Five Reasons the Cloud Beats an Appliance for Big Data E-Discovery

Cloud Platforms Better with Big Data

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Big data can mean big headaches for legal and IT professionals involved in electronic discovery. In large-scale litigation, the task of collecting and sifting through electronically stored information can be gargantuan, both in effort and cost.

When a business becomes involved in litigation or a government inquiry, its lawyers need to dig through the company’s stacks of big data in search of needles of potentially relevant documents, emails, text messages, spreadsheets, presentations and other ESI. This process of collecting, searching and reviewing ESI is typically the most expensive and time-consumingly phase of any legal matter.

Without question, big data discovery would be all-but impossible were it not for technology. Sophisticated e-discovery platforms enable corporations and their counsel to get through the process with greater efficiency and economy. These platforms use advanced analytics, powerful search, and streamlined workflows to enable legal teams to whittle big data down to scale.

However, while there is no question as to the need for e-discovery technology, there remains debate over the better platform for delivering this technology—a local appliance or the cloud.

Ever since the early days of e-discovery, several of the leading platforms have run as local, appliance-based installations. But as the data that companies must deal with gets bigger, their legal teams are finding that these legacy appliances are no match for the advantages and capabilities of platforms based in the cloud.

Why is a cloud platform better suited to handling big data e-discovery? Here are five reasons:

1. **Cloud Platforms Cost Less than Local Appliance**

A leading factor driving businesses and law firms to the cloud for e-discovery is cost savings. With corporate legal departments under greater and greater pressure to rein in legal spending, in-house counsel are becoming more attuned to the efficiencies and savings they and their outside firms can realize through the cloud.
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Savings from the cloud come in many ways. Because the cloud provider hosts the data, the user saves by having no hardware to purchase or maintain. Cloud applications run in any standard web browser, so the user avoids the expense of purchasing software and upgrades. Also, cloud systems cost less because they require less IT staff than local appliances and have less system downtime.

There is confusion in the industry about the relative costs of the cloud versus an appliance because comparisons tend to focus on discrete elements of each platform, not on the total cost of ownership. Because of this dearth of data, our company commissioned its own study. Using a hypothetical but typical e-discovery client, our study analyzed its total costs over a three-year period, using either a cloud or an in-house platform. Our analysis found a 36 percent savings in the cloud over the appliance.

2. Cloud Platforms Scale to Fit the Case

For big data e-discovery, a major advantage of the cloud is scalability. The larger the corporation, the more likely it is to be involved in multiple lawsuits. Just as the nature and complexity of these cases will differ from one to the next, so too will their data demands. One case might involve only a few gigabytes of data, whereas the next could involve multiple terabytes. For that matter, even a single case can see an unanticipated spike in ESI.

In an era of big data, that means, e-discovery requires a degree of elasticity that local systems simply cannot easily or economically provide. When your platform is built on locally installed hardware, then every ramp-up for a larger case requires you to obtain and invest in new hardware, new site licenses and extra staff. When case activity drops off, you are left with systems sitting idle, yet still taking up space and requiring maintenance.

By comparison, cloud-based platforms are inherently able to expand and contract as needed and on demand to meet your changing litigation requirements. You pay for greater bandwidth only when they need it and never pay to support unneeded system resources. Additionally, you need never interrupt the workflow of a case to await the installation of new hardware.
3. Cloud Platforms Have the Horsepower to Handle Big Data

Big data cases require big computing horsepower. This is not merely a function of the quantity of data, but also of the increasingly sophisticated search and analytics functions that are being used to help identify potentially responsive documents within all that data.

Cloud systems come with the capacity to tap into virtually unlimited processing power. The unbridled power of a cloud platform makes it far better suited than a local platform to handling the demands of big data e-discovery. Plus, with greater processing power comes greater speed and efficiency, which translate to lower costs.

4. Cloud Platforms Make it Easy to Load and Process Data

A hallmark of big data is that, within a single company, it can be spread across any number of locations and kept in any variety of formats. Cloud systems make it easy to load and process data from wherever it happens to be – corporate servers, remote custodians or third-party vendors.

In addition, some systems offer users the ability to search data automatically during loading, enabling users to identify and segregate documents up front that are potentially confidential or privileged.

5. Cloud Platforms Allow Anywhere, Anytime Access

Big data means global data. It is increasingly common for litigation to involve lawyers, support staff, review teams, data custodians and third-party vendors who are spread across disparate parts of the world. Because they require only a browser and Internet access, cloud systems have the advantage of offering easy access from anywhere at any time. That makes them ideal for global e-discovery.

The fact of the matter is that big data does not have to mean big headaches in e-discovery. Cloud platforms offer significant advantages over local appliances, providing greater savings, greater power, broader scalability, easier loading and processing, and easier access.
access. For all of these reasons, cloud platforms are uniquely well suited to the demands of big data e-discovery.

About the Author

John Tredennick is the founder and CEO of Catalyst. John is passionate about the role of search in e-discovery. Before founding Catalyst in 2000, he was a trial lawyer and litigation partner. John has been a frequent speaker on legal and technology issues for more than 30 years. He’s also written and edited five best-selling books and countless articles on litigation and technology issues.