



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services—Legal

Customer Profile

Los Angeles, California-based Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton is one of *The American Lawyer* 100 highest-grossing firms in the United States, with approximately 474 attorneys and 566 staff members in 10 offices from New York to Shanghai.

Business Situation

Faced with an intranet that had limited functionality and costly annual fees, the firm wanted a system with better performance, increased flexibility, and integrated search capabilities.

Solution

Sheppard Mullin worked with partner XMLAW to implement a customized intranet solution that is based on Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 and the XMLAW Enterprise Portal System for law firms.

Benefits

- Nearly U.S.\$1 million in cost savings
- Enhanced productivity
- Greater responsiveness to clients
- Increased reuse of firm knowledge

Law Firm Increases Functionality and Reduces Costs with New Intranet

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Tom Baldwin, Chief Knowledge Officer, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton

With an aging, expensive intranet that offered limited functionality and slow performance, law firm Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton sought a better way to find and share the information needed to serve clients. Working with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner XMLAW, it implemented an intranet solution based on Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 and the XMLAW Enterprise Portal System for law firms. The new intranet offers enterprise search functionality, with add-on capabilities to index the firm’s Interwoven document management system, flexible collaboration options, and information tailored to user roles, all of which led to increased efficiency for attorneys and staff. With built-in workflow capabilities and no need to acquire a third-party workflow application or continue to pay annual licensing fees, Sheppard Mullin will save nearly U.S.\$1 million over the next three years.

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Situation

Law firm Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton handles a full range of corporate and technology matters, high-stakes litigation, and complex financial transactions for its clients. The firm’s 474 attorneys and 566 staff members work from nine offices in the United States and one office in China. Sheppard Mullin is one of the “Am Law 100” highest-grossing firms in the United States according to *The American Lawyer* magazine.

Delivering value to clients is the top priority for Sheppard Mullin. But to provide that value, attorneys need access to all relevant information firmwide so that they can serve clients efficiently. Recently, Sheppard Mullin recognized that it had outgrown its existing intranet and needed a new solution.

In addition, Sheppard Mullin wanted to improve its access to details about clients and past matters. “The only pieces of information that our users could consistently search for were structured data, such as people and financials. Any other areas produced a glut of information that wasn’t prioritized and therefore took a lot of time to sift through,” recalls Dora Martinez, Director of Project Management for Sheppard Mullin.

In the past, the firm’s end users were forced to perform multiple searches through its many systems, receiving individual documents back. They could not compare all the documents pulled from different information sources, thus there was no way to rank them by relevance. Attorneys, paralegals, and staff also had difficulty determining who within Sheppard Mullin had the most experience working with a certain client or matter.

To compensate for the lack of enterprise search capabilities, the firm put a lot of information on the intranet’s home page, more than any one user needed or wanted to

wade through after logging on. “We decided not only to improve our search capabilities, but also to streamline the intranet based on user roles by delivering targeted home pages,” says Tom Baldwin, Chief Knowledge Officer for Sheppard Mullin. “For instance, we wanted partners to see the information that mattered most to them, such as financial reports and timekeeping statistics along with targeted news and events based on their practice groups, which wouldn’t necessarily be pertinent to a legal assistant.”

Sheppard Mullin also sought to improve its reuse of existing documentation and knowledge to provide superior counsel as well as achieve greater efficiency in serving clients. “We never want attorneys to have to start from the beginning when putting together a standard letter or other legal document,” says Martinez. “All of our people should be able to quickly find existing work product so that they can make the most of their time and our clients’ budgets.”

In addition, the firm’s users had been requesting the ability to share knowledge in a more freeform, flexible way than was available with traditional communication options. Says Baldwin, “They wanted to launch ideas, ask questions, receive feedback, and so forth in an unstructured way, so we also needed something with built-in mechanisms for a free exchange of ideas and knowledge to foster a more collaborative environment.”

Solution

In early 2006, Sheppard Mullin began its search for a new intranet solution, with the goal of having it up and running by February 2007, the annual subscription renewal date for the existing system. The objective was to bring all of the firm’s content and knowledge sources into one easy-to-use location so that Sheppard Mullin attorneys and staff could

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quickly find complete information, regardless of its location.

After evaluating available intranet options, Sheppard Mullin decided that a solution based on Microsoft® SharePoint® Products and Technologies made the most sense for the firm. “Within the legal community, there has been a surge of firms and vendors building solutions using SharePoint sites, and we were encouraged by the number of vendors building Web parts to quickly and easily integrate Office SharePoint Server with their products,” says Baldwin. “Also, like many firms, we have in-house development experience with Microsoft technologies, and we know that it’s easier to find developers with those skills than to find people with a background in other, more obscure development languages.”

Latest Technology

Sheppard Mullin still had to choose whether to base its solution on the proven Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 or on the upcoming release of Office SharePoint Server 2007. After a careful evaluation of the two versions, Sheppard Mullin opted to move forward with Office SharePoint Server 2007.

