Meet the Women Leading in E-Discovery Solutions

▶ **OpenText sponsors Women in eDiscovery, a non-profit organization providing women with legal tech education, networking and leadership opportunities. Here, Priyanka Sharma, Jennifer Davies, Erin Tomine and Jennifer Easley, executives with OpenText, describe their journey into e-discovery.**

CCBJ: What attracted you to this field, at the nexus of legal, technology and business?

Priyanka Sharma: Growing up in India, I was always interested in math and technology, but it wasn't until I began a master's in computer science that I realized how technology could really change our lifestyle. This is how a student who was interested in mathematics found herself working in technology. I've been in the IT industry for 19 years now.

Litigation historically has required very manual, intensive work. As I considered making a change I recognized how technology is helping corporate legal departments and law firms automate manual processes, make better decisions and – for law firms – better advise their clients. I found that so exciting. It was my inquisitiveness about how technology is solving problems and differences that led me to enter the e-discovery space.

Jennifer Davies: After I earned a graduate certificate, I took a job in project management and technology. Eventually, I transitioned into product management, which is more user-focused and really about understanding client needs and translating them into a product. From an e-discovery industry perspective, it's exciting to be addressing client questions such as, "How can I get more insight into frequent flyer custodians and litigation they've been involved in for the next matter that arises?" or "How can I make better, real-time decisions across matters, budget and spend?"

Erin Tomine: I started out as an attorney document reviewer and worked my way up at e-discovery vendors as I became more interested in the industry. From there, I joined Catalyst, now part of OpenText, as a product manager for the OpenText Insight platform. At the beginning of my legal career, I told myself, "I'm going to fight the good fight, one case at a time, one client at the time." Now, I feel like I can make a difference on a larger scale by improving the technology that attorneys use in their cases, when they are fighting that good fight.

The legal field is slow to change, but technology is always evolving. It's really exciting to be in this space because you can see how we are incorporating new technology into our product portfolio and its impact to clients on a day-to-day basis.

Jennifer Easley: I was in graduate school at the University of Virginia when the Electronic Text Center was founded at the UVA library. At the time, there was a great deal of interest in digitizing books and making them available online and I joined the Etext Center to work on several grant-funded projects, including one funded by the Mellon Foundation and one co-sponsored by the NSF and the DFG in Germany. The intersection of text and technology was interesting to me, so when I left university I looked for opportunities that would allow me to continue down that path. I happened upon e-discovery by chance, but the skills I developed at the UVA Digital Library were a great fit for the industry.

What drew you to product management in particular?

Sharma: While I was at TiVo Corporation, I led an extensive team of engineers and we did not usually interact directly with customers. I found I really enjoyed the few opportunities I had to interact with and really understand clients' needs, so I decided to shift into product management. That's when I came to OpenText.

Davies: Technology is amazing. The value it can add to our daily personal and business lives is incredible. It's great to sit down with clients to understand their problems, and to identify opportunities to enhance day-to-day productivity, interactions and operations in e-discovery through technology.

Tomine: As both Jenny and Priyanka have mentioned, the opportunity to work with and understand our clients' needs and to provide solutions to their problems is really gratifying. I often describe the product manager role as a translator between our engineering groups and our customers – being able to link them together and work towards a common solution.

Easley: I started in the field on the services side, but I also found that I most enjoyed working with clients to understand their requirements and priorities and working with the development team to improve the product to support their use cases. About five years ago, I moved into product management for OpenText Axcelerate and have enjoyed being here ever since.

Tell us what specific client problems you're helping to address.

Easley: One of the biggest challenges our legal customers have is how to efficiently review and investigate millions of documents for litigation, investigations and regulatory compliance matters. We've been addressing this need by introducing features into OpenText Axcelerate that help legal teams to surface the most relevant documents for review first. We're currently launching Axcelerate Predictive Filtering, which extends our existing predictive coding technology and allows users to see entire search categories that are most relevant – not just the documents – helping them narrow down huge piles of potential evidence.

Davies: The data centralization and consolidation strategy that is core to OpenText Insight, specifically for corporate clients facing repetitive litigation, is to leverage information from previous litigation to help legal operations departments be more cost effective and efficient. The earlier on they can understand facts about a new matter, the better equipped they are to make decisions about litigation strategy and management.

Tomine: With the OpenText Insight platform, our team proactively collaborates with not only our internal professional services team, but also our corporate clients to understand their pain points, as well as what plans they have for the future. That helps us coordinate our development efforts.

In addition to looking to new features and functionality, we also look at our current products to see how we can expand their use for different situations. For example, OpenText Insight Predict is our continuous active learning (CAL) tool, which is primarily used for technology-assisted review (TAR), but because of the algorithm's efficacy, we can also leverage it for e-discovery tasks like

early case assessment, or to assist in investigations to surface the most important fact patterns that will tell the story.

What are some of the greatest challenges and opportunities you've had?

Tomine: I don't think I've faced many challenges that aren't prevalent for all women working in more male-dominated industries. That said, after moving from the law into product management at OpenText, one of the challenges was not having the experience with the existing engineering or product processes. Fortunately, Jenny has really helped me to develop an understanding of the product side. We exchange ideas and that's been a huge resource for me.

In terms of opportunity, there are many organizations and resources to help empower and educate women in the field, like Women in eDiscovery, Women in Product, Girls in Tech, Girls Who Code, Tech Ladies and Latina Geeks, to name a few.

Davies: On the opposite side, I have the product management experience, but not the legal industry background

that Erin has, so she's been extremely helpful to me as well. Leveraging the different types of knowledge your colleagues have is a really great opportunity for growth.

Sharma: When I entered the workforce in India, I was one of the only women in my business unit, which was hard. Then, after I moved to the U.S., there were cultural differences that made finding a job difficult at first, but once I did, I found a mentor in another woman, my manager at the time.

One piece of advice she gave me was to convert challenges into opportunities. For example, if you're the only woman in a group, use it as an opportunity to make your voice heard. I learned so much from her and from the women I work with at OpenText, who are doing some amazing work.

Tomine: Something I've been hearing about lately is imposter syndrome, and how women can feel like they are not qualified to do a certain job, even when they are. So I think it is really important for women to share their stories about what challenges they have had to overcome, and also for strong women leaders to be mentors to younger generations. ■

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