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—Kürşad Güney, Sr. Forensic IT specialist, Grant Thornton

Global accounting, tax and advisory company puts its trust in AccessData® for computer forensics and e-discovery solutions

Grant Thornton Forensic Services B.V.

is a member of Grant Thornton International Ltd, which was founded in Chicago in 1924. The service provider handles auditing, tax consulting and business consulting assignments. Grant Thornton International has customers in over 140 countries and has 38,500 employees worldwide. There are 800 employees at its Dutch offices in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, etc.

When Grant Thornton Is Investigating, There Are No Boundaries Anymore

Separating the wheat from the chaff: this is a fitting description of the IT forensics work carried out by Grant Thornton. The team is tasked with distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant digital evidence on a daily basis. Previously, the team had to examine gigabytes or even terabytes of data using physically separate review and analysis platforms, which significantly increased the time required to make critical case decisions. Grant Thornton was therefore looking for an integrated solution that would cover both computer forensics and e-discovery. The company found such a platform, as well as addressed its geographically dispersed teams and resources.

Accounting, tax and advisory company Grant Thornton International has a number of IT labs around the world that employ a large community of forensic experts tasked with examining digital evidence for use in legal cases. The labs are equipped with highly secure networks and are serviced and operated only by certified IT specialists. In order to support the main research centers in the U.S., Ireland, Great Britain and the Netherlands efficiently, the labs are geographically distributed. These centers constitute Grant Thornton's main global hubs and one of them is the forensics office in the Dutch city of Rotterdam. Additional offices are in Amsterdam, Gouda, Boskoop, Woerden, Leiden, Alphen aan de Rijn and Enschede.

The experts in the Rotterdam office handle cases that require expertise in computer forensics and e-discovery (electronic document review). Both disciplines are employed in complex legal cases and this previously resulted in lengthy analysis times. The reason for this was the data had to be investigated separately — first using an investigation platform and then using a review

also leverage the integrated solution when necessary to close out a case.

A Consolidated Platform Delivers Streamlined Capabilities

The forensic team required a solution that would provide more efficient investigative capabilities, especially with regard to time-sensitive investigations that involved multilingual documents with different character sets. The chosen solution needed to support detailed examination, be highly scalable and be accessible to local and remote employees and clients. Because the Dutch forensic experts had been strong users of AccessData's Forensic Toolkit® (FTK®) for more than a decade, Summation® was added to the list of potential solutions.

A proof-of-concept was initiated in the Rotterdam laboratory to put AccessData's technology through its paces. Summation, when paired with FTK, provided a combination of mobile forensics, computer forensics and functions for encoding and reviewing documents.



“Thanks to the connection to AD Lab, teams at Grant Thornton can work remotely on a single large case. Internal workflows and service quality have been positively impacted by such rapid remote collaboration.”

platform. Grant Thornton needed a unified platform that could be used for both computer forensics and e-discovery, drastically reducing the time it would take to conduct the analysis, and that could also be used by forensic IT investigation teams, professional investigators such as forensic accountants and auditors as well as in-house experts, to provide support for litigation processes. In addition, customers of Grant Thornton such as lawyers, corporate auditors and government investigators, could

In addition, all the employees and customers could now leverage a common platform for complete end-to-end analysis.

In addition to evaluating AccessData, Grant Thornton also evaluated other solutions. Grant Thornton then tested and compared the competing solutions: in contrast to Summation, the other products generally proved to be more expensive — especially in terms of the cost per gigabyte—and were not as easily scalable as the

AccessData platforms. Grant Thornton's lead forensic practitioner discussed the test results with his supervisor, Mark Hoekstra, Global Leader, Forensic & Investigation Services, Head of Advisory, GT Netherlands within Grant Thornton International. The crucial difference was AccessData's combined computer forensics and legal review capabilities. Grant Thornton viewed these features as critical toward making sustainable improvements to internal workflows. Finally, direct feedback was obtained from staff regarding the ease of use of Summation, which fortified their final decision. As a result, the company chose to adopt AccessData's Summation platform, which was fully compatible with the market-leading FTK solution they had been using for years.

Up to 300 GB of Data Per Hour*

Overseen by the lead forensic practitioner, the installation took less than a day with direct support from his AccessData Technical Account Manager (TAM). Together they implemented Summation, which was to be used for remote collaboration by multiple experts. During the course of the next few days, the TAM ensured that the platform was tuned and configured to fully adapt to the various workflows of both employees and clients. Additionally, the TAM ensured that Grant Thornton would be able to extend its processing capacity as needed in the future. Maximum solution stability and scalability were achieved and Grant Thornton can now process 200 – 300 GB of data per hour.

The learning curve for internally adopting Summation was minimal. The new features in the AD Lab components were also straightforward and intuitive. Grant Thornton only had to hold brief training sessions reviewing the features of the Summation interface.

Different Perspectives

The AccessData solutions were well received by the various investigative teams right from the start. The granular processing capabilities and the wide range of forensic functions provided by the combined

platform were particularly appreciated. Grant Thornton Netherlands now has a holistic platform that allows fast and thorough review processes: irrelevant data that had made previous analysis more difficult can be quickly filtered out without inadvertently removing any relevant detail. Moreover, the Summation platform's ability to quickly enable end users to choose between different views for digital forensics and document review really impressed the staff. Each user now has the working environment that is best suited to their particular requirements.

This wide range of functionality was especially important because the cases handled by Grant Thornton differ considerably in nature: sometimes only a single PST file needs to be examined, and now and again a few scanned documents or a small network folder have to be investigated. However, it is often the case that several terabytes of mixed forensic images and files have to be examined. These usually come from different countries and contain a number of languages and character sets. Thanks to Summation, large cases can be analyzed in real time by different offices; for example, by 25 different employees based in five different locations. They can work in organized groups using Summation through the secure browser-based interface that provides Grant Thornton staff and its customers lightweight and distributed access.

"We selected Summation from AccessData as our main forensics and review platform for a number of reasons. The primary advantage is the seamless integration with the Forensic Toolkit. This provides a lot of optimized review features while ensuring efficient work processes," comments Kursad Guney, Senior Forensic IT Specialist at Grant Thornton. "As we now use a single platform, we no longer need to bother with the cumbersome reindexing and rerecording of data between separate review and analysis platforms. This is a big plus in terms of the overall data processing time, and is very tangible in our daily work."

*Processing time varies, depending on the processing options chosen and the type of data.






Summary

With Summation from AccessData, Grant Thornton has acquired a solution that provides a combination of mobile forensics, computer forensics and functions for encoding and reviewing documents. The unified platform can be used not only by internal employees but also by external customers such as lawyers. All parties can access the forensics solution via a web browser and, thanks to the connection to AD Lab, they can also work remotely in teams on a single large case. Grant Thornton's internal workflows and service quality have been positively impacted by such rapid remote collaboration.



Whether it's for investigation, litigation or compliance, