

Firms Replace Elite

Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP

After 12 years of managing finances with Thomson Elite, Buffalo, N.Y.-based Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP was definitely ready for a change.

“With Elite, nearly everything—from time entry to accounts receivable—was fragmented, with nearly every module being from a third party,” said Marie C. Benevento, applications support specialist for the 65-attorney firm. “This made support and operations highly frustrating. Elite would say to contact the vendor partner, the vendor would say it was Elite’s problem. We were very unhappy.”

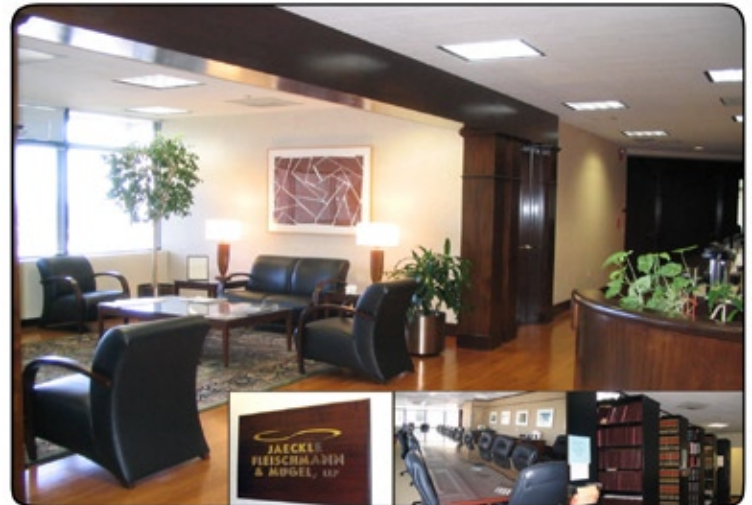
Another issue was the time entry, which was workstation driven, meaning time entry had to be uploaded on the desktop and downloaded into the financial management database. This meant the reports were often inaccurate.

Integrated System

“We needed an integrated system—with time entry, accounts receivable, Work In Process (WIP), etc. in one package, with support from one vendor,” she added.

“The next version of Elite might have integrated more of these capabilities, but we would have needed to purchase five more servers to get it, not to mention the expense of the new software and the ongoing maintenance of multiple servers. It was far more than we wanted to pay.”

The firm also wanted the new financial management software to be easy enough to learn that attorneys could enter their own time, freeing up the administrative staff for other things. This hadn’t been possible with Elite because of its complexity.



After evaluating several alternatives, Benevento was confident that Omega Legal—with only one high-performing server required and all capabilities, including the database, integrated into one software package—would fit the bill. Her recommendation to firm administration came despite claims that the InterSystems Caché® database was proprietary, the main “negative” competitors have been using in recent times to combat the ever-increasing spread of Omega Legal through the legal community.

Benefits

- Improved Performance
- Lower Total Cost of Ownership
- Happier Attorneys

“We were told by competitors that Caché was proprietary, meaning we wouldn’t be able to access the database,” Benevento said. “After doing some research on my own, I discovered that I could still do SQL queries and that it is ODBC compliant, meaning it is no more ‘proprietary’ than Microsoft SQL. On top of that, since it isn’t from Microsoft, like SQL is, I also don’t worry about any computer viruses infecting the program. It feels much more secure!”

“Fear of change felt almost like jumping off a cliff, but ended up the exact opposite...”

*Marie C. Benevento, MIS support,
Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP*

Jaeckle took the conversion in “bits and pieces”—starting with demographics, then Accounts Receivable and Accounts Payable—so it would be easier to fix if there were any problems. As is always the case, the Omega project manager worked with the firm every step of the way, guiding Benevento through the process. “I knew SQL very well, so I could extract the files into the exact format that Omega wanted. We didn’t even need a third-party data extractor; it was that easy.”

The firm was completely converted in three months, with the bills going out on the third month. “I was surprised at how smooth it was, as were a few of the attorneys. Fear of change felt almost like jumping off a cliff, but ended up the exact opposite,” Benevento said.

Makes Time Entry Simple

Jaeckle Partner Mitch Banas appreciates the product’s ease of use. “None of us entered our own time in Elite, it was far too cumbersome,” Banas said, “Omega Legal was easy to learn and has enabled me to capture substantially more time than I ever did before, which is largely a function of my own proactive use of the product. Every day, I go through the drop-down matter menus and review the time I’ve entered from the day before to ensure that nothing has slipped through the cracks. It’s really simple.”

In addition to making time entry simple, Banas also values being able to research for himself how much time he’s billed on a particular matter, how much WIP is with the client, what the recent receivables are for the client, etc. “With Elite I’d have to put in a request to the accounting department, along with everyone else, which could take some time. With Omega Legal I can find out myself, which is ideal when I’m sitting down to call the client.”

