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Redefining the Client-Centric Approach

Technology experts adapt to your law departments needs

*Daryl Teshima and Wendy King, a senior managing director and managing director at **FTI Consulting, Inc.**, pride themselves on their ability to listen. It's one of the ways their company distinguishes itself, they say. FTI focuses on finding the right solution for each client, not fitting the client's needs into the available solution they happen to have on hand. The interview has been edited for length and style.*

FTI has recently made some partnership announcements, including a deal that will allow your clients to use kCura's popular Relativity program along with your own Ringtail software. Is this a change in FTI's strategy?

Daryl Teshima: This isn't a change in strategy as much as a re-articulation of an approach that FTI has really followed for a long time. We've always focused on solving clients' biggest challenges and problems. As clients' problems have grown and expanded, we've adapted to find tools, technologies and the right people and skill sets to address these challenges, and also to develop processes and procedures to overcome them.

So, being client-centered has been part of FTI's DNA for quite awhile. But the recent announcement was designed to re-articulate that to the industry, to our clients and customers, and emphasize that we're not just a proprietary technology company. We can support them on a variety of different technologies. We also recently announced a partnership with Exterro. We have a partnership with Microsoft and with other software companies, besides developing Ringtail, which we think is one of the best e-discovery solutions out there.

What does client-centric mean to you?

Teshima: To me, being client-centric means listening to what clients' needs are. It means we're adaptable, we work when the clients need us to work, and we work where the clients are. We handle whatever data they have, and whatever technology and platforms that they've standardized on. So, it's really putting the client first in everything that we do.

Wendy King: One thing I heard when I worked within law firms, and I still hear it today from law firm clients and friends, is that the service provider relationship doesn't always feel like a partnership. It's the vendor's way or no way. And it was because they had really structured their processes in such a tight, defined manner. It didn't allow them to actually listen to the client and be able to provide a solution to the client's request. Often it would require the client to have to alter or be more flexible than what they might want to be, or even maybe settle, in some respects, on a solution because of that rigidity. So for me, client-centric means being able to take your expertise, and the solutions that you have available to you, and offer an approach with their needs, workflow and in-house technology first in mind.

Teshima: This is a key point. One of the challenges in the e-discovery industry has been a one-size-fits-all approach. Oftentimes that has led to results that are not optimal for clients, especially ones with unique challenges, issues or problems, like unusual data formats. And it really ignores the uniqueness of them. Oftentimes it's been dictated by the technology that's offered. As an e-discovery vendor, if you offer only one option, you really are saying, "We only have one tool to address your problems."

At FTI, we have proprietary software that we think is top-of-the-line, but we're also able to offer well-known tools like Relativity or Exterro, and supplement that with early case assessment platforms that we develop, like Radiance. We make sure that it works with Microsoft, which so many of our clients have standardized on. We live in a different world, where that one-size approach doesn't always work. So that's why we think that this approach, and our ability to offer not just one technology solution, but many, really helps us stand out and be more responsive to clients.

Let's talk about people at FTI. What kind of backgrounds do your experts have?

Teshima: The secret to FTI's success is that we really have a lot of diversity in the group of folks that we have. So, we have recovering lawyers, we have technologists, we have data wizards, forensic experts, people with deep expertise in certain types of matters, like Second Requests or FCPA investigations. We have people who excel in training, and we also have people who have been customers of e-discovery services for quite a long time.That wide diversity of backgrounds is what really helps bring an incredible knowledge base to this space. And it's a knowledge base which is not just rooted in one discipline, such as technology or law, but it's a combination of all of these things. And that's where all the magic happens. So, for myself, that's one of the things that is really fun working at FTI. I learn something new every day just by working.

King: I would add that one of the things I have found to be wonderful here at FTI is it's very collaborative and collegial. So talking about complementary skills, I've been referenced throughout my career as a legal technologist, and I can say because of my experience in law firms, I understand the business of law but I am not a recovering lawyer. I can call one who is, Daryl, and I can walk through a scenario with him to be able to get his perspective on something, or somebody else within one of the groups. It allows us to provide a very thoughtful and comprehensive solution for our clients, where if you had a balance on one side or the other, you may not be able to take that holistic approach to it.

Can you give an example of a case in which you were able to customize a solution?

Teshima: There's a case that I've been working on for the past couple of days. And this is a case where the client really had a problem. They had to respond to allegations made by a regulatory agency, and the response is due in two weeks. So we were brought in to help them draft a response, and to get a handle on what all the emails might have said, and how those might inform their response. And instead of just saying, "Well here's our solution and we need the data delivered to us in this fashion, and here's our workflow," we listened. And we realized that a lot of the data was in the client's own archive system. So in a couple of hours, a couple of us were able to look at the archive system, and we were able to craft a rudimentary review workflow that our researchers were able to get in and start looking at.

And we were also able to start providing those high-level insights, and find some of the hot documents that would influence how they would respond. And at the same time, we found that the client's system was just not something that would allow us to really look through a significant amount of documents in the given time frame. So, we were able to pull out a certain subset of them, and put them in our own tools to make sure that we've uncovered all the needles in all the haystacks.

That's an approach that I think underscores what we do. We're using the client's own technology, we're using some of ours, but we're really all working together to solve the immediate problem.

Daryl Teshima *is a senior managing director in FTI Consulting's technology practice and is based in Los Angeles. He assists clients with the electronic data discovery process in litigation and government investigations, and in developing in-house corporate e-discovery and records management programs. He has more than 15 years of experience in information management and litigation support. He can be reached at daryl.teshima@fticonsulting.com.*

Wendy King *is a managing director in FTI Consulting's technology practice and is based in Atlanta. She brings more than 15 years of experience in e-discovery practice support, working alongside legal and technology teams to find the most efficient use of litigation technology. Her work is focused on helping law firms understand the costs and resources involved with e-discovery software, and implement tools in ways that enable best practices and cost savings. She can be reached at wendy.king@fticonsulting.com.*