

Technology Leadership Enables UNIFIED To Pioneer In Delivering Outsourced Legal Support Services

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Noel Kilby,
COO, UNIFIED

Summary

The market for electronic discovery and electronic disclosure services is attracting both a lot of attention and a lot of competition. The research firm Gartner, Inc., predicts that worldwide E-Discovery software revenue will top \$1.2 billion this year, a 23 percent increase from last year. Gartner defines E-Discovery as the identification, collection, preparation, review and production of electronically stored information associated with legal and government proceedings. For companies, government agencies and law firms, the more stringent compliance requirement and tougher E-Discovery laws that have driven the market, have also placed a premium on both legal and technology expertise.

UNIFIED is a relatively young, innovative company with a veteran team of widely respected experts in creating innovative technology solutions for legal support services. In a short space of time, the company has been able to differentiate itself by offering high-performance, cost-efficient outsourced solutions driven by a fast, robust, scalable and highly available technology infrastructure. The UNIFIED team has already proven itself to be a pioneer and a major aspect of its ability to lead the market has been the performance, scalability and flexibility delivered by their BlueArc network storage solution.

The Company

UNIFIED is one of the fastest growing providers of litigation and legal support services in Europe. Corporations, law firms and public-sector agencies turn to UNIFIED for a variety of outsourced services, including E-Discovery and E-Disclosure, forensic collection and business process outsourcing, among others. Based in London, UNIFIED primarily serves customers in the United Kingdom and across Europe. The company prides itself on what it describes as “outcome-based outsourcing” and is absolutely focused on the results it can achieve for its clients. UNIFIED boasts a deeply experienced team of legal technology and litigation support professionals. In creating the company, CEO Paul Mankoo and COO Noel Kilby believed they could differentiate UNIFIED not only by providing superior services but also by implementing a superior technology infrastructure.

The Challenge

The E-Discovery market — or, more aptly for the European market, E-Disclosure — is becoming saturated with suppliers, Mankoo says, and the challenge for UNIFIED, has been to create a clear value proposition that would distinguish the company as a market leader. One area of differentiation has been the vast experience of the UNIFIED team in litigation support and technology leadership. Another key area has been in the technology itself. “While the volumes are different than in the USA, the key issues for clients and providers alike is to cut through the noise to actually identify the key technologies that will help them identify the data and issues relevant to their case in a manner which allows for an early case assessment as regards merits and risks” Mankoo says. “The key for us as a provider is to be able to get a handle on the information provided by our clients quickly and identify for them what they need to focus on in terms of key documents and data and also what technologies could help them review this. Another key component is costs: Clients don’t want to spend an inordinate amount of money on managing or getting a handle on their data. Speed is very important. These two factors combined point to the selection and implementation of the relevant technologies as the determining factor in successful outcomes. It’s also worth mentioning that the data protection laws in the U.K and Europe are a lot more stringent than the rest of the world in terms of how you handle and segment data, its storage and distribution. There are very tight laws as to what you can and can’t do as regards security, confidentiality and chain of custody. Again systems and processes are the key to mitigating risk in these areas and ensuring legal compliance”

The challenge to UNIFIED was to come up with a cost-effective, fast and high-performance platform that would enable the company to be a leader, not just in providing competitive E-Disclosure and litigation support services, but in providing technology breakthroughs for its customers. UNIFIED is currently using some off-the-shelf software as well as adding value through its own proprietary software developed in-house. Part of the challenge for Mankoo, Kilby and team was to not only differentiate UNIFIED’s existing solutions by offering , better service, better performance and better value than competitors, but also to position the company to leapfrog the competition with a extremely scalable, flexible and powerful technology platform for future solutions as well.

The Solution

Right from the beginning UNIFIED set out to be a technology leader in litigation support services and right from the beginning it began looking at BlueArc for its high-performance storage requirements. “At the time BlueArc was more heavily used in the media market and it was just starting to grow in E-Discovery in the USA,” Kilby recalls. “We compared three different solutions and we analyzed the type of usage we’d require and broke it down to database traffic and file-type traffic. It became apparent that the flexibility BlueArc offers in terms of breaking up the storage into different tiers and optimizing it for different tasks would enable us to choose one solution and optimize it for all of our different requirements. There are other elements of the BlueArc that are advantageous in our market. For example, our extraction tools are processing thousands of files a minute — there is a high number of reads and writes going on and the I/O has to be very, very fast. We benchmarked our off-the-shelf processing products and found that they performed four times faster using the BlueArc solution than any of the other storage systems. That was clearly a driving factor.”

