LJN LAW JOURNAL NEWSLETTERS

LJN'S
LEGAL TECH
Newsletter®

Volume 23, Number 11 • February 2006

ALM

PRACTICE TIP

Best Option for E-Mail Recall, and Other Tips

By Brett Burney

E-mail can dominate our lives. If you're reading this, I'm guessing you monitor several e-mail accounts every day and toil over a wireless e-mail device when you leave the office. E-mail is the first thing you check in the morning and the last thing you check before going home.

So if e-mail is so ubiquitous in our lives, why don't more people follow some general, common sense guidelines for composing, addressing and sending e-mails? This isn't a column on security; it's a look at some fundamental concepts that will keep you savvy about your e-mail habits.

Oops, I Didn't Mean to Send That

Sometimes the "Send" button is our worst enemy. How many times have you composed an e-mail in haste or anger and fired it off only to realize two seconds later that you sincerely regret what you wrote?

It happens all the time, and the really scary part is that there is no definitive way to snatch that message back — once you hit "Send," it's too late.

Microsoft Outlook offers a feature called "Recall This Message," which sounds like it should yank an e-mail back, but it is, for the most part, useless. If you attempt

continued on page 6

Next-Generation CRM: Achieving the True 360-Degree Client View

By Allison Nussbaum

When Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology was first utilized in a corporate setting, fewer firms understood the vast possibilities offered by CRM solutions and tended to use it for things they already understood, such as contact management. As their sophistication grew and more was written about CRM, the scope of their use expanded. During this time, it became clear that CRM could support client development efforts by keeping track of the interactions between clients, prospects and employees, and by collecting value-added information from internal and external sources. By leveraging this relationship intelligence, firms were able to better identify sales leads, manage customer contacts, expand relationships and ultimately pave the way to successful cross-selling initiatives.

As CRM took hold, vendors began to understand that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work. Individual industries varied so widely in business practices and processes, that to gain uptake and maximize ROI, solutions had to be tailored for specific needs. LexisNexis Interface Software, for example, identified the legal industry (among other professional services sectors) as one that had unique CRM requirements that were not being served by the existing vendors. The company's signature offering, InterAction, allows attorneys to record and track critical data relative to people, companies, relationships, experience and expertise, while applying security and confidentiality safeguards crucial to the private nature of legal work. InterAction also offers a relationship mapping function, "Who Knows Whom." The feature helps users identify connections between internal and external contacts, linking the firm's personnel more efficiently than the ubiquitous firm-wide e-mail. Another example is the Watch List, a feature that monitors activity in the system related to a specified individual or company, alerting the user whenever activities occur relating to that contact. Specialized features, such as these, have helped law firms to understand and utilize CRM beyond simple contact management, and leverage it as a strategic marketing and business development solution.

continued on page 2

In This Issue

CRM

continued from page 1

As law firms grow in technological sophistication, the issue is no longer whether a firm is using a CRM system, but rather how they are generating greater ROI. Integrating with other key systems that allow users to take advantage of valuable content residing elsewhere in the firm is an important piece of this equation. How will next-generation CRM deliver a true 360-degree view of the marketplace and what features will help generate the most value from its content?

NEXT-GENERATION CRM

The challenge to creating a robust CRM system is that, while the process of integrating internal data, like financials, can be automated, efforts to integrate external data are manual. To move these systems forward, leading vendors and industry experts believe that next-generation CRM will combine with Business Intelligence (BI) tools and external content sources to enhance internal data and create a more complete picture of the marketplace with less manual effort.

It is often said that it's not what you know, but whom you know, and that knowledge is power. In the competitive law firm environment, it is equally important to understand both what and who you know, how you know it, and finally, what you don't know. Information must be relevant and fresh. CRM solutions that are enhanced with BI, deliver more filtered intelligence that provide more context around standard contact information, thus creating more valuable information.

With traditional CRM, your intelligence is only as good as your internal data. Next-generation CRM will automatically draw content from external sources to extend the relevance of that data, such as pairing internal relationship intelligence about a prospective client with its financials, corporate hierarchy, board membership and executive team from external sources. The ability to view this information via a "content enabled" CRM solution in a single report or "dashboard" may likely reveal details that help secure the business of that new prospect.

