



Commonwealth Legal takes leadership position in Electronic Discovery with BlueArc Storage Solutions

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Sean Leclair

Director of Operations and Technology,
Commonwealth Legal

Summary

Electronic discovery is a rapidly evolving industry that has been driven by the massive growth in digital communications during the past decade. Organizations facing litigation are often required to produce documents originating from a wide range of sources including email, audio files, paper, websites, social networks and more. According to various industry estimates, electronic discovery will be a \$5 billion industry within the next two to three years. Commonwealth Legal is positioned as a technology leader that helps law firms and corporate clients to collect, process and review data so that relevant materials are ready for the lawyers to act upon. Commonwealth Legal requires an IT storage infrastructure that can deliver on a high volume of storage capacity along with flexibility, magnitude, and, high performance. Since partnering with BlueArc in 2007, Commonwealth Legal has been able to support a nearly ten-fold increase in data volume storage, while improving magnitude, performance, redundancy and business continuity.

The Company

Commonwealth Legal was founded in 2000 as Canada’s first national full-service litigation document management company. It is now the largest company of its kind in Canada, providing service to firms in the United States and outside North America. The company is privately held, and, is based in Toronto with branch offices in Ottawa, Calgary and Vancouver. Commonwealth Legal has an IT facility in Brampton, Ontario, which is its backup and disaster recovery site. Overall, the company has 70 employees across its entire operation.

The Challenge

Four years ago, Commonwealth Legal was managing a total of 16 terabytes of data. Today, the volume has increased to more than 150 terabytes. According to Sean Leclair, Director of Operations and Technology at Commonwealth Legal, performance is as critical as capacity. The company supports a number of hosted applications since many of its clients do not have advanced storage infrastructure that would support huge spikes in demand for capacity or performance. For these customers, data-transfer and uptime are absolutely critical.

“We needed one monster vault for data that we could easily access,” says Leclair. “If we are involved in managing the evidence in a large lawsuit or investigation, we anticipate a wide range of electronic file formats varying from emails, Microsoft Office documents, text messages, container files and more. In some cases we may do the capture on a data set of this magnitude or the client may handle the collection process and provide data to us. We access the documents from a number of machines and devices including USB drives. Our processes include de-duplication, extracting metadata, textual content, image conversion and integrating the files into a searchable database. Some of our projects have involved terabytes of data. Whether the data is delivered to us all at once or in intervals, ownership and ‘Chain of Custody’ procedures are



essential in preserving the integrity and defensibility of the data. The steps involved in copying and processing data can increase the storage volumes substantially. We can receive one terabyte of data, and by the time we are finished, the volume may have multiplied three times or more.”

Depending upon the needs of the legal team, Commonwealth Legal may be required to convert electronic data into an industry-standard format for integration with software packages, such as CT Summation, Concordance, iCONNECT, Clearwell or FTI Ringtail. For many of our clients, the volume of data is simply too much to house internally. In these instances, Commonwealth Legal can host the data and provide secure end user access via the Internet using a SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) model.

“Data transfer from an operational perspective is a critical function for our team,” says Leclair. “For hosted applications, accessibility must be 24/7 and requires 99.9% uptime. Large volumes of data must be backed up daily without impacting accessibility.”

The Solution

Four years ago, Commonwealth Legal decided that in order to sustain its position as an industry leader in Canada and to grow the company’s E-Discovery capabilities, an investment needed to be made in upgrading the IT technology infrastructure. The company investigated a variety of vendors and their technology offerings. Based on an in-depth analysis of competing solutions, Commonwealth Legal purchased BlueArc as its storage solution.

“BlueArc was a well known and rising star in E-Discovery industry in the US,” says Richard Wessel, an E-Discovery and technology consultant who works closely with Commonwealth Legal. “Prior to BlueArc, we saved everything on local disks. We had one small SAN and very little disk capacity. Every time we needed more disk capacity, a new server was purchased.”

Today, Commonwealth Legal has two BlueArc Titan 2100 Series network storage solutions; one that handles the company’s national business and operational storage demands in Toronto and the second which is used for backup and disaster recovery at a separate facility in Brampton, Ontario.

According to Leclair, there is a wide variety of benefits to the BlueArc NAS solutions. “When we need more capacity we just expand the volumes and put in a new shelf,” he says. “With a centralized storage platform, we can access the appropriate content, which gives us much more throughput from a processing perspective. Everything is much easier from an overall disk management perspective. Also, as we are migrating data away from older systems

coming to the end of their life cycle, many departments are moving away from local storage to a more reliable central storage.”

The Results

As a result of having the BlueArc systems in place, Commonwealth Legal has been able to take on new projects without having to worry about storage management issues. “We have projects where our customers are concerned about the size of their data volume, to which I assure them that disk space and management are not a problem,” says Leclair.

“It’s no longer a question of ‘What are we going to do?’ We simply call BlueArc and request another shelf. In fact, we ask for two of them: one for Toronto and one for the disaster recovery site. The other great thing is that it comes configured right out of the box, snaps in very easily and takes the burden off wait-time and IT Staff. BlueArc knows what is going on with your business,” explains Leclair

Another important benefit to Commonwealth Legal has been in regards to backup and disaster recovery, which are both critical in electronic discovery applications. Working with Q9 Networks Inc., which is Commonwealth Legal’s network infrastructure supplier, the company has been able to transfer data between Toronto and Brampton at rates of more than 900 megabits per second. Having the capacity, performance and piece of mind offered by the BlueArc storage systems has also enabled Commonwealth Legal to expand its revenue base by moving into the hosted applications space. This in turn makes Commonwealth Legal a more valuable partner to its own customers.

The Conclusion

For Commonwealth Legal, having a plan in place to manage data growth is critical to building a successful business. The more the business grows, the more data there will be to manage. By partnering with BlueArc, Commonwealth Legal is able to move confidently ahead with new customers and new projects.

“Having BlueArc in house gives us confidence that our disk arrays will be readily available, dependable and constantly up.” Leclair says. “There’s a certain level of confidence that the owners of the company have in knowing that we’re not going to have any issues with data. It also helps with our customers. When our customers see what we are doing — to those that know the disk industry — it is a win for us having BlueArc as a partner. We have many clients who have asked detailed questions about our disk storage. It gives them confidence to know we are partnered with an innovative technology leader like BlueArc.”



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