

SPiRE: The Latest Step Forward In E-Discovery And Document Coding Services

The Editor interviews **George Phillips**, Director of Operations, SPi.

Editor: Mr. Phillips, would you tell our readers something about your professional experience?

Phillips: Prior to my work in e-discovery and litigation, I was engaged in IT and networking. Essentially I was a system and network administrator, and I came to e-discovery through data forensics and forensic collection. From the role of forensic technician, I moved into project management, where I managed a variety of e-discovery projects. From there I moved into production management, where I managed the operations that produced the data and then exported it for a national EDD company. Here at SPi, I am the Director of Operations for the litigation arm of the company and oversee all the data processing, data review and the support services group within SPi Legal.

Editor: Would you give us a brief overview of SPi Legal and the services that it provides?

Phillips: SPi Legal provides a comprehensive suite of litigation support services that give clear advantages to corporate law departments and outside counsel. Our end-to-end solution includes data collection, pre-process data culling, processing, data analytics, hosted and managed first-pass review in Attenex, iCONNECT and Concordance, paper processing, document coding, electronic document productions, consulting and project management.

Editor: What is SPiRE?

Phillips: The acronym for SPi Repository, SPiRE is a set of hosted processing utilities which import, manipulate and export data to and from the repository. It has been designed for both large and small scale projects involving electronic data and image paper documentation.

Editor: Why did SPi develop SPiRE? What did you see going on in the industry that led you to develop this offering?

Phillips: From the repository perspective, we were seeing a dramatic increase in projects requiring the reuse of data. We saw the need to be able to de-duplicate across multiple databases and across multiple projects. What we developed is a response to a clearly defined need for a defensible, flexible and cost-efficient production-quality electronic data processing engine. SPiRE was developed to manage not only the electronic data processing function, but to potentially serve as a long-term repository for various forms of client data, including but not limited to native files, scanned images and TIFF documents.

Editor: Who would be served best by SPiRE?

Phillips: SPiRE's utilities are best utilized by any of our corporate and law firm clients.

Editor: How does SPiRE integrate with SPi's other litigation support services?

Phillips: While the components of SPiRE are proprietary, we export to a variety of litigation support and review tools. This includes, but is not limited to, Attenex Patterns Mapper, iCONNECT, Concordance, and Summation. SPiRE can also export generic text and XML transfer formats. We are currently in the process of developing other proprietary exports as well.

Editor: What are some of the advantages of using SPiRE over standard EDD processing tools?

Phillips: SPiRE is both highly automated and easily customizable. Processes have been carefully developed, tested and automated. This process automation decreases the likelihood of errors. In addition, we have the ability to process data selectively, based upon client specifications, due to SPiRE's open-ended nature. One of the principal advantages of SPiRE is that it allows for customization both during and following processing at the request of the client. At the earliest stages of a project our project managers consult with the clients on the different options for processing with SPiRE. For example, in de-duplication, we permit them to change the variables for de-duplication, which really opens the door for "what if" scenarios. For instance, what if we ignore time zone differences on e-mail messages and de-duplicated solely on the basis of content, would that reduce the number of items to be reviewed? This is just one area where we add transparency and add additional data reduction capabilities by opening up what is typically considered "black box" functionality. Opening up this type of functionality gives our clients a significantly enhanced ability to get to the root of the relevant data quickly. The flexibility and transparency of SPiRE has been one of the principal selling points of SPiRE since its release in July of 2007.

Editor: Does SPiRE help SPi clients to save money? If so, how? Can you share some examples?

Phillips: SPiRE helps our clients save money by processing data quickly and efficiently, and, while the savings vary from project to project, they are substantial and ongoing. Coupling SPiRE with our other services is where our clients really begin to realize the savings. For example, one of our large corporate clients had us process a large volume of data in SPiRE. They wanted



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to review data as quickly as possible, but they only wanted to see the most relevant data to their case. Coupled with SPi Data Analytics, our client was quickly able to cull the data set down to the most relevant data based on selection criteria. Our client reviewed 50% less data due to the hit and non-hit analysis and samples provided by our SPi Data Analytics team in conjunction with SPiRE. This in turn saved the client not only on processing and hosting costs but also greatly decreased the amount of time needed to review the most relevant data to their case.

Editor: You mentioned that SPiRE helps clients save time. Can you tell us how in a little more detail?

Phillips: SPiRE was designed to be a high-volume, high-speed, multi-user environment tool through the use of parallel processing, advanced search capabilities and automated batch processing. These features add efficiencies that result in significant time savings. The ability to process data while concurrently reviewing data also results in a considerable savings of time for our clients. We have the ability to address even the largest projects by breaking them down into different databases and, while maintaining continuous identity across those databases, proceed into the different phases on a high-speed basis. This gives our clients the ability to start reviewing data quickly while we process and make additional data available on a rolling basis.

Editor: What are some of the long-term advantages to clients whose data is in SPiRE?

Phillips: While SPiRE can export to industry standard review platforms, SPiRE also has a round-trip import feature for the very same platforms. This permits our clients to make use of long-term storage and reuse of review and production information decisions, such as privilege calls. The combination of exporting and importing features allows SPi to select and classify large volumes of raw collected data, where we can then send the likely responsive documents to a client's selected review platform. When the review is completed, we can bring the data back into the repository for bulk downstream TIFF conversions, exports and productions.

Editor: What is your infrastructure for running SPiRE and storing clients' data?

Phillips: With regard to SPiRE, we use a SQL server DT Search based processing platform. We currently have multiple banks of servers that run SPiRE for new and existing projects. We maintain a SAN environment, which we use for the storage of active client data, and we provide our clients with near-line or tape backup storage options as their project review completes.

Editor: What can you do with SPiRE regarding exports to other platforms, review systems, or native file productions?

Phillips: We can currently export data natively to most of the industry standard legal review platforms. SPiRE has the ability to export native data with text or other reference load files. We control the development of SPiRE; we can add new platforms as needed for our clients. This is an ongoing service, and we anticipate adding a variety of new platforms at the request of our clients as they emerge.

Editor: Now that it has been released and is fully operational, how do you think you have done with respect to meeting your goals?

Phillips: We think that we have really hit the mark with SPiRE. Our operations development and SPi Data Analytics groups have found that many of the capabilities made possible by SPiRE make us more efficient and more flexible in dealing with the ever changing requirements of our clients. We have made repurposing data much more manageable. The modeling or review scenario, such as the duplication across or within databases, has become easily manageable for our clients, and we are able to go back and forth between different types. Automating processes allows for quick operations, with reduced likelihood of issues. We also have the ability to successfully process selectively, based on a larger set of client specifications and communication of data elements to and from downstream review platforms. We have been very pleased with the results.

Editor: SPiRE prides itself on being unique. What is the competition doing?

Phillips: The top EDD vendors in the field are working on their own processing tools. What sets us apart is our robust data model, our ability to reuse data, our automated processing and our flexibility.

Editor: What can we expect from SPiRE going forward? Are there new features in the works?

Phillips: Absolutely. Going forward, we are working on other tools that integrate with SPiRE, such as advance data analytic tools like concept extraction, and we are working on exports for data and customized formatted text in HTML and RTF. We are also developing the ability to catalog from MS exchange server, and we are constantly adding new foreign language support as we get requests from our clients. As we add languages, our clients can expect an increase in the number of foreign languages that we will support. Arabic, for example, is one that we will add to the list in the very near future.

Please email the interviewee at g.phillips@spi-bpo.com with questions about this interview.