A related point of content-enabled CRM is the role analytics will play. Integrating analytic tools with the CRM solution will allow users to uncover trends about their clients and within their target markets, returning more precise and relevant results. Law firms have spent years populating their CRM systems with numerous data points about clients, prospects, industry leaders and the like. Analytic tools enhance CRM content by providing the advanced analysis essential for client development activities. Reports generated through this can offer actionable data, such as inbound and outbound referrals, which could translate into a business development opportunity.

At Goodwin Procter, we've spent considerable effort to populate our CRM with data from sources such as Martindale Hubbell, Directory of Corporate Affiliations, and VentureSource. We have also invested in both the InterAction Matters and Opportunities (the sales tracking add-on) modules to enable us to see a 360-degree view of any of our clients. On a daily basis, our CRM is populated with data from our HR and financial systems, allowing us to view all aspects of our relationships with our clients. Our goal is to be able to view everything about a client: from referral, to pursuit, to close. By also enhancing this information with external data, our lawyers have begun to see a broader picture of the client, and to better assess the quality of the relationships.

But these are just first steps toward the goal. For us, the logical next step is the ability to automate these manual processes, and to be able to subscribe to greater numbers of data sources. We would like to be able to track our competitors more formally and get the information into the right hands at the right time.

THE BENEFITS

In a law firm setting, the marriage of BI and CRM informs decisions on many levels, from the basic analysis of whether to engage with the prospective client, to the formation

continued on page 4

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LJN's Legal Tech Newsletter® (ISSN 0738-0186) is published by Law Journal Newsletters, a division of ALM.
Telephone: (800) 999-1916,
Editorial e-mail: ssalkin@alm.com
Circulation e-mail: subspa@alm.com

LJN's Legal Tech Newsletter P0000-223
Periodicals Postage Pending at Philadelphia, PA
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
ALM
1617 JFK Blvd.,Suite 1750, Philadelphia, PA 19103
Annual Subscription: $329

Published Monthly by:
Law Journal Newsletters
1617 JFK Boulevard, Suite 1750, Philadelphia, Pa 19103
www.ljnonline.com

Digital Dictation: Make the Leap

Integrate, Manage and Outsource Transcription Of The Spoken Word Like Documents

By Eric Harrison

Law firms that defend insurance cases are in a battle for survival. Most insurance companies pay by the case, not by the hour. This means that how much a firm actually earns depends on how productive it is. Firms that handle cases expeditiously are assigned more work, while laggards see their work dry up.

At Methfessel & Werbel, a 35-lawyer firm in Edison, NJ, we're constantly on the lookout for technology that can help make our time more valuable. It's not enough to be more productive; we also want to keep improving the quality of our work and cutting the cost of support services. Because almost all of our work involves insurance cases, we have no choice but to keep improving.

Realizing the Possibilities

A few years ago, we heard about digital dictation technology. We wanted to talk with law firms that were using it but couldn't find any. The companies providing the technology were focusing on the medical profession. They were willing to talk with us, but their technology was not designed for law firms. We concluded that getting them to re-design their technology for us would be expensive and the results probably wouldn't justify the cost or satisfy our needs.

In 2003, we began talking with Verdatum, a new digital dictation firm that was specifically tailoring its technology to law firms. At first, we couldn't see how investing in this new technology would help us. Our Sony micro cassettes were easy to work with, and the analog technology seemed relatively inexpensive. However, once we realized that with digital technology we could work with spoken words the same way we worked with text, we began to see endless possibilities.

For one thing, with the analog tapes, we were sharply restricted in what we could do with our dictation. We couldn't take a piece of dictation and attach it to an e-mail. Nor could we store individual dictated documents in separate files in our computers and then move them in an out of the files or ship them over the network.

With micro cassettes, everything we did was dictated by the limited capabilities of the analog tapes. Searching a tape for a specific bit of dictation meant running the tape backward and forward until you came to the right spot. A tape might include several different dictated documents, notes and letters, and there was no easy way to separate one from the others. Making changes or corrections was difficult and risky. You could rewind to the spot of the correction and dictate over it, but if you accidentally dictated over additional material, it was erased. Inserting new material was impossible. You had to add that at the end. Nor could you insert printed copies of citations, charts, graphs, photos or other graphics.

If dictation was difficult for the lawyers, turning that dictation into accurate text was hellish for the typists. The typist would get a micro cassette with an instruction sheet attached to it. Other instructions might be included within the dictation itself or at the end of the tape. For people who enjoyed solving puzzles, the work might have been pleasantly challenging; for people trying to make money, it wasn't.

