CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE DISCOVERY REPORTING

Reporting is rarely discussed but it is one of the most critical parts of the eDiscovery process. Reporting is:

- The way you tell the story of your data, illustrating it with numbers, facts, findings, and other concrete evidence that provide the direction and support for your case.

- An audit trail of what you've done to date — insurance that you've performed all that is necessary to locate and provide evidence.

- A competitive advantage, since the more you know about what you have, the better you can understand your position.

- The best way, when done early and often, to ensure that what you're doing is as accurate and complete as possible.

Despite its importance, lack of quality reporting continues to plague the legal discovery industry. Courts, however, are asking for more visibility into the discovery process and are expecting more detailed information, faster. The following checklist will help you evaluate the reporting capabilities of eDiscovery solutions to help you ensure that you have your reporting bases covered.

Scope of reporting

You have the ability to report throughout the eDiscovery process.
Reporting is an important way to provide knowledge transfer from one group to the next — what has been found, how it was found, why it is important, and where to look for more information. If you can only generate reports at the end of the process or even at the end of each stage — rather than iteratively throughout the process — you are limiting your ability to leverage reports to improve your processes and increase efficiency.

You have the ability to report on anything.
Reports should be able to be scoped by anything that's been put into the system — not just at the project and custodian levels — and enable you to present the information from multiple vantage points (e.g., by type, timeframe, source, sender/recipient, etc.) to give you a better understanding of why the results look the way they do.

Reporting as a core feature

Reporting is part of the system.
Some systems don't have any reporting capabilities at all, which means that you will need to build your own or deploy an off-the-shelf reporting solution, both of which can be expensive and extremely inefficient.

Reporting was built into the system from the start, not added on as an afterthought.
Even if a solution has reporting, if it has been bolted on after the fact, it's likely to be limited in its capabilities and usability. Determine whether reporting was built in from the start as a key component of the system.

Reporting capabilities were developed by experts in legal discovery.
Many eDiscovery solutions were initially built for general-purpose use and then leveraged for the legal industry. As a result, the software provider doesn't have the legal industry experience to define the stories their reporting needs to present.

Usability of reports

Canned reports are useful.
Many vendors have addressed the reporting gap in their tools by offering a series of general or canned reports. The problem is that these reports are often incomplete, missing key information that is important to users. And these reports can be clumsy, making it challenging for the end reader to understand what the report is conveying. Review the canned reports provided by the system to ensure that they deliver the information you need in the format you need it — and that the reports can be easily customized.

Dashboards allow for deeper dives.
Another approach vendors use to solve the usability issue is to add fancy dashboards. But a problem with many dashboards is that they present a specific view of pre-defined, high-level trends, and don't allow users to dive into the pieces they want to see in more depth and report back on them. Make sure that dashboards provide the right insights at the right level and users can easily drill down for details.

Reports are portable.
Often, the people who need the reports are not always the ones who log into the system to access dashboards or reports. The information needs to be exported from the system in a way that's easy for the user to digest. Ensure there is a way to deliver reports to the people who need the information without requiring them to log into the system.

Ease of creating and customizing reports

End users can easily create reports.
In some cases — especially when reporting was not built in from the start — generating reports requires manual creation of back-end database queries. Ensure that you can generate and export reports right through the system's user interface without requiring any specialized database or coding knowledge.

Report results are delivered in a user-friendly format.
Some systems deliver information in CSV, log, or text files that need to be parsed by a technician. This is both cumbersome and ineffective as it either takes significant time or customization and scripting by IT or requires that you implement a third-party reporting tool. Make sure that reports provide the data in a way that makes it easy to make sense of that data.

Reporting is a way to see the story the data has to tell and to communicate that story to others invested in the process. And it's a way to document that the story you're telling is based on information that's not only complete, but also thoroughly vetted. When you are evaluating eDiscovery systems, make sure that they meet all of these criteria.

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