“We liked the item-level security, search capabilities, and tighter integration with the Microsoft .NET Framework. Plus, testing from Microsoft showed that the solution could handle searching up to 50 million documents without any lag in performance and that we also could index our Interwoven document management system,” says Baldwin. “We were especially interested in the workflow capability of Office SharePoint Server 2007.” The firm had been evaluating third-party workflow systems, but the integrated workflow functionality within Office SharePoint Server 2007 removed the necessity for an additional application, resulting in a less costly and more straightforward implementation.

According to Baldwin, moving forward with Office SharePoint Server 2007 was not an easy decision. The intranet had to be fully deployed by the beginning of 2007 to comfortably plan the migration of all users firmwide from the previous intranet to the new solution before the February 2007 license renewal date for the old intranet.

To address its concerns and pave the way for a smooth migration, Sheppard Mullin IT staff members attended a two-day Architecture Design Session at the Microsoft Technology Center (MTC) in Los Angeles, California, in July 2006. There, they worked with Microsoft architects to evaluate their server-farm design and ensure that it was appropriately scaled, based on the size of the firm. The Sheppard Mullin team left the MTC engagement with a fully vetted design, a better understanding of the new features in Office SharePoint Server 2007, and a far greater comfort level with the new technology.

“Being one of the first large law firms in the world to deploy an end-to-end Office SharePoint Server 2007 solution meant working with prerelease code during much of the project timeline,” says Baldwin. “The stakes were high, but we felt that the risks were mitigated by the support from Microsoft, the ability of XMLAW to work with us through the prerelease phase, and the benefits of the solution’s core functionality that we could leverage right out of the box.”

Industry Customization

Although pleased with the built-in capabilities of Office SharePoint Server 2007, Sheppard Mullin wanted to customize its intranet solution to meet specific industry needs, so it consulted potential partners for help. “XMLAW was the only company that offered us a complete, functioning intranet as opposed to a set of Web parts. We took advantage of our partner’s expertise with

both the legal industry and Office SharePoint Server 2007, and worked closely with the XMLAW team and tools to produce our intranet," says Baldwin.

XMLAW, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, also helped Sheppard Mullin become acquainted with and take advantage of the power and benefits of its new solution's search capabilities. "Lack of effective search functionality is a common pain point among our clients," says Rob Saccone, President and Chief Executive Officer for XMLAW. "Including search capabilities early in the implementation provides immediate value and helps drive adoption of other portal functionality."

In September 2006, XMLAW began working with Sheppard Mullin to fine-tune the requirements of the solution and lay out the project plan and methodology for deploying Office SharePoint Server 2007 and the XMLAW Enterprise Portal System. For several weeks in December 2006, the firm conducted a pilot project in which 150 partners, associates, and staff members from different offices and practice groups across the United States tested the solution and provided detailed feedback. Says Martinez, "Our users' initial requests for a new intranet were that it needed to be more user friendly and produce relevant search results—basically, they wanted something similar to the Internet search engines they use."

After adjustments to reflect the feedback from the pilot users, the solution went live in mid-January 2007, at which time the firm shut down its old system. A team of Sheppard Mullin professionals traveled to its different offices to introduce users to the new intranet, illustrate how user feedback influenced its design, explain the rationale for its organization and functionality, and generally promote its capabilities and usability. "The

results and feedback have been outstanding," says Saccone.

Adding Workflow Capabilities

To implement workflow capabilities, Sheppard Mullin plans to make extensive use of Windows® Workflow Foundation to build automated processes that will help the firm optimize efficiency and avoid errors. The firm currently is identifying many opportunities where a workflow solution with a centralized repository will have a dramatic impact on efficiency and costs.

Sheppard Mullin wants to develop at least 20 workflow processes regarding new-matter intake, new-attorney setup, and the addition of other new staff members, as well as processes to automate the approval of vacations and leaves of absence. The firm already has begun creating the new-attorney workflow process and plans to have it operational by the end of March 2007.

Benefits

Thanks to its new intranet, Sheppard Mullin not only is fostering employee efficiency by providing users with a more powerful, more versatile system, but also is doing so while saving significant sums of money. "We're conserving resources, making life easier for attorneys and staff, and offering the tools for greater responsiveness to our clients. This new intranet solution has been a real win for the firm," says Baldwin.

Cost Savings of \$1 Million

By using the intranet and its built-in enterprise search capabilities and workflow tools, Sheppard Mullin is saving nearly U.S.\$1 million over the next three years. "By not having to purchase and implement individual, off-the-shelf products to support enterprise search and workflow processes or pay the annual portal licensing fees, we are gaining a tremendous cost savings," says Baldwin. "Plus, developing with SharePoint Server

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2007 is far easier and less expensive than with [other] systems.”