To add an element of risk to the challenge, the micro cassettes, with their instruction sheets, were moved manually from the lawyers' offices to the typists. If a cassette got lost along the way, the work on that tape was gone. There was no back up. Protecting the micro cassettes became so important that lawyers who dictated documents while on the road were generally afraid to overnight the tapes back to the office. For them, "better late than never" took on a new significance.

Easy Transition

When we went digital in July 2004, we quickly shook off the limitations of analog tapes. We still dictate into handheld recorders, but now instead of being captured on a tape, the dictation goes directly into an audio file in the computer. Each piece of dictation has its own audio file. When the dictation is completed, a single click sends it to a transcriber. Because each audio file is separate, it's easy to flag items with a high priority, so that typists can move them ahead in the queue.

Just as you can stop typing the middle of a Word document, switch to another document, and then switch back to the original document, so we can switch from one piece of dictation to another and then back again. We can also move parts of the dictation around, shifting a paragraph from one place to another or switching the order of sentences.

Correcting or changing dictation, which had been so difficult with micro cassettes, is now simple. Just as you can add, delete or insert text in a Word document, so we can do the same with our dictation. There's even an "undo" to recover dictation that's accidentally deleted. If we want to include a citation, we can scan it and imbed the text right in the dictation. We can also imbed pictures, charts and other graphic material.

When we dictated into micro cassettes, our analog dictation could not be linked into our various systems. Now, with digital dictation, we can treat our audio files like text files and integrate them into Interwoven and our other systems to maximize the efficiency of our business processes.

With micro cassettes, there was always the danger of a cassette being lost or mislaid. With digital dictation, there is nothing to lose. The dictation goes directly into a computer file, which like text files is automatically backed up. When lawyers are on the road, they dictate into a remote recorder, connect to the Internet and transmit their work directly to a transcriber.

Initially, we transmitted all of our dictation to in-house transcribers, but as transcribers left through natural attrition, we began replacing them with transcribers in India. We now have seven transcribers in India and

continued on page 4

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Digital Dictation

continued from page 3

about three times that number in our home office. Outsourcing like this cuts typing costs by roughly two thirds per typist. For security reasons, a back-up copy is retained of every audio file sent to India. The law firm generally transmits all of its outsourced work at 5:00 p.m. The transmission is quick because the system compresses the dictation as the lawyers are dictating. The completed work is waiting for the lawyers the next morning when they arrive at their desks.

Other Benefits

The digital dictation technology gives us tight control over every piece of dictation. For starters, each audio file has a built-in database that tracks the file's history. In addition, the system interrogates the files in the queue every minute and gets an update on where each file stands right now and when it will be completed.

At the law firm's office, the person in charge of transcription can easily see every file in the queue — its position, size, current status and estimated completion time, as well as the total amount of transcription to be done. Priorities can be changed immediately to accommodate a rush job, and large jobs can be split up among two or more typists. If one typist goes to lunch in the middle of a job, another can pick up at the exact spot where the first left off. The system automatically marks the spot.

Besides tracking work, the Verdatum system can also measure the average transcription time per job, noting when the job was opened, when it was closed, the turnaround time, and how much time was actually spent typing. If two typists worked on the job, the system can measure each one's work separately. The system can also measure an individual's typist's overall work and gauge his or her efficiency. Such measurements single out the best typists for rewards and promotion.

Measurements like this can help firms calculate the real costs of transcription on an overall and a per-person basis. They can also help measure ROI, which, in the case of Methfessel & Werbel, has been greatly accelerated by our ability to outsource dictation to a lower-cost service.

The greatest ROI has come, of course, from gains in the productivity of our 35 attorneys. Initially, some of them balked at switching from micro cassettes to Verdatum. However, as the advantages became obvious, the holdouts made the switch. Because of our need to minimize costs and maximize productivity, they really had no choice.

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CRM

continued from page 2

of the internal account team, to the services the account team proposes. The value of this marriage is that it simplifies the processes of research and relationship management while allowing the user to derive more value from the data that has been collected over the years.

