

Review: Nextpoint

By Brett Burney

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Nextpoint

www.nextpoint.com

TechnoScore: 4.8

1 = Lowest Possible Score;
5 = Highest Possible Score

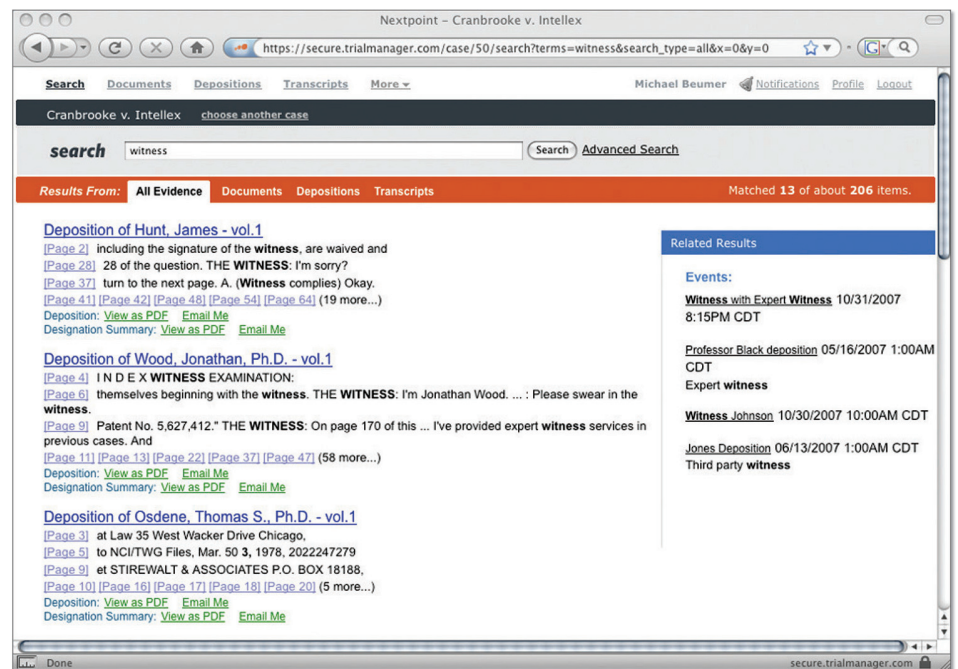
Clients don't hire you because you wear Armani suits. They want a favorable resolution of their dispute. But personal style matters. It can enhance your presentation and make you more persuasive. The same goes for your litigation support software. If it doesn't have the features you need, a slick interface is meaningless. But such an interface can enhance your productivity. In this TechnoFeature, litigation support expert Brett Burney reviews Nextpoint, which attempts to break the mold by offering robust litigation support and trial presentation tools in a slick-looking Web application (SaaS). Does it succeed? Brett's review holds the answer.

INTRODUCTION

Litigation software isn't meant to be glamorous. It's designed to be practical, logical, and tolerable.

That makes Nextpoint something of a curiosity in the litigation world. How can a "trial preparation" tool look modern and stylish and be completely functional at the same time?

The folks at Nextpoint declare themselves a "next-generation" litigation support company. They offer an alternative



to what they call "long-in-the-tooth, locally-installed [litigation support] applications that are bloated with features." In fact, the only software you'll need to access a Nextpoint database is a Web browser.

Nextpoint is completely Web-based, offering the service from the "cloud" via a software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform. That means anyone using Nextpoint is completely free of the burdens of administering a local software application, maintaining databases, ensuring adequate security, and wrestling with the herculean task of regularly upgrading the software.

The best part is that Nextpoint does all of this with style and panache, delivering a software

platform that you might actually enjoy using. Nextpoint is the GQ of litigation support software.

DOCUMENTS AT THE COPACOBANA

It makes sense that Nextpoint has some polish to its system since several of the largest corporations and law firms in the world use the product. Strangely, many of these customers presumably already have access to litigation support software and personnel, but Nextpoint fills a conspicuous gap in current offerings — a simple, streamlined, and straightforward system to prepare documents for trial.

While many popular litigation support software platforms of-

fer an unlimited bonanza of tools and features, Nextpoint has focused its efforts on providing a refreshingly uncomplicated and undemanding service.

The best example of this mindset is the first screen you see when you log into a Nextpoint database. You're not confronted with an endless list of documents. Rather, you're provided a search box similar to what you'll find on Google. You simply search for a word or phrase in the documents.

Anyone can add additional documents to Nextpoint — it's as easy as clicking the upload document link and browsing to the file located on your computer or network drive.

When I talked with Nextpoint's CEO, Rakesh Madhava, he referenced the company's "[Copacabana Rule](#)". Nextpoint suggests that if you can find the lyrics to "Copacabana" easier than you can find a key document in your case database, you have a problem. In other words, if searching your documents in your current litigation software isn't as easy as Googling for song lyrics, perhaps you need to re-consider what you're using.

BRINGING THE CLOUD DOWN TO EARTH

It's obvious that Nextpoint values simplicity, which [even extends to its pricing plans](#). While many litigation support vendors freely toss out four or five pages of pricing information, Next-

point charges a flat fee of \$250 per GB to process native files, and then \$50 per GB per month to host the data.

One of the main reasons that Nextpoint can offer such a low price is because it subscribes to a "cloud-computing" mentality where it can host customer data on servers maintained by [Amazon Web Services](#).

That statement alone will cause lawyers to convulse at the thought of their clients' confidential data being stored on servers that they can't personally see or touch.

The counterpoint to that fear, however, is that data is unquestionably more secure on the highly-encrypted, highly-secured server farms under Amazon's watchful IT army than an old, out-dated server sitting in the broom closet of a law firm. Amazon Web Services is a legitimate way for companies to "outsource" the hosting of data. It enables Nextpoint to concentrate on customer support and experience rather than wasting resources on buying and maintaining additional storage.

Furthermore, the [Nextpoint system standardizes on 256-bit encryption](#). That's the same encryption standard your Web browser uses when you type your credit card information into Amazon.com, or access your bank account online.

GIMME A D, AN O, AND A C

Nextpoint was not originally designed as a document review platform — it has customarily been referred to only as a "trial preparation" tool. That said, the company is currently offer-

ing enhanced document review tools in private betas, which means those features will soon be rolled out to the rest of its customer base.

Regardless of the "trial preparation" distinction, Nextpoint can certainly function as a basic review tool, and many customers use it as such. Nextpoint provides tools for labeling and "tagging" documents, associating issues to documents, and adding customized coding fields.

Nextpoint fills a conspicuous gap in current offerings — a simple, streamlined, and straightforward system to prepare documents for trial.

For the initial data upload to Nextpoint, it's a good idea to contact the company to have them create and populate the database (which is included in the processing cost). Anyone can add additional documents to Nextpoint — it's as easy as clicking the upload document link and browsing to the file located on your computer or network drive. Nextpoint accepts just about any native file that you'll encounter in a law practice (e.g. PDF, DOC, TIFF, PST, etc.) as well as data-bulging ZIP files.

When you import documents, Nextpoint's OCR technology automatically converts any scanned documents into searchable text. For exporting documents, Nextpoint supports the increasingly popular

Native File format (the document's original format), as well as other formats such as PDF, TIFF, Concordance, and EDRM XML.

DESIGNATED DEPOSITIONS

Nextpoint also handles deposition and trial transcripts. You can upload transcripts as ASCII text files, PDFs, or even the [PTX E-Transcript format](#).

As you read through your transcripts, Nextpoint enables you to create "designations" by selecting text and associating it with an issue. Nextpoint uses color-coded dots in the left margins to identify where designations occur in the transcript text. Once you finish designating relevant passages, you can export the deposition as a PDF file, complete with the extremely helpful, color-coded "[background highlighting](#)."

READY FOR THE BIG SCREEN

The glossy visual magic of Nextpoint appears in the "Theater" mode, which is similar to the presentation modes found in trial presentation tools such as [Sanction](#) and [TrialDirector](#), but Nextpoint's Theater slapped me silly with its simplicity.

From any document in Nextpoint, you can click the "View in Theater" link, which will open a new window of your Web browser with a black background. Within a second or two, your selected document appears, filling up the screen.

The first time I launched the Theater view, I instinctively used my mouse to draw a rectangular box around a paragraph of text, wanting to see that para-

graph enlarged or "called-out." Sure enough, the paragraph zoomed out in front of the document (which had grayed slightly so that my zoomed box was more prominent). You can create multiple call-out boxes on each document.

Next I wanted to highlight a word or two. Dragging my mouse around text in the call-out box accomplished this task without a hiccup. The best part is that I didn't have to hit any other buttons or keystrokes — I simply clicked and dragged my mouse and Nextpoint anticipated my needs.

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The fact that all of this action takes place inside a Web browser amazes me. Most of the Nextpoint platform is built using [AJAX](#), which provides the foundation for an impressive array of functionality. Gmail famously paved the way for AJAX adoption.

Once I had my "call-out" and highlighted text the way I wanted, I had the option of saving the document "treatment" into the Nextpoint database so that I could bring it up later. Each treatment is associated with its corresponding document. I also had the option of downloading a screenshot of my work as an image so that I could insert it into a PowerPoint presentation or Word document.

In fact, that's how I found the Theater tools most helpful — creating perfect call-outs and text highlights that I could use in other applications. You can use Nextpoint in a live trial, but you may already have other tools for that purpose.

There are a few keyboard shortcuts in Nextpoint's Theater for advancing pages in documents, for example, or for clearing your callouts, etc. A little dropdown at the top of the Theater window reveals these shortcut keys. I found myself referring to them often until they became second-nature. For example, instead of a highlight (which requires no additional keystrokes), you can hold down the Shift key while clicking with your mouse to underline text.

Nextpoint's Theater doesn't have anywhere near the number of tools that you'll find in a full-featured trial presentation program. But do litigators really need all those fancy gizmos? In my experience, most lawyers just want "zoom" (call-out) and highlight, which Nextpoint provides.

On the other hand, Nextpoint Theater can't show more than one document at a time on the screen, and you can't move a call-out box once it's created (call-out boxes always appear in the center of the screen). If those feature are important to you, you will certainly need to consider a different application.

CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS FOR NEXTPOINT

Nextpoint's Web site touts its future plans for document review and file processing. These

two new service areas reflect how customers are pushing Nextpoint to offer more features based upon their mission of simplicity. The best part is that as soon as the new tools are ready, customers can use them without installing any software. They'll just see the new tools the next time they login.

Nextpoint is one of the slickest and easy-to-use litigation support applications I've used. The Theater and depositions designation tools are gloriously intuitive, and the entire interface is streamlined and easy to follow.

Critics of cloud-computing services make the excellent point

that this simplicity becomes meaningless if you can't connect to the Internet. Since Nextpoint is a Web-based service, you'll need to be connected to the Web to use it. You'll have to make your own decision on whether that scenario is practical for your particular circumstances, but I found comfort in the fact that I could always locally download documents. In most areas of the country today, you can obtain reliable Internet connectivity from wireless carriers such as Sprint and Verizon.

I would not recommend Nextpoint for every litigation matter because some matters demand

different tools and resources. But Nextpoint fulfills a certain and distinct longing for a simple and effective software platform to help legal professionals prepare for trial. Litigation support that's stylish, intuitive, and functional — what a concept.

For more information contact:

Susan Massey
Nextpoint Director of Sales
Nextpoint
4043 N. Ravenswood Ave.
Suite 317
Chicago, IL 60613
(773) 929-4000x120
sales@nextpoint.com
www.nextpoint.com

Brett Burney is the Principal of [Burney Consultants LLC](#) where he focuses his time on bridging the chasm between the legal and technical frontiers of electronic discovery. Burney Consultants also provides exceptional support for litigation databases, document review projects, and trial technology. Visit his blog, [ediscoveryinfo](#).

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