

4 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CHOOSING AN E-DISCOVERY MOBILE APP

Adi Elliott of Epiq Systems advises firms on starting the search for the right app.

BY IAN LOPEZ

In much the way technology served as the catalyst to the modern office, mobile apps are functioning as the impetus for technological expansion. While law as an industry might drag its feet in the tech race, the solutions are out there for conducting many of its duties from anywhere remotely. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in e-discovery, where mobile services have alleviated a once arduous discovery process to a procedure that can be conducted from anywhere at any time. Despite good intentions, not all e-discovery apps are created equal, and not all align with the goals and needs with every firm, which begs the question: How do I know which app best meets my discovery needs?

Adi Elliott, vice president of market planning at Epiq Systems, shared some insights on what firms should think about before deciding on the right e-discovery mobile app.



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1. “A clear definition of what problem you’re trying to solve.”

Both within discovery and beyond, there’s no shortage of problems that apps purport the capability to solve. Still, the burden falls on firms to ensure that their apps of choice can handle their discovery tasks, thus the necessary first step becomes defining what it is you’re exactly trying to do.

“The number one thing people often forget is that e-discovery can mean a lot of different discreet problems for a lot of different discreet audiences,” Elliott said. He added that it’s essential for a firm to know “what about [its] process today as it exists” makes sense of the need to have a mobile app.

“That might sound obvious, but people don’t start there,” he said,

added that among those failing to consider this are software companies themselves.

In order to do this, Elliott noted that firms need to ask themselves how a process is appropriate for mobile, as well as “what mobile brings to the equation.”

“When people think of e-discovery, they often think of attorneys reviewing documents ... but if you have a big e-discovery review, mobile doesn't really make a ton of sense,” Elliott explained. He added that while mobile may be “a cool feature,” if a task calls for a lawyer to have, say, multiple monitors running at a time, the firm “wouldn't want them on an iPad or iPhone” conducting discovery.

2. “Feedback from the people that would actually use the app.”

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but this adage was pretty much irrelevant through most of the history of the modern workplace. In the world of years past, IT made the call on what the enterprise did or did not use, virtually independent of those tasked with employing the technology for their daily tasks.

In recent years, however, this pre-supposition has been rendered nearly obsolete. Elliott marked this shifting of the paradigm at the advent of the iPhone, a moment in time where the control went from IT to the user.

“The way people would buy software in general is changing,” Elliott said. “It used to be that IT would make decisions about what kind of software an organization would run. And they might get some feedback from groups about the software, but honestly, IT could easily trump the opinion of the user.”

Now, however, Elliott said that “not only is the user experience a key element, it might be the number one element” in making a decision.

“Before the consumerization of technology, largely driven by the iPhone and mobile technology devices, the IT organization's specific agenda for what an organization bought, in C-level, executives didn't really care,” he said. “The reason C-level folks didn't care was because they didn't use any of this stuff. They all had secretaries, and they barely used email. ... The IT organization, it wasn't that they were better able to make decisions, it's just that no one that could care to trump them.”

3. Take note of “your mobile device landscape” and plan accordingly.

In the not so distant past, Microsoft was behind most of the products and software in the office, though over the past decade, this has started to change.

“It's all about where the users are,” Elliott said. “And you only develop where users are.”

So where have the users gone? Elliott said that Android is now a key player, while “development generally starts with Apple's iOS platform and expands out.” Even with this sense of uniformity, Elliott said “each organization has a different device texture,” which means that your landscape is defined by more than the operating system upon which your firm operates.

This leads to the question of whether a firm wants to deploy an e-discovery app that's native (developed for a particular device) or web-based. Elliott said, “If, for instance,

in your organization, you're willing and wanting to support a really wide group of devices, then that's probably going to lead you more towards a web app.” However, he said that native apps, being geared toward specific ecosystems, might enable “a richer experience” depending on your workflow.

4. The size of the company developing the app and whether it's public or private.

Tech's rapid growth is providing solutions to age-old problems at a rate faster than ever before. At the same time, this can lead not only to your e-discovery technology being dated, but also possibly nonexistent.

This is particularly true with apps, as often a company will release an app that users enjoy, only to sell its own company to a larger company, potentially resulting in the discontinuation of the app. Thus, Elliott advised against building “a key element of your workflow around an app that can disappear tomorrow.”

“Any privately funded company with outside investment, they're intrinsically looking to get bought at some point,” he said. “That is their game plan ... so if you are looking at an app like that, know that ... they are looking to cash out.”

He added that, if posed with the decision between an app provided by “a reliable b2b public business company” and that of a privately funded start up, he would go with the former.