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## Effective Project Management is Essential

Posted by Kevin Nichols on Mon, Dec 12, 2011 @ 09:28 AM

Effective project management is an essential component in the litigation discovery process.  Unlike other practice areas, litigation requires meeting numerous court deadlines, following various rules of civil procedure, and bartering with opposing counsel to reach agreements.  Non-compliance can be costly, where hundreds of thousands of dollars can be handed down as sanctions.  Effective project management enables lawyers to rely on their vendors to assist them in achieving these requirements on-time and on-budget.

The industry does not have a consistent definition of a project manager, however, for our purposes, we will define him/her as the technically skilled and legally knowledgeable intermediary between the law firm client and the vendor's IT staff that guides the flow of electronically stored information (ESI) throughout the Electronic Discovery Reference Model (EDRM).  A project manager's duties include but are not limited to the following:

1. Possessing enough background and knowledge of the litigation process to comprehend the specifications and scope of the project at hand in order to articulate a clear and concise statement of work (SOW) for client approval;

2. Translate effectively the details of the SOW to the IT/EDD staff so that they know what to do and how to do it;

3. Set realistic internal deadlines that end before the drop-dead deadlines of the client's to allow an appropriate cushion in the event something should go array;

4. Inquire about the project's status on a regular basis with IT/EDD staff and communicate updates to client; and

5. Effectively manage the project, including assisting the client with issues that may arise during the document review, until completion of the project, with honesty and integrity.

Honesty and integrity is inextricably tied to the project manager's familiarity and knowledge of eDiscovery.  Both the vendor and client rely immensely on this individual's ability to communicate effectively.  Thus, in order for project management to be effective, there must be technical knowledge, knowledge of the litigation process, honesty, and integrity.  If any of these are lacking or missing, the project manager will learn accountability very rapidly.

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