

Holland & Hart

Leading law firm adopts Adobe® Acrobat® Professional and Adobe PDF enterprise-wide to improve case document management and to accelerate case preparation

New views of legal documents

Staff at the law offices of Holland & Hart can deal with hundreds of thousands of pages of documents in the process of working on large legal cases. Materials from clients, briefs created by attorneys, documents submitted by opposing counsel—the variety and volume of materials are tremendous. As a lawyer at the firm describes it, “Civil litigation is about documents, and the firm that controls its documents, controls the case.”

Fortunately, lawyers are taking a new view of documents and their role in legal proceedings. Once synonymous with paper, documents today can also exist electronically, offering law firms a number of benefits. “We’ve always been at the leading edge of integrating technology into our practice,” says Oliver Fuchsberger, practice support analyst at Holland & Hart, the largest law firm in the Rocky Mountain region. “While most firms were still copying paper and storing it in case folders, we were creating digital repositories of case information in Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF).”

Locating documents in seconds, not hours

In the mid-1990s Holland & Hart began evaluating solutions to better manage case documents, eventually standardizing on Adobe Acrobat software and Adobe PDF. The platform- and application-independent Adobe PDF files provided an excellent alternative to the TIFF files the firm also considered. “Adobe PDF was ideal because it retained a document’s exact appearance and, unlike TIFF, it supported keyword searches,” says Fuchsberger.

The firm began converting all of its case materials to Adobe PDF, whether documents were created electronically in-house or received on paper from outside sources. To deal with materials on paper, Holland & Hart used Adobe Acrobat Capture® software to reliably convert scanned paper images to searchable Adobe PDF files. “The advantages of having case documents available electronically in PDF are remarkable,” says Fuchsberger. “Case information that previously took hours or even days to locate can now be found in seconds.”

Adobe PDF documents are stored on a central, secure server for access by legal staff in Holland & Hart’s 12 offices nationwide. The central repository of Adobe PDF files improves collaboration among attorneys and staff and helps ensure that all employees access the same timely information. “With so many lawyers working in different offices, collaborating across project teams was costly and time consuming,” says Fuchsberger. “Adobe solutions help us overcome these problems because everything is readily available in Adobe PDF.”

Acrobat as a firm standard

Currently, the firm has licenses for more than 600 seats of Acrobat Professional software for use on employees’ desktop or laptop computers. One advantage of using the software is that lawyers can add electronic comments to case materials in Adobe PDF without modifying the original file. Because the electronic comments are saved with the files, each lawyer on a case can review comments made by co-workers. Equally important, when new lawyers are assigned to a case, they can instantly review the comments of others.

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INDUSTRY

Legal

CHALLENGES

- Improve collaboration among legal teams
- Minimize administrative costs
- Accelerate case preparation

SOLUTION

- Document Collaboration
 - Case Document Management
- Holland & Hart standardized on Adobe Acrobat Professional and Adobe PDF to improve management of and access to tens of millions of case documents.

RESULTS

- Reduced administrative costs associated with document management
- Accelerated staff access to case documents from hours to seconds
- Eliminated problems with revealing document metadata in native application files
- Decreased time required for case preparation and document submission to courts

“By searching materials electronically in Adobe PDF, our lawyers are better prepared. The improved efficiency can also save the firm and its clients significant expense in managing cases.”

Oliver Fuchsberger,
Practice support analyst,
Holland & Hart

SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE

- Adobe Acrobat Professional
- Adobe Acrobat Capture
- CaseSoft CaseMap
- Platform: Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional
- Hardware: PCs with Intel® Pentium® processors and laptop computers.
- HP Scanjet scanners

Each case has associated with it a series of cataloged Adobe PDF files that lawyers access via a secure central server. In many cases, the information is integrated into a CaseSoft CaseMap system used by Holland & Hart. Fuchsberger cites the ease of integrating and working with Adobe PDF files in CaseMap as an important benefit of standardizing on Acrobat and PDF. “By searching materials electronically in Adobe PDF, our lawyers are better prepared. The improved efficiency can also save the firm and its clients significant expense in managing cases,” he says.

Sharing documents inside and outside

Holland & Hart also uses Acrobat and Adobe PDF to submit case documents to both federal and state courts throughout the United States. The courts currently accept materials in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, and PDF, but are increasingly requesting materials in PDF because the files are easier to work with.

An added advantage of exchanging documents in Adobe PDF is that it eliminates problems with having metadata associated with client files. For example, when documents are submitted to courts or to outside counsel as native Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect files, it is possible to review the history of changes to a document—something that neither lawyers nor clients want shared.

Focus on services and strategy

In the future, Holland & Hart is looking to use Adobe PDF forms to enable staff and clients to submit work order documents electronically. For instance, clients could submit a trademark verification request online to the firm’s employees, who could do the trademark search based on the electronic inquiry.

Concludes Fuchsberger, “Law firms face the same competitive pressures as any business. There’s more competition among firms worldwide, and clients expect more efficient, responsive services. With Acrobat and Adobe PDF, we spend less time on administrative tasks and have more time to focus on high-level strategic counsel.”

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