

# THE API ECONOMY

What lies ahead for the connectivity of software in the legal space?

BY STEVE FLEMING

MUCH LIKE THE COSMIC derivation of bacon from pig, the "API economy" has become the trendy term for the re-imagining of traditional software development methodologies into packaged digital assets that are shaking up the world of business. Driven by demand for greater mobility and collaboration, APIs are now being showcased in the cloud as part of an evolving technical landscape, which helps satiate the clamorous demand for interconnectivity between software applications.

For the uninitiated, an application programming interface (API) is a defined set of bleeps and bloops that allow for one application to be called by another in order to perform a specific function or routine. You just booked tonight's restaurant on your mobile app, you push a button that says "location" and it's very likely that your application will have a chat with Google Maps to do the heavy lifting, before ultimately serving you the geographical content you desire.

All this trendy comes long after Web 2.0 companies such as Amazon, Netflix and Salesforce began to put APIs at the core of their strategic business thinking, helping to propel them into the billion-dollar revenue club and transform them from traditional widget stores, disc-by-mail services or humdrum database applications into the cloud platform powerhouses of today. Amazon began to break off their server infrastructure into consumable, API-shaped morsels of what we now term cloud computing, giving businesses everywhere the power of massively resilient and scalable backend systems



on a pay-as-you-go basis. Salesforce continues to curate an impressive API partner ecosystem through [salesforce.com/partner](http://salesforce.com/partner), allowing users to plug-in published or bespoke add-ons that propel their offering well beyond a simple CRM system. APIs are the language that enable and power these transactions, with trillions of calls between applications and services now occurring daily across the Web.

As more innovative cloud-based solutions spring up in the legal technology industry, how are law firms and solution providers currently engaged with Web-APIs, and what lies ahead for the connectivity of software in our space?

What does API mean in the legal space right now? A quick glance across the legal software spectrum and naturally there is a raft of API success, harkening back to partnerships between syn-

thetic legacy software to countless Microsoft Word plugins for legal research and drafting tools. kCura's current dominance in the document review space can attribute some of its success, without being too reductive, to having a defined strategy in respect of integrations. Akin to Salesforce, the Relativity product boasts an established ecosystem and developer program, acting as a massive enabler for law firm clients and service providers to mesh together tighter, more

cohesive solutions for end users. Whether it is a hook from a processing engine or a push to a case analysis tool, users are more able to leverage the "best of breed" approach to their case work with greater efficiency without reverting to cumbersome manual process or muddling along with anything claiming to be an end-to-end solution. A skin across major rivals in the review space and no comparable developer platform exists, with only a handful acknowledging and positioning custom API programs as a key benefit.

Document and content management systems that act as the pivot for workflow in big firms are platforms designed to help centralize content from every source. But despite these systems housing a veritable treasure-trove of content within a law firm, they can often end up acting as a barrier when users need to get certain

documents into more useful productivity tools, some that may even sit outside the firewalls of a law firm. This perceived logical barrier is starting to dissipate, as the interoperability of enterprise and cloud applications becomes ever more viable thanks to modern APIs.

#### THE FUTURE

As legacy software begins to phase out and perish in its utility, technology decision makers within law firms must analyze their legal workflows with greater perspicacity, identifying key areas in which the interoperability of new applications might provide significantly increased efficiencies in the management of data and attorney work product. More critical consideration should be placed on the API strategy of a potential new technology partner to ensure one is well positioned to reap the bene-

fits of the ultimate convergence of best-of-breed tools.

Looking to the future, it is worth briefly turning our gaze toward the steady march of machine intelligence and its impending role in legal. It is inevitable that applications will be built to replace some of the more "mundane" treading tasks that lawyers currently have to perform, harnessing the virtual brainpower of brilliant beasts such as IBM Watson.

Already, applications like BOSS have sprung up that purport to be "your brand new super intelligent attorney." Using API calls to leverage the various analytical services made available by Watson, BOSS has been designed to revolutionize the way legal research is conducted. Ask BOSS a question, and it responds in the form of citations, suggested reading and a measurable estimate on how useful it thinks it has been. Expect to see more

innovative new players coming up with similar cloud-based solutions, weaving together fantastical and powerful technologies quicker than ever before to create state of the art user experiences and yield massive advancement in our space.

Whatever else may come to pass, API owners must be alive to new possibilities and position their assets adeptly in this new economy. Law firms themselves are no doubt destined to end up with a deck of their own APIs, perhaps deployed to spur engagement with their corporate clients and directly integrate their suite of legal services into the seamless fabric of modern day business—it'll just take a board-level commitment and a sprinkle of innovation.

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