

## **Why You Should Switch to Electronic Redaction**

### **Redaction Defined**

At its most basic, redaction is the process of removing information from a document prior to publication. In the legal context, redaction is used to remove confidential, proprietary or privileged information from documents prior to filing with the court, producing to opposing counsel, or otherwise making them available for viewing outside the office.

### **A Little History of Redaction Methods**

#### **Paper**

Before the explosion of electronic data and electronic data exchange, law firms had no choice but to redact confidential information from paper documents.

Once this meant overwriting confidential text with a black marker, and then photocopying the document. Often the text was visible under the black marks, and the document had to be copied several times to render the text truly invisible.

Next, redaction tape was invented – adhesive white tape in varying widths that could be placed over the confidential text. When the document was photocopied the covered text was usually not visible after the first pass, unlike the black marker method. Also, the tape could be removed if necessary.

It was an improvement over the black marker, but it was still slow and labor intensive.

#### **Digital**

For several years now, technology has existed to redact confidential text electronically from any document in PDF format. Several software programs have this capability. The process?

A user selects the confidential text with a Mark Redaction tool, usually operated with a sweep of the mouse. Multiple redactions can be marked in any given document.

The user can determine the appearance of the finalized redaction by selecting the color of the redacted area. The user can also specify the font, size and color of any overlay text placed over the redaction.

Once the user is confident all confidential text has been marked, the redactions are finalized. This step electronically strips the redacted text from the document, rendering it impossible for a viewer to access or uncover. All redaction software applications have an additional function

that can search for all metadata remaining in the document and give the user the option of removing some or all of it.

## Superior Procedure

This electronic procedure is superior in many ways to either of the paper redaction methods:

- **More Reliable.** Because all PDF applications with a Redaction feature have search tools, the user can search for confidential information such as phone, social security and account numbers, or for specific phrases. The resulting redactions are more reliable because they don't depend solely on the human eye to locate confidential and privileged material.
- **Speed.** It is faster to mark and remove text with quick mouse strokes than to place tape or black ink over confidential text. Hundreds of pages of redactions can be performed in a fraction of the time needed to redact the same volume on paper.
- **Cost Savings.** It saves a law firm money, both in supplies (paper, toner, ink or tape) and in staff time. Instead of spending hours to perform a very clerical task, employees can be freed up to perform more substantive work.
- **Professional Appearance.** Electronic redactions look clean, neat and tidy. Paper documents redacted with markers or tape look messy and unprofessional.
- **Green.** Paper, toner and electricity are saved because there is no need for photocopies of the original redacted document.

## Despite These Advances, Paper Redaction Continues

Although the technology to perform digital redaction has existed for several years now, and although firms are producing and exchanging an increasing volume of documents created digitally, some firms are still using manual paper methods for redaction.

In many cases this means they are printing a document, manually redacting confidential material with ink or tape, photocopying the document as many times as is necessary to cover the text, and then scanning the document back onto the system.

A document which was once searchable now is not, and if they want a searchable document, they must run OCR (Optical Character Recognition) over it.

A relatively small digital document has now as much as doubled in size due to the increased bulk caused by scanning and OCR.

And a procedure which, if performed with redaction software could have taken 5 minutes has now taken two or three times as long.

## Why?

With the tools available to improve the quality of their redactions, to maintain the searchable quality of digital documents and to garner huge savings in staff time and resources, why are law firms still redacting manually?

- Some firms aren't aware that redaction technologies exist because they've been too busy practicing law to keep abreast of technological advancements.
- Some firms believe they don't have time to research their software options, and thus just continue to do what they've always done.
- Some firms believe that redaction software is unreliable and that the redacted information and metadata will somehow be discoverable by the other side.
- Some firms are aware of the software, but believe they can't afford it.

## The Good News

There are an increasing number of software applications offering redaction capabilities. Examples are Adobe Acrobat X Pro, Informative Graphics Redact-It, Nuance eCopy PDF Pro, NitroPDF Pro 7, and Workshare PDF Professional, to name just a few.

All applications with true redaction features when used properly will completely and reliably remove all redacted text and metadata (if desired) from the document, as discussed above.

What's more, redaction software is indeed affordable for the smallest law firm, particularly if the firm determines that the software application need only be installed on a few desks or "seats." Pricing varies, but averages in the \$200 per license range. This is an investment that any firm can recoup in terms of staff time after just one sizable redaction project.

More and more law firms, both large and small, are making the switch to using redaction software for all their redaction projects. It's time for your firm to do the same.