Enhanced Productivity

In addition to the cost savings, the new intranet gives Sheppard Mullin faster access to the right information, which helps attorneys and staff streamline their processes and accomplish their tasks more quickly. Just from a performance standpoint, the firm’s users can view pages more quickly and get faster search results—and logic is applied to those results so that the most relevant documents are listed first. “Our implementation of Office SharePoint Server 2007 has been a huge success,” says Guy N. Halgren, Managing Partner for Sheppard Mullin. “Since going live, the feedback from our lawyers and staff has been very positive. The solution is quickly becoming a focal point for our lawyers’ daily activities and for their quests for information within the firm.”

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Users have noted improvements in both accuracy and performance. Now, when a user performs a search, the results typically are displayed in a fraction of a second and often the document sought is in the top five listed on the first page, even if a thousand documents are returned. What’s more, when users receive results, they can click any of the links on the results page to be taken directly to that document, without leaving the intranet or opening a new application. Notes Baldwin, “Search is one of the most popular features used and we are averaging almost 1,000 searches per day.”

Relevance has been added to the content that users see on the intranet. The solution delivers content through logon-based home

pages that load with the right content and level of detail for the particular user, based on title, practice group, location, and so on. “With that kind of audience targeting, we’re making it so that nobody wastes time by rummaging through our intranet,” says Baldwin. “Everyone can get right to the specific information that he or she needs.”

Greater Responsiveness to Clients

Sheppard Mullin constantly strives to deliver faster, higher-quality services to its clients. Today, attorneys have quick access to firm-wide information, so they can respond to client issues and inquiries as quickly as possible. In fact, the firm is integrating much of its accounting data into the new solution, making vital financial information available to attorneys and their staff directly through their intranet home pages.

“Now, our attorneys and their legal secretaries can immediately answer client questions regarding what’s been invoiced or paid, which helps further the client relationship,” says Rick Moreno, Director of Network Operations for Sheppard Mullin. “We’re enhancing the firm’s ability to respond to our clients’ questions about documents and billing and to do so more thoroughly, thus improving the level of service we’re providing.”

Easier Content Publishing

The ability to more easily publish content is another area of improvement for Sheppard Mullin. “Publishing today is certainly much easier because everything can be done from within Office SharePoint Server 2007,” says Anthony Arrington, Knowledge Management Project Coordinator for Sheppard Mullin. “And now information is ready for use in less than one minute.”

Adds Baldwin, “The new intranet is so easy to deal with that we’re now seeing an increase in the amount of content being contributed by

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our practice groups. The more content published on the intranet, the more our attorneys can take advantage of the experience of their colleagues.”

Attorneys also are using the new intranet’s blogging capabilities for the freeform knowledge sharing that they sought. “Blogging is a great option for sharing firmwide intellectual property and collaborating with colleagues,” says Baldwin. “It’s better than using e-mail because users can search blogs using keywords, and we can archive and retrieve all the posted ideas and information for later use.”

Increased Reuse of Firm Knowledge

Because so much more content is published now, the firm can make greater use of it than ever before. Part of the appeal of working with Sheppard Mullin is its wealth of institutional knowledge and range of experience. In the past, attorneys only needed to know the right people to gain access to that knowledge, but as the firm grew, tapping in to the right source became more difficult. The new intranet makes information from any attorney’s past experience readily available to everyone.

“Our intellectual property has real value, and it’s a tremendous asset now that the right people and documents are more accessible to those who need them,” says Baldwin.

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Future Improvements

Although the new solution already has increased efficiency for users, Sheppard Mullin anticipates even greater benefits after it fully implements the new workflow capabilities. “We’ll definitely make gains in

the accuracy of our information with regard to matter intake, not to mention the productivity gains derived from one person entering a new matter once as opposed to five times,” says Moreno. “We’ll also be able to populate our systems much more quickly, which will satisfy many of our attorney’s complaints about how long it takes to get a matter through the series of necessary approvals.”

The workflow process will spare staff from having to manually walk through the process of printing and scanning multiple forms and mailing or e-mailing them to the various reviewers at the right time. The workflow will come with automatic alerts, making it far easier and faster to move through processes. Says Moreno, “It takes an average of three days to get a new matter approved right now, but with the workflow solution in place, we estimate that we’ll have things approved in a single day.”

Concludes Baldwin, “We’ve always made a point of providing our attorneys with great information, but we had to have multiple delivery mechanisms for doing so—printing reams of paper reports, sending e-mail attachments, etc. We’re moving toward a model where we have a central location of access for all the information that employees need, with reports generated elsewhere made available directly through the intranet. With Office SharePoint Server 2007, we get a system that can grow with us. We’re free to add functionality as users demand it and still continue to provide superior service to our clients.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about XMLAW products and services, call (781) 848-4844, or visit the Web site at: www.xmlaw.net

For more information about Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton, visit the Web site at: www.sheppardmullin.com

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