



Severson & Werson Case Study

Background

For over 60 years, Severson & Werson has provided consistent, reliable, and unwavering support to their clients. Their ethic is service in its truest sense. Severson & Werson's attorneys are taught from the start that clients know their own business, its environment, and their ultimate needs better than attorneys do. Attorneys first listen closely, consider fully, and then provide honest, straightforward advice and advocacy.

Headquartered in San Francisco, Severson & Werson have a number of specialized practices, including banking, auto finance, construction, telecom, insurance, and sports law. The litigation-focused firm serves clients ranging from financial institutions to professional athletes.

Bruce Furukawa is the Technology Partner for Severson & Werson and a member of the firm's litigation practice group. He has negotiated and implemented e-discovery protocols and developed strategies for cost-effectively producing electronic documents in both federal and state courts.

The Case

Severson & Werson were representing a structural engineer caught in the middle of costly litigation. The structural engineer was a sub-consultant to the architect on a condo-hotel project where the general contractor had taken more than 300 days longer than anticipated to finish. This meant the project, which began well before the real estate market crashed in 2008, was not completed until just after the crash. The owner subsequently had to auction off several condo units below the original asking price. As a result, the owner sued the general contractor for \$9 million in revenue lost due to delays, while the general contractor sued the design professionals for \$5.8 million, attributing most of the delays to Severson & Werson's client.

The chain of command on the condo-hotel project was complex: the owner/developer hired the general contractor who then in turn hired a number of subcontractors. When emails were sent, they were often reproduced multiple times, once for each party involved, becoming a repetitive portion of the documents required for review. Even excluding the duplicates, many of the documents were versions and reiterations of similar emails.

In total, a quarter of a million documents were received in productions from multiple parties. These documents had to be reviewed on a limited budget. To make matters worse, Severson & Werson didn't have enough time to thoroughly review every single document -- a problem attorneys face more and more in the age of electronic discovery.

Enter Relativity

To sort through 250,000 documents, the case team at Severson & Werson dumped all of the data into Relativity, the review platform Bruce and his team use through Evolve Discovery, a Relativity Premium Hosting Partner. His plan was to use Relativity's text analytics to organize the data based on his expertise and understanding of the issues of the case. Bruce first provided an example set of documents to train Relativity on the issues that were the highest priority.

Building the example set was easy: Bruce used 200 documents that his client, along with attorneys who had been working on the case, suggested were the most relevant to specific issues based on their intimate knowledge. Relativity used those 200 expertly arranged documents to search the entire discovery database and make coding suggestions for the issues found in each document.

"Like a magnet passing across a desk covered in filings, Relativity picked up similar documents and grouped them," said Bruce. "It allowed us to quickly sort out groups of obviously nonresponsive, repetitive documents."

Severson & Werson could then focus their attorneys and paralegals on groups that would likely be responsive -- documents that were similar to the small example set -- sorted by issues such as concrete embeds, structural steel, floor levelness, etc. This could also ensure coding uniformity, which is often lost on teams of 20 to 100 reviewers working at the same time.

Fast Results

For the senior attorneys on this case, the initial results of Relativity's suggestive coding allowed them to obtain a bird's-eye view of the composition of the case, so they could predict the time and cost of review for their client with little guesswork. Associates were able to pull up the hottest documents at the beginning of the review phase.

"If e-discovery is like panning for gold, then Relativity let us examine the gold first without sifting through layers upon layers of sand," said Bruce.

Based on Severson & Werson's experience, traditional linear review often has attorneys reviewing documents at rates ranging from 60 to 100 documents per hour. With their new Relativity workflow, Bruce's team could review 175 documents per hour for batches suggested to be nonresponsive. The documents suggested to be responsive were reviewed at a consistent rate of 120 documents per hour.

In the end, senior attorneys were ready to prep for depositions and trial within two weeks of having only three associates reviewing the hottest documents. The initial review cost a little more than \$100,000 using contract attorneys at a rate of \$55 per hour. If Severson & Werson had reviewed all of the documents using a standard review time and cost -- assuming 60 documents per hour at \$55 per hour -- the review would have cost approximately \$200,000. Based upon these metrics, Severson & Werson realized a 50 percent savings for their client in attorneys' fees by eliminating hundreds of hours of review time. These results are scalable, as well. If this were a case that required associates who billed at \$200 to \$300 per hour, Relativity would have saved Severson & Werson's client up to \$400,000.

An Efficient Review

In a short time, Severson & Werson managed to reduce their electronic pile of 250,000 documents to 1,000 that could be immediately reviewed for depositions and trial by the most experienced attorneys. They unearthed the documents that proved their client wasn't at fault. From start to finish, they cut the typical time and cost for review in half.

Bruce found the needles in the haystack and showed his client the value of text analytics in Relativity by allowing the most expensive senior attorneys to focus on a short list of documents early into the case. The cost savings and strategic advantage text analytics technology has brought to Severson & Werson's clients has far outweighed their upfront investment. Bruce believes that leveraging Relativity in this way will become the standard rather than the exception.



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