IBM

ELF: making a case for e-business in the legal industry.

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Application	Online workplace for legal professionals
Business Benefits	Measurable productivity and efficiency gains, ROI quantifiable to the dollar, data center that can be built quickly anywhere
Software	IBM DB2® Universal Database™ IBM Vault Registry IBM VisualAge® for Java™
Hardware	IBM RS/6000®

Increasing productivity through collaboration

Legal professionals can appreciate the advantages of a collaborative solution. Each case brings a daily deluge of information that can quickly become overwhelming, making collaboration and efficient work difficult. And until recently, security concerns related to transferring proprietary information over the Internet limited solution options. Since its inception, ELF, an application service provider (ASP) located in Seattle, Washington, has sought to alleviate collaboration problems for legal professionals. ELF's mission is to help corporate law departments and insurance claims departments work more productively and profitably with their representing law firms by developing cutting-edge, high-tech solution offerings for the legal industry.

Assessing the solution needs

Prior to 1999, ELF served its clients with a collaborative offering that was based on Lotus® Domino™ and Lotus Notes® running on a virtual private network. This solution was a first step—the Lotus components worked great—but using the virtual private network was expensive and cumbersome to implement.
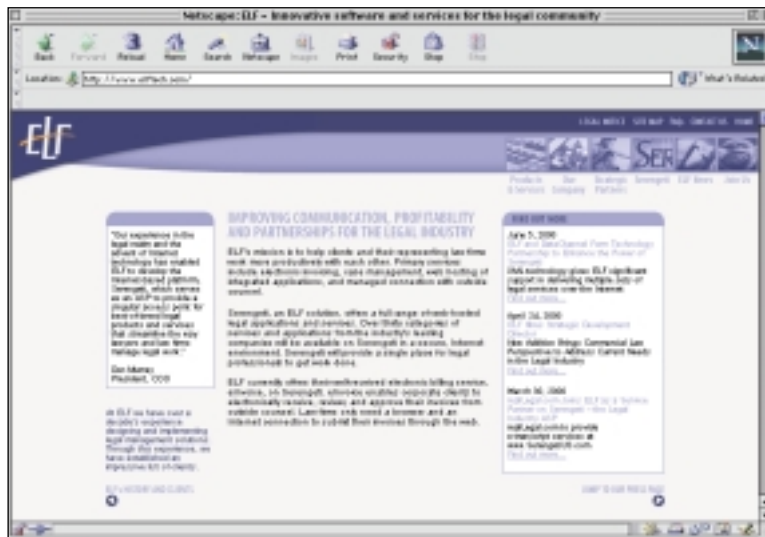
Through the use of IBM security technology and ingenuity, Serengeti meets the stringent security requirements of the legal industry.

e-business

An Internet solution — where the only technical requirements for users were Internet access and a Web browser — was the next step. In December 1998, ELF realized the legal industry was comfortable with Internet security and ready for a Web solution.

To remain the leader in its industry, ELF raced to be the first to market an e-business solution. According to Don Murray, ELF's president and CEO, ELF had comprehensive information technology needs. Explains Murray, "Our e-business strategy required that we create a network architecture and data center that were unbiased to any particular technology platform." ELF wanted to partner with a world-class technology provider, and it needed a secure, scalable, highly available and flexible solution. Flexibility was especially important because as an ASP, ELF needed the ability to accommodate a multitude of solutions from other legal service providers (and ELF anticipates adding services in more than 30 categories). The ability to globally deploy similar data centers quickly was also critical to ELF. As a small and growing company, ELF knew it could count on the experience and resources of IBM to help deploy its solution.

"We deployed our e-commerce strategy at a remarkable rate. It's something we're very proud of and certainly couldn't have done without IBM as a partner. We went from a crystalized vision in April of 1999 to a fully deployed solution in six months and built a very complex data center in ten weeks."

