manually associated with the scanned file before importing into Replica RLS. The Evidence Cruncher shortens and streamlines the work flow on this process, handling the OCR processes automatically, and reduces the document-processing time involved in document management.

For us, the Evidence Cruncher truly shines in the document-production process during litigation. Just as far more expensive applications, like Caselogistix, allow a lawyer to select, and to produce, documents from the document population on a piecemeal basis, MasterFile likewise allows the firm to do so. Collaboration between staff and lawyers can take place over time to decide which documents to produce or to disclose and the production can be paused and resumed as needed. Once the staff and lawyer have completed the selection, the lawyer can delegate actual production of the documents. MasterFile maintains a history of productions, documents produced (or production sets), and the like as permanent records in the database.

BENEFITS

MasterFile itself offers an unprecedented level of flexibility, adaptability and affordability that integrates case analysis, evidence and document management and, thus, provides an extraordinarily powerful litigation-support tool. This adaptability allows a lawyer to make MasterFile work the way he or she does, as opposed to making the lawyer adapt to the way the technology works

The combination of MasterFile's flexibility and its remarkable adaptability creates a truly powerful analytical tool that places lawyers in small firms and solo practices on a technologically equal footing with large firms that use applications costing several times more than MasterFile. Its price, which medium and small sized law firms, even individual practitioners, should find economical and affordable makes MasterFile the premier offering and the logical choice of this type of litigation-support software for smaller or medium sized firm.

OTHER

Until MasterFile, the firm had never encountered support for any application that even approached CaseMap's outstanding level of support and technical assistance. However, it has been the firm's experience that the level and quality of MasterFile's technical support has exceeded, by far, that which CaseSoft had provided the firm in the past.

MasterFile have responded promptly (sometimes immediately) to every request by the firm for information, technical assistance, or support for the application. When doing so, MasterFile's support staff courteously responded to those requests. More important, MasterFile's support staff responded in a way that conveys a dedication to serving the needs and interests of the users of MasterFile application unsurpassed by any service provider we have experienced.