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Legal Tech New York - what was hot

by Charles Christian

Due to the dates clash with the Legal IT Show in London, we were unable to make it out to New York at the start of the month for LegalTech, so we asked independent EDD IT consultant Andrew Haslam to take some soundings from the British contingent over there and prepare this report for The Orange Rag...

The dust has settled on LegalTech 2008, and next year the show will be even bigger, as even more of the Hilton is dedicated to exhibition stands. As ever, the event was dominated by all things electronic disclosure, as several UK visitors commented "Why don't they just rename it EDD Technology Show?" That being said, there were pointers to other trends in amongst the clamour of the "e with everything" vendors.

The thing to remember about LegalTech, it that, crowded and overwhelming though it might seem, what happens on the conference and exhibition floors is just the proverbial tip of an iceberg. The demonstrations, meetings, corporate parties and casual conversations that occur off-site are the vast "unseen" mass of interactions that makes this event the premiere occasion of the Legal IT calendar.

So what were the main points that came out of the show?

Large US corporates are renewing their KM initiatives, this time around driven by the spiralling costs of litigation and its associated disclosure demands, but also fuelled by regulatory pressures. All of this is leading back to renewed interest in search. The need to be able to index and search effectively is critical for EDD but are now being deployed across the enterprise. We are back to the mantra of "search is king", but with the use of analytics software such as Recommind, Autonomy, Inference, etc. also in the mix.

Reza Alexander of DLA Piper, who showed devotion above and beyond the call of duty by visiting LegalTech whilst on holiday in New York, was one of a number of UK litigation support professionals who commented on the rise of analytics software. "The use of data sampling methodology, and the emerging and finally accepted near dupe, data clustering and intelligent search technologies, to increase precision and confidence in

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high volume document review of electronic data". Others commented on the steady adoption of Autonomy's software by a number of vendors, with IntroSpect being the most high profile.

Reza's picks for products to watch are kCura's Relativity and Content Analyst, with Discovery Mining's integrated analytic and document clustering also being singled out for praise. The new look IntroSpect also received a lot of interest, since they were taken over by Autonomy a lot of money has been pumped into the product and the new version showed the effects of it all. Pity they had to show their nervousness at the strength of the opposition by removing a banner for one of their competitors from a pillar too close to their stand for their liking. Simon Price at Recomind was busy throughout the week, with queues forming for demonstrations at one point.

The big four accountancy practices were very active at the conference and exhibition, with a couple of presentations questioning how long law firm litigation support services would be needed, as clients started to deliver on 3-4 year programmes to take information management and disclosure responsibilities in-house. As one CIO commented; "We have 30 cases on the go around the world, 30 different law firms, 30 different vendors crawling over our data. I'll take care of that and save a significant amount of money on economies of scale, and the law firms can do what they do best, which is provide professional advice, not act as a data collection bureaux." Whilst the UK litigation support community is probably still safe in their jobs, the move into the arms of accountancy firms could add extra pressure on some of the smaller vendors in our marketplace.

The US adoption of Sharepoint as the core of their intranet environments continues with both Star Law and Incisive demonstrating integrated suites of products. It will be interesting to see how this fares over the next year, with Jan Durant at Lewis Silkin, sure to be keeping an eye on developments as her Sharepoint project unfolds. Also, as Ann Hemming, fresh into her first week at Tikit, commented; "Office 2007 seems to have reached tipping point in US law firms, with interest in training and Word template management very high".

Several observers noted that this was finally the year that America really discovered the rest of the world. Unicode compliance, that is the ability to store and search foreign language characters sets, so long paid lip service to, is actually starting to be fully implemented in products, with Russian and Chinese/Asian alphabets being proudly shown off at a number of stands. Also, there was renewed confirmation of jurisdictional and data protection issues coming to the forefront, with Japan and Australia being quoted as countries joining the EU in opposing data being processed in the USA.

A number of people found the updates on the Federal rules on civil procedure interesting, though as one observer rather wryly noted; "The UK concepts of proportionality and reasonableness seem to be making a welcome appearance in the US courts". On this side of the Atlantic, the lack of case law, coupled with judicial indifference to the issue, continues to stifle progress. That being said, there are signs that the UK bench is awaking to the problems, and 2008 could well be the year that the mass of mid-tier law firms finally grasp the electronic "nettle" and we see real advances made.

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Mixed reactions to the conference content, some found it excellent, others were disappointed by the lack of new developments, overall it was fair to say, that if you were a newcomer, then you would be very well educated, for the experienced there was a lot of repetition, with very few “nuggets” in evidence. The lack of new developments was replicated on the exhibition floor, with most people seeing signs of a maturing marketplace as products consolidated their functionality. On the all pervasive litigation support side, all software seems to be in varying stages of fully embracing electronic data processing, embedding analytics software and becoming fully Unicode compliant. As ever there was number of new US service suppliers, the trick is to see how many are there again in 2009, then bother to make contact.

Tikit's Liam Flannigan took time out from meetings to collect the award for Interwoven Partner of the Year, and also open discussions with an EDD vendor in order to explore Tikit's entry into the UK marketplace. Also showing their faces in New York were representatives from Delloites, Discovery Mining, Ernst & Young, Epiq (who arranged a very successful Super Bowl party in a crowded sports bar), Hobs Legal Docs, LDM, Legal Inc, Palmer Legal Technology, Recomind, and TRILANTIC (also a successful event host and conference sponsor). A number of these firms were finalising details of alliances with vendors and products, expect a rash of announcements over the next few weeks.

TRILANTIC's session on International eDiscovery Rules and Standards was praised by a number of people, with one comment being; “It's apparent that privacy and jurisdictional concerns will grow in importance and complexity as the global nature of eDisclosure continues to expand, with each jurisdiction bringing its own challenges. It seems the growing need to consider off-shore eDisclosure reviews will also draw attention to these challenges. LegalTech provided an excellent forum for discussing such challenges with lawyers and litigation professionals from all corners of the globe.”

Both UK and US vendors expressed a slight backlash to the hordes of freebie collecting exhibition attendees, typically these delegates hail from small or one person law firm from Hicksville, Nowhere. They roam the halls, clearing stands of pens and “goodies” in locust like swarms. Many vendors are now retreating from the main floor, booking a hotel suite and running focussed client demos and user groups- so the conference is now spilling over into surrounding hotels.

All the UK suppliers reported a very healthy show, with again a feeling that the market was maturing, with the bigger players starting to dominate. For many the show is the opportunity to catch up with clients and existing contacts, a number reported that they spent most of their time in meetings and private demonstrations, adding weight to the strategy of pulling back from the main exhibition floor.

The hot ticket of the corporate events, was an invite to the Lexis Nexis party, as Terry Harrison from Hobs Legal Docs put it; “1000 people in the swish NY bar Duvet – all ice sculptures, white leather loungers and drapes and an impressive aquarium containing jellyfish! I am told that it appeared regularly in the TV hit “Sex in the City”. Needless to say, your author did not qualify for inclusion in this august company.

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Finally, a word on what, for many people is the main reason for attending the show, the chance to network and socialise. Some familiar faces re-appeared, with Michael Conde of LTL days making the trip from Canada to assess enterprise products, with assistance from Andrew Terret, the Mason's Knowledge Manager back at the turn of the century.

The Brits that make it across the pond are a self selecting group of the key players in the UK legal IT environment. More than one person noted that they fitted a month's worth of meetings into the weekend before and the days of the conference. Alliances are formed, information shared and initiatives developed. The fact that it all happens in one of the most exciting and vibrant cities in the world, and with a killer exchange rate, is a happy coincidence that adds to the charms of LegalTech. Roll on 2009!