Other benefits include:

- **Improved Client Service.** With a more complete view of current client projects and the overall marketplace, legal professionals can better understand current client demands, as well as anticipate future trends. Capturing this wealth of information also helps law firms to consistently deliver a high level of service, even after staffing changes, since the firm's collective knowledge of the client relationship is preserved.
- **Improved Prospecting and Business Development.** Data, for the purpose of understanding a relationship or potential growth opportunity, is incomplete unless it has been aggregated and integrated together to provide a comprehensive view. Data brought together from multiple sources can reveal opportunities that may otherwise not be evident from a single source. With the ability to look at internal trends as well as the wider marketplace, firms are better equipped to evaluate growth opportunities.
- **Enhanced Productivity.** Long hours and heavy workloads are no secret in the legal profession. Keeping track of and sorting through numerous details associated with firm matters can be both tedious and time-consuming. Content-enabled CRM can improve time efficiencies and enhance productivity for both law firm marketers and attorneys. For marketers, the benefit is twofold. First, when a marketer is researching a prospect or client, they are often limited to the internal information that is already within their CRM system. Yet there is a wealth of external information that could assist marketing efforts (market share data, revenue, etc). When marketers produce reports and analyze market data that encompass both sets of information, it is a highly manual and time-consuming task to marry internal and external sources. Content-enabled CRM automates this process, saving time and freeing marketers for other activities. Likewise, when marketers receive requests directly from attorneys, they can more easily pull this information together, allowing time for other strategic and proactive work. Attorneys also can enjoy a productivity boost from content-enabled CRM. They often rely on marketing and other staff members to access client data. Providing them with an automated system for accessing Relationship Intelligence via a content-enabled CRM solution gives attorneys access to the information they need without requiring marketing to intervene into the process. This creates a win-win scenario in which lawyers are more empowered to get the information they need more quickly, freeing up marketers for more strategic projects.

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Beyond Redlining

Litera Provides Womble Carlyle A Document Collaboration Solution

By Sean Scott

Managing change in any walk of life or business is difficult. Document change is no different. Documents are the lifeblood of a law firm. Efficiency of lawyers and staff in producing, editing, sharing and collaborating on documents impacts the quality of a firm's work product, and ultimately a client's cost — as well as success.

Womble Carlyle is a 130 year old law firm that has grown from humble beginnings to a staff of 1,200 in nine offices across the South and in Washington DC. Our practice groups are as diverse as most law firms.

CHANGING NEEDS

Document Change Management has always been a goal and we, like most firms, used CompareRite from Lexis Nexis for many years until it started to fall apart. We then moved to Workshare's Deltaview several years ago because it was a superior product at the time. However, today we find that it does not meet our growing needs for multiple functions in the "change management" arena.

For example, one of the biggest complaints from lawyers was that looking at the "redlined" changes was only the beginning of their document review process. They indicated a need to be able to selectively accept some of the changes and create a new version without having to manually edit the original.

Sean Scott is the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of Womble Carlyle. A significant piece of his role as CIO includes identifying new and strategic technologies and integrating them to provide users with access to and retrieval of information. He reviews all existing hardware, software and telecommunications platforms and recommends solutions that will position the firm for continued growth and improved operations. Scott was honored as one of *Computerworld*'s Premier 100 IT Leaders for 2003.

Another growing need in recent years has been the ability to work with PDFs. Creating PDFs as needed with one click from every user desktop is only the tip of the iceberg. Our users were looking for ways to convert PDFs back to MS Word and also sometimes be able to edit the PDF in its native form.

In the last 3 years, "metadata" has become a buzzword in the legal field due to the recent publicized cases where "metadata" put companies, government and law firms in compromising situations. The need to remove Metadata goes beyond MS Word documents. We also need it for PDFs.

Some of our practice groups have also expressed the need for a program to compare MS Excel files.

We were also getting tired of dealing with multiple vendors, each with their set of problems and conflicts when to our surprise, we were contacted by Litera Corp. who was looking for early feedback on their change management product suite, as well as a unique collaboration product that promised to meet all our needs and then some.

PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

We put together some of our best trainers and testers and began a grueling test of the Change-Pro Suite. Our expectations were low, only because we felt no company could bite off this big a project and do it well. Here is what we found.

