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## Legally Speaking

# Cyberspace revolutionizes the legal paper trail

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BELLEVUE — Imagine you're a young associate attorney working in a big law firm. Your assignment is to search through all financial documents relating to a planned acquisition of another company. This includes thousands of letters, printed e-mails, contracts and budgets, spread sheets and payroll reports — work that will take months.

If you think there's an easier way to do this, you're right. Certain companies can find what's needed in just a couple of days. Welcome to the intersection of the cyberworld and the legal profession. The business of lawyering — long dominated by the importance of the printed document — is finding ways to deal with the flood of electronic information.

For one thing, more and more documents exist only in cyberspace. If you need those documents for a trial, or need to review a company's performance before a merger or acquisition, what do you do? The old answer? Print the documents, ship them to the lawyers and let them start searching and sorting by hand, with the clock running and the bill adding up.

Resources
• Applied Discovery

At Applied Discovery in Bellevue, complex work is done with a simple goal: take paperwork out of the physical world and into cyberspace. The company grew out of a co-founder's experience as a young lawyer.

You get a binder in the morning and review as many documents as you can that day, and you get a binder in the afternoon and do the same thing, says Rich Corbett. That process could go on for three months in a million-page case.

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Now Corbett and his partners offer a high tech, pay-by-the-page alternative to that time consuming and expensive search for data.

"The meta-data fields are right here, he says. We can also go into detailed meta-data properties right here.

It's a way of converting computer files into readable pages formats, allowing lawyers to search and sort electronic documents, and track their history, using a secure internet connection, adds Corbett. It's especially valuable in the discovery phase of legal proceedings, the pre-trial exchange of evidence and in the corporate world, when companies seek information during mergers and acquisitions.

Joe Lopez, with the Bar Association's electronic communications committee, calls it a growth industry, linking the e-world with the legal world, with an eye on the bottom line.

### **For more information**

Read more about the legal paper trail from the people interviewed in this installment of *Legally Speaking*:

I think in four or five years all discovery will be done through an electronic format. I think it's catching up with how businesses communicate. The No. 1 thing that businesses produce now are electronic documents. Ninety-three percent of all data produced, created in corporations these days is electronic. So it's just a matter of synching up the law firms with the corporations, so they can function the same way businesses actually function these days.

— Rich Corbett, co-founder of Applied Discovery, on the trend towards more electronic tools for handling legal "paperwork."

It hasn't been as hard as we thought, because the pent-up demand was so huge. A lot of lawyers were working on cases where they didn't know what to do with the electronic data. They would just ignore it and hopefully it would go away. But we find once they know there's a tool out there and we go in and do a sale demo they realize this can help them immediately in their process.

— Rich Corbett on getting Applied Discovery off the ground and profitable (which it is right now.)

Many documents don't have any existence except electronically. They're never printed. They never see the "light of paper," so to speak. They spend their entire life on a server, on a computer screen, and they may never be reduced to paper. If it was created electronically and exists electronically — if anything you can do with a document you can do online, you can do electronically — you've reduced a step. You've saved yourself some money. It's important for courts, for lawyers, for corporations. It's important for everybody.

— Joe Lopez, member of Washington State Bar Association's Electronic Communications Committee, on the nature of documents in the year 2001.



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