UNIFIED is using a BlueArc Mercury 50 networked storage solution with 17 terabytes of data using SAS drives. Having the BlueArc system in place has enabled UNIFIED to enhance its entire IT infrastructure, maximizing its other investments in very fast network connectivity and increased use of virtualization technology. This has bolstered performance and flexibility from all aspects. “We have a high-end 10-gigabit-per-second network,” Kilby says. “In order to make the best use of the BlueArc technology we did not want the network to be a bottleneck. We have a very high number of cores and a large amount of RAM that we virtualize using Microsoft Hyper-V. It doesn’t take us more than a few minutes to create a new virtual machine. We can scale up very, very quickly and each Blade server can run 32 simultaneous virtual machines. We can scale up to a very large number of processors — more than we would ever need — and it’s important for us that the storage can adapt to that very quickly and simply.”

The BlueArc Mercury has also enabled UNIFIED to be innovative in managing its storage requirements by utilizing intelligent tiering as well as data migration. “We have different types of storage — very, very fast and slower near-line storage with migration policies in place,” Kilby says. “Moving data used to be a huge manual task, but now we use BlueArc Data Migration to do that. We set a policy that any file that is on our server for more than 24 hours migrates from very, very fast to slower. It’s funny to call it slower or near-line, since BlueArc’s slower storage is faster than the fast storage of other products they compete against.”

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– Paul Mankoo
CEO, UNIFIED



The Results

Having BlueArc in place has been one of the foundations in enabling UNIFIED to establish technology leadership, not only in providing the most sophisticated technology solutions, but also in providing superior performance and reduced costs. “We’re very much focused on being technology leaders and we have worked hard to develop that reputation in the market,” Mankoo says. “We’re always the company that gets called by clients to solve those difficult projects they don’t think anyone else can handle. Having the BlueArc solution is an extension of that. At the last company I worked, which is also in the same sector, the storage solution didn’t really do anything for us — in fact it was a bit problematic — and it certainly didn’t give us competitive advantage. It didn’t give us the speed and advanced platform that we use today as part of our competitive advantage in the market.”

By contrast, Mankoo says BlueArc has given UNIFIED significant competitive advantage. “Most providers can’t sit there with racks and racks of storage capacity waiting for a big project,” Mankoo says. “BlueArc enables us to scale up very quickly to meet any demand without having the lag in set-up time. We can enable true early case assessment immediately, while sometimes other providers will take a couple of weeks to get up to speed with the data.” Mankoo adds that this type of technology leadership is a major part of UNIFIED’s overall strategy. “We bring customers here and we show them what we’re doing and we talk about it in terms of performance. We tell them that we are able to get a four-fold increase in performance for the same application and we talk about scalability and the way we’re able to increase capacity very quickly. We even talk about intelligent tiering and how we’re able to use that to save labor costs.”

The Conclusion

“We’re the first E-Disclosure provider in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) for BlueArc and that’s very important to us. Even if we won’t be the last E-Disclosure customer, it definitely shows that we are cutting through the noise and leading the marketplace,” Mankoo says. “It shows that we are able to innovate in areas others may overlook. Having the BlueArc solution also gives us confidence as we move forward. The barrier for entry in e-disclosure is very low. Nowadays anyone can grab a computer, download software and set up a Web site. To actually do it the right way, you need to have the correct systems, processes and security in place and be able to scale quickly giving you and your clients the comfort that you can successfully deliver the project you take on, and not just one project, but multiple, using various tools, data and project types, and even managed services. BlueArc gives us the foundation to do that.”

About BlueArc

BlueArc is a leading provider of high performance unified network storage systems to enterprise markets, as well as data intensive markets, such as electronic discovery, entertainment, federal government, higher education, Internet services, oil and gas and life sciences. Our products support both network attached storage, or NAS, and storage area network, or SAN, services on a converged network storage platform.

We enable companies to expand the ways they explore, discover, research, create, process and innovate in data-intensive environments. Our products replace complex and performance-limited products with high performance, scalable and easy to use systems capable of handling the most data intensive applications and environments. Further, we believe that our energy efficient design and our products' ability to consolidate legacy storage infrastructures, dramatically increases storage utilization rates and reduces our customers' total cost of ownership.



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