First, we compared documents head to head between Change-Pro and Deltaview. Recognizing no product is perfect and "document corruption" is a factor, we were looking to see which program was more accurate and also successfully compared more documents. To our pleasant surprise, Change-Pro showed greater accuracy and was able to compare more documents successfully. Some documents that would not compare on other products, compared easily and well on Change-Pro. As we know, a missed decimal point or comma change can have a huge impact on a legal document. Change-Pro handles the big or the small changes equally well. Other features we found useful:

- The workflow is a lot more efficient in Change-Pro than other products. Users can accept or reject select changes, create a revised version which avoids significant manual editing time;
- Also, unlike other products, Change-Pro allows users to keep the Original and Modified document open, continue to make/save edits and run a comparison without having to close the source documents and reopen them after each comparison (in case they wish to do more editing);
- Change-Pro handles templates better than other products; and
- The ability to send redline document as a PDF attachment to e-mail is helpful.

Second, the integrated Metadata Sweeper strips metadata from all MS Office files and PDF files. It is very intuitive and easy to use. Among the options in the product we appreciated are:

- How to handle Track Changes: Accept all, Reject All or Leave All; and
- We can set whether the Metadata Sweeper should prompt, auto clean or not clean metadata for internal e-mails, specific domains or external e-mails.

Third, Change-Pro has a top notch PDF "engine" which not only provides an integrated PDF maker that converts all MS Office files to PDF with accuracy and superb compression, but also the ability to extract PDFs back to Word. We love this feature. The PDF suite portion of Change-Pro Suite also contains a PDF Editor that allows "redaction," highlighting, labels, flags, insertion of new pages (Word or Excel) as well as the ability to edit the text as long as the PDF is not a scanned PDF. Scanned PDF's can still be annotated on but the text cannot be edited. The cost benefit of the PDF Suite (when purchased as a part of Change-Pro Suite) are tremendous, costing only a fraction of what it would cost us to equip every desktop with PDF capability.

Fourth, Litera also added an Image Editor that allows our attorneys to insert and edit pictures into their documents as needed. It is more advanced than some of the simple Photo, image editors but not as complicated as some of the professional products.

continued on page 6

Redlining

continued from page 5

Fifth, there is also a useful Screen Capture tool that comes in very handy when watching a Web presentation or in general when you need a small portion or all of a screen.

Sixth, the DMS integration Change-Pro provides is stronger and more user friendly than we have seen from other products. Users can right click on a document inside the DMS and send it for comparison, remove metadata or convert to PDF with one click.

Finally, Litera is delightful to deal with when it comes to anything from negotiating licensing terms to customer support.

All in all, we were so impressed by the Change-Pro Suite that we began converting our firm to Change-Pro Suite and our lawyers and secretaries are very happy with the change. We hate change just as much as most people, but this has been the most painless change we have made in a decade! Change-Pro Suite just added a MS Excel comparison tool and we are about to begin testing and hope that Litera has kept their high standards and user focus intact.

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E-mail Tips

continued from page 1

to recall a message that you've sent through Outlook, the recipient of your e-mail will probably get the original anyway, and then receive a notice that you're attempting to recall it, defeating the purpose of the feature.

It's also important to note that users of Microsoft Outlook will only see this feature if they operate on a Microsoft Exchange Server. Most home users do not have an Exchange server while most law firms use Exchange to manage the company's e-mail.

Furthermore, the recall function only operates on messages that you send to another user on your Exchange server, which usually means someone within your office or firm. If you sent an e-mail outside your firm to a client or opposing counsel, the recall function will do absolutely nothing for you.

Best Option for Recall

All hope is not lost, however. A company called Bigstring (www.bigstring.com) offers to give you a "big string" that you can use to jerk back regrettable e-mails. On top of that, Bigstring gives you the option of expiring an e-mail after a certain amount of time and even lets you determine how many times a recipient can read your message.

This magic lies in the fact that Bigstring actually hosts your e-mail on its own servers and only sends a link to your recipient. It's not a perfect method, but it's the best option on the market today.

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Bigstring is a subscription service that costs $12.95 a year for 300 e-mails per month, or $29.95 for unlimited messages. There is also a free version that allows 20 e-mails a month, and a business account that provides a wealth of other features.

Once you subscribe to Bigstring, you can send an e-mail message through the service (you don't have to use Bigstring for all of your e-mail, just certain messages). Your recipient gets an e-mail with a link that they click to read your message. Since the original message is stored on Bigstring's servers, you can actually make a change to the message at any time, or modify the attachments.

Bigstring claims to be completely secure and scans for viruses. If someone is technically astute, they could theoretically take a snapshot image of the screen when they are reading an e-mail and save that picture. One way to limit the chances of this happening is to set an expiration date to limit access.

Successfully recalling an e-mail is a dicey bet. That's unfortunate, but it places an important responsibility on the shoulders of every person who sends an e-mail. Many of us pause before we pick up the phone to call someone, or consider what we would jot down on paper in ink, and we should carry those same responsibilities over into the world of e-mail and think before we hit "Send."

Don't Subject Others to Bad Subject Lines

Most people determine if they will read an e-mail based on the subject line. It amazes me, therefore, how many times I receive e-mails with poorly worded subjects, and sometimes nothing at all.

Leaving out the subject line of an e-mail is irresponsible. People shouldn't have to completely open your message to know what you intend to discuss.

A subject line at a glance should tell your recipient exactly what your e-mail discusses. A quippy "Hi" or "FYI" isn't enough to explain what the e-mail refers to and frankly doesn't respect the recipient's time. Try to summarize your e-mail in the subject line.

In an oft-quoted article entitled "Tips for Mastering E-mail Overload," in *Working Knowledge* by the Harvard Business School, Stever Robbins declares you should use a subject line to summarize instead of describe your message. His example of a bad subject line is: "Deadline discussion." A better subject line should read: "Recommend we ship product April 25th." The recipient of an e-mail with a good subject line doesn't even have to read the whole message.

Fonts, Formats and Pretty Pictures

There is always at least one person in every office who believes it's a good idea to change the fonts and background colors on e-mail messages. I say stop the insanity.

While a curly font and a seashell background might look cute and cuddly, they have no place in a professional environment. Some people want to stand out from the crowd and be different, but I submit that dancing smiley faces and the Comic Sans font is the wrong way to go.

Pictures and special fonts are distractions from effective communication. In addition, some e-mail readers cannot interpret HTML formatted e-mails, which means that the message will

continued on page 7

CardScan Executive: The Way to Clear Business Card Clutter!

By Alan Pearlman

If you are anything like me when it comes to business cards received, then you have a desktop filled with them and at least one drawer piled up with them. I always seem to throw the cards on the desk and hope that someday I can enter, or have someone else enter the information into my Outlook contact database. Of course, this never happens, thus perpetuating my never-ending battle to organize. It just seems no matter how hard I try, I never seem to get the cards off my desk and into my computer.

Well I have found the perfect solution to alleviate the situation. It's the CardScan Executive, and it is the most advanced business card reader available. The CardScan Executive, a USB model, scans in full color and is smaller, faster and sleeker then their earlier product versions, in fact it is now so small that it is travel friendly for your notebook computer case and for card scanning on the road.

Demanding users depend on its fast scan speed, top accuracy and easy-to-use software to turn business cards into data you can use to bring in new business or keep the clients that you now have happy. CardScan Executive saves you hours by capturing business cards directly into your computer. Without typing, you build a database of your vital contacts, either in CardScan's address book, in Outlook, or in any

continued on page 8

E-mail Tips

continued from page 6

look like a garbled mess of technical code. Even within Microsoft Outlook, some companies turn off the HTML view because harmful viruses have been know to use that as a way to install themselves on computers. Also, BlackBerrys and other wireless e-mail devices do not render HTML e-mail.

To be safe, and to ensure that all recipients (especially outside your office) receive a readable, communicative e-mail, just stay away from fancy fonts, colors, pictures and animated images. Stay with black text on a plain white background using a standard font, such as Times New Roman or Arial. If you want to be different, then concentrate on composing short, concise straight-to-the point e-mails. Your readers will take notice and be grateful. Leave the pretty, fancy e-mails for marketing purposes and occasional electronic newsletters.

E-Mail Signatures and Disclaimers

Every e-mail should contain a signature line at the bottom so that your recipients: a) know exactly who the e-mail is coming from; and b) can call you via the provided phone number if necessary.

Signature lines at the bottom of e-mail messages should be succinct and short while providing all the necessary contact information. At the very least, a signature line should contain your name, company and phone number.

If you are so inclined, you can add another line or two to include a URL for the Web site of your company, and perhaps a short marketing phrase. You might also want to add a fax line and your e-mail address (in case the e-mail is printed out for later use). A general rule to follow is to never let your signature line exceed six lines total.

Some people also choose to add a short quote or funny comment at the end of their signature. While this may be cute for friends and family, it gets old quickly and has no practical place in business correspondence.

I would recommend against adding a graphical logo for your firm at the bottom of an e-mail message for the same reasons mentioned above. First, not all e-mail clients will have the ability to display a picture, and any image that you include just adds to the all-around size of the message.

Some people also choose to add a short quote or funny comment at the end of their signature. While this may be cute for friends and family, it gets old quickly and has no practical place in business correspondence.

Out-of-Office Notices

If you use Microsoft Outlook (or your firm has deployed a Microsoft Exchange server), then you should have the capability to set up an out-of-office notification.

The Out-of-Office Assistant in Microsoft Outlook allows you to notify people who send you e-mail that you are not immediately available and can provide an alternate contact method. With the advent of wireless e-mail devices (such as BlackBerrys and Treos) I personally don't find the Out-of-Office Assistant as practical as it once was, but it's still a good ally when you leave for vacation and completely unplug from e-mail for a while.

When you set up the Out-of-Office Assistant, I would recommend including a date when you plan to return to your e-mail, as well as an alternate contact for urgent e-mails. That way, people have a good idea when to expect a reply, and have the option of contacting someone else if necessary.

Fortunately, the Out-of-Office Assistant only sends one e-mail to each sender. When someone sends you an e-mail and the Out-of-Office Assistant is activated, that sender will receive one e-mail with the language you choose to put in the message. That sender can continue to send you messages, but they will not continue to receive replies from the Out-of-Office Assistant.

When you return to the office, remember to de-activate the Out-of-Office Assistant.

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Cardscan

continued from page 7

other popular contact manager that you may be utilizing.

Over 50 powerful software features help you search, sort, and use contact information more efficiently. Save color images of your cards, both sides, plus all the information they hold, in searchable data form. Search by typing just a few letters of anything you remember. Sort contacts into multiple groups for rapid access. There's even the AccuCard service to keep your contact records up to date. CardScan unlocks the potential in the business cards you've collected, to help you become more productive in hundreds of ways. Here's one example: move the cursor to the address, and click. It's that easy to get a map to your appointment.

If you like this type of at hand information you will really like their CardScan.Net! CardScan.net can only be explained as a type of ASP for your contact management system. It allows the user to access your contacts over a secure Web connection; you can even have a complete digital image or view of the card, right there on the screen with your entered information. With the use of any Web browser, anywhere in the world you have total access to your information. Additionally, any changes or additions made to your CardScan file on the net file are automatically reflected on and in your PC file, and visa versa. What makes this even more important to me, in this age of necessary backing up, is that now I have a guaranteed back-up of information, by storing my contacts on both my PC and a secure private CardScan.Net server, saving me against any accidental data loss. With my unique password and secure log in, I also have the ability to share my address book with others as I may need.

How many times have you written something important on the back of the card you just received? Well, this product also gives the user the ability to scan both-sides of the business card and attach both of those images to a single record, thereby eliminating duplicates in an instant. I also noted that CardScan has the uncanny ability to read and record cards from several foreign countries, a hard task indeed, with all the formats out there, and it reads in many different languages to boot!

The most interesting thing I noticed about the integration of the software was the fact that it had about a 98% accuracy rate! This in and of itself amazed me. The card reader hardly ever picked up stray characters and it always seemed to place all the information in the correct area of use, thereby cutting down significantly the time necessary to correct and re-enter the information. I must applaud the company on this as well, as I found myself scanning cards and having great results the first time around.

CardScan Executive scans up to 40 cards per minute, without you typing a thing. Plus, it's so accurate: with 10 years in development, CardScan's proprietary interpretive technology accurately reads and understands card information, distinguishing street address from e-mail address, phone from fax, and title from name. CardScan Executive includes the CardScan 700c color business card scanner and CardScan Version 7 Premium software. USB cable included. The software and product are easy to use and it takes no time or effort at all to be running the CardScan Executive, simply install the software, plug in your scanner and you're ready to go. For the price of $249.99, I have saved three times that amount in time and have now organized all my business cards into meaningful contacts that I can now access in an instant.

FACTS

CardScan Executive is a product of the CardScan Company and can be reached at the Web on www.cardscan.com. It has a MSR of $249.99.

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