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*Mitch Banas, Partner,
Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP*

Benevento can’t be any more pleased with the report writing capabilities of Omega Legal. “Our version of Elite didn’t have report writing, so we had to create reports manually or with SQL. In Omega Legal, we can do it less expensively because we can do it ourselves. We’ve had some custom views built and I’ve been able to write some others as well because Omega gives you a straightforward SQL tool to use that is very user friendly.”

Kennedy Childs & Fogg, P.C.

The story was similar for Kennedy Childs & Fogg, P.C., one of Colorado's largest law firms dedicated to the practice of trial law. The 50-plus attorney firm was at a crossroads when it came to its financial management system: either the firm had to spend a lot of money upgrading to the next version of Thomson Elite (at least \$120,000) and adding multiple servers with very high ongoing maintenance; or they had to search for an easier to use integrated system offering the same features at less cost. The firm chose the latter. That decision was easy.



After evaluating several options, the firm chose Omega Legal (another easy decision), and the conversion process began nearly immediately. Finance Director Janet Wulf first worked closely with the Omega project manager to outline the specific definitions and needs of the firm. Based on these requirements, Omega designed the foundation of the software, setting up all of the firm's timekeepers, defaults, firm-wide rules, etc., creating a custom-configured system.

At the end of February, they began converting Accounts Payable and General Ledger data from the previous 25 years. (Any transaction after March 1 was directly entered into Omega Legal). Unlike Jaeckle, who had internal SQL expertise, Kennedy Childs hired a third-party database consultant who could extract the required data from Elite and then work closely with Omega to convert it into Omega Legal. Accounts Receivable/Billing was converted from Elite at the end of March and the firm was fully live with Omega Legal on April 1, 2005. No joke.

"You have to know that the vendor is going to give you the kind of customer service that will make your conversion—and your everyday work processes once you're live—as worry free as possible. Omega is that kind of vendor."

*Janet Wulf, finance director,
Kennedy Childs & Fogg P.C.*

Wulf feared the conversion was going to be the tough part. All of the firm's Matter IDs are alphas, not numeric, so her biggest concern was how to make the alpha IDs fit Omega Legal's numeric Matter IDs. "Omega bent over backwards to enable us to continue to use our Alpha IDs," Wulf said. "You can't just be happy with the product you choose. You have to know that the vendor is going to give you the kind of customer service that will make your conversion—and your everyday work processes once you're live—as worry-free as possible. Omega is that kind of vendor."

The Importance of the Database

Most of the reasons for the lower cost, integrated capabilities and significant flexibility are due to the Caché database. In addition to being significantly faster than other databases, Caché handles terabytes of data with no performance issues, even when generating month-end bills or detailed financial reports. As a result, unlike competing systems, no full-time database administrator is needed, greatly reducing the costs often associated with maintaining a financial management system.

“After referencing law firms that use InterSystems Caché, I’ve found it to be SQL-compliant, very effective, and quite fast...”

*Don Holland, CPA, Partner,
HSV Consulting Group LLC*

“When I’m helping my clients choose a new financial management system, they always ask about the database,” said Don Holland, CPA, HSV Consulting Group. “After referencing law firms that use InterSystems Caché, I’ve found it to be SQL-compliant, very efficient and quite fast, and I don’t hesitate to recommend a product based on this database.”

Universal Benefits

Jaeckle and Kennedy have a lot in common. Not only did they make the decision to switch from Thomson Elite—for similar financial and feature reasons, they both decided to choose Omega Legal to replace it. As a result, they have noticed a significant improvement in efficiency and reduction in Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) over Elite, for the following reasons:

- **Single Server Only**—Minimal hardware is required, meaning both less initial investment and less costly ongoing maintenance. Omega Legal requires only a single server, regardless of a firm’s current size or future growth plans. In addition, no additional third-party tools are required, which saves on software and annual maintenance fees.
- **No Database Administrator**—This can save a firm from \$50,000 to \$75,000—or even more—a year.
- **Minimal Staff Required** —Both Jaeckle and Kennedy found they had more time to work on additional projects instead of managing day-to-day operations.
- **Improved Customer Support**—Omega develops and supports its own applications—no finger-pointing or multiple phone transfers. This means questions can be answered faster and issues resolved sooner.
- **No Hidden Upgrade Fees**—Upgrades are always included in Omega’s annual maintenance fees.
- **More Reporting Options**—With Omega Legal, there are myriad ways to generate reports without the need for any SQL expertise. As a result, even attorneys can access the reports from their own desktop when they want them.

Omega

Omega is a privately held Scottsdale-based company that provides mid-to-large size law firms an integrated financial and practice management software suite that sets the standard for return on investment, system performance and service. Since 1975, Omega has been solving critical business issues for law firms, improving their profitability, productivity and efficiency.