

BUSINESS & CAREERS

New advanced browser-based system makes searching easier

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Lawyers at Cassels Brock & Blackwell LLP are spending less time — a lot less time — looking for the elusive legal needle in a haystack. The Toronto-based law firm has become the first in the country to implement iManage Universal Search, an advanced browser-based search system.

As a result, the more than 200 lawyers in the firm can now search through more than four million archived documents in less than 10 seconds.

Lending lawyers a hand is the goal of the system. “This tool was developed for law firms,” said John Gillies, director of practice support with Cassels Brock. “It was designed to take account of the true peculiarities of the practice of law.

“This system enables you to find information, cross-reference information, and it does it all intuitively. The benefit is huge improvements in productivity,” explained Neil Araujo, vice-president of marketing at Autonomy Corporation, the San Jose, Calif.-based technology firm that sells the online legal system.

Comprehensive search tools are essential for lawyers, he added. “Our legal system is based on precedents. A search is very intrinsic to the working practice of a lawyer.”

Searching can also be very irritating. That was what Cassels Brock heard from its lawyers during focus group sessions held to explore the barriers to practising more effectively and efficiently. “Searching was identified as a real difficulty and time consuming,” said Gillies.

The new system, a Google-like

enterprise search tool, not only allows lawyers to sort information, now they can filter it by author, sender and receiver, among other criteria. They can sort and narrow by date or by one particular lawyer.

As well, law firms have unique needs when it comes to archiving and then retrieving data and information. Organizationally, they’re unlike hierarchical corporations. Law firms have large, flat structures, with the makeup of lawyer teams often changing with each particular matter and the fact patterns never repeating exactly, making it difficult to know exactly where to look for precisely what is needed.

“The same type of document can also be named differently depending on the person who created it and the circumstances under which it was created,” noted Gillies. “For example, a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) could be called a confidentiality agreement, a proprietary rights agreement, an NDA or titled with the name of the client or transaction for which it was created.” iManage looks through the document’s text and its metadata, producing search results in a carefully calibrated relevance order.

And this is only the beginning. The new system takes lawyers into Web 2.0 territory, improving search effectiveness and ultimately leading to social tagging, the ability for any lawyer to post helpful comments about their own or another lawyer’s documents.

Simplicity is also a key feature. “There is a search bar,” explained Araujo. “You type in keywords or you can go to a web



Gillies

page,” he added. “We’ve built it to be omnipresent.”

“It’s completely web-based and, therefore, much faster,” he added. “User interfaces are really simple — they can be searched from an iPhone.”

From the firm’s point of view, simplicity is also an important feature. “It’s a browser-based application. It’s not a question of having to install anything,” said Gillies.

Cassels Brock unveiled the system, which it has branded internally as SearchWell, over a day and a half in anticipation of loads of questions and potential issues, he noted. “There was not a single call to the technical desk. This rolled out without a problem of any sort.”

In the past, searches were made using a very limited native search tool that is standard in many law firms. This type of system takes considerably longer, requires very specific search protocols and sometimes produces inconsistent results. “The native search tool in all document management system tools are intended to fetch a particular document or show recent documents,” said Gillies. “There was no other manner to find information.

“It was very frustrating,” he added. “Lawyers would frequently come up empty-handed.”

iManage, noted Araujo, “is a brand new capability.”

Araujo believes systems like iManage will become standard operating procedure in law firms. “It’s only a matter of time. This will become like the phone or fax machine. It has,” he noted, “huge relevance to the billable hour.”