— Don Murray, president and CEO, ELF

Serengeti: legal professionals' Internet workplace

IBM and ELF designed and built the data center and network architecture of ELF's Serengeti solution based on the IBM Application Framework for e-business. "Serengeti is a business-to-business solution that connects law firms to their clients and also serves as an ASP to provide a singular access point for legal products and services that streamline the way lawyers and law firms manage legal work. Serengeti enables corporate legal and claims departments and law firms to collaborate through a common Web browser," says Murray. Built on a foundation of IBM hardware and software, Serengeti is an embodiment of innovation, security and flexibility.

ELF's investment in its existing technology was leveraged by the IBM Application Framework for e-business solution. Part of Serengeti included extending ELF's Lotus Domino and Notes™ solution—running on a virtual private network—to the Web. Built on the IBM AIX® platform running on an RS/6000 SP server and five stand-alone RS/6000 servers, Serengeti is capable of almost unlimited scalability. Using Domino, Serengeti provides secure, reliable data sharing and easy access to information—through a standard Web browser or a Notes client. And Domino's synchronization and workflow technologies are incorporated into the back end of the solution. Serengeti incorporates two Web servers—one manages site traffic, and the second provides security services to registered users.

Meeting ELF's site-security expectations was the biggest technical challenge the people of IBM faced in implementing this solution. The flexibility of IBM Vault Registry enabled IBM to create an innovative solution to this problem by integrating the standard certificates of Vault Registry with Domino. "With these measures, we can be confident about who a user is and what access authority they have based on a certificate's information," says Murray.

Serengeti uses Java code—written using IBM VisualAge for Java—to extend legacy applications to the Web. And more extensive use of Java is planned. Since business partners will supply many of Serengeti's services, Serengeti needed the capacity to accommodate applications housed on business partner's servers in addition to those housed on ELF's servers. Java enables ELF to tie all of the different functions together and integrate various back end capabilities. As time goes on, the flexibility of Java will be increasingly important to the success of Serengeti.

IBM DB2 Universal Database also plays a critical role in Serengeti. Currently, it provides the infrastructure to collect data for business intelligence functionality that will be added in the future. "Serengeti is not just a platform where law firms and other legal service providers work with their customers; it is also designed to be a place that collects powerful business intelligence for users," explains Murray.

"This project was an enormous undertaking for ELF, which is a small and growing company, but the sheer human resources that IBM added to this project is what allowed us to do this quickly and be first to market."

–Don Murray

The flexibility of the Application Framework for e-business-based Serengeti solution makes it easy to incorporate services and solutions from other legal service providers.

Convincing arguments: how ELF benefits from its IBM solution

IBM, working from the Application Framework for e-business model, gave ELF the flexible, secure infrastructure it needs—fast. "It took us about six months to go from a crystalized vision to a fully functional e-commerce solution. We rolled out our first data center in 10 weeks," says Murray. And the quick planning and implementation is paying off—Murray anticipates a full ROI for Serengeti within six months.

Using the Application Framework for e-business, ELF has a solution that sets it apart from the competition. "We've created a secure Internet channel to connect not only law firms to their corporate clients, but all other legal service providers on one platform through one ASP," explains Murray. The flexible infrastructure can be quickly duplicated worldwide, and it guarantees the easy addition of new features.

Why IBM?

ELF sought a vendor whose name its customers would trust when exploring solution options. Don Murray explains, "Look at who ELF is—a rather small company in Seattle, Washington, with Fortune 50 customers. We have a new customer with offices in 38 countries. We needed a partner that would guarantee that the lights never flicker. The primary reason we selected IBM as a partner is because our big customers have faith that IBM will be there—no matter what happens to our network."

As a Lotus Business Partner, ELF had an existing relationship with IBM. Based on this work relationship, ELF had great confidence that IBM would do whatever it took to make this difficult project succeed. "We felt that IBM was the only organization that could provide an end-to-end solution with leading-edge security products, hardware and services," says Murray.

For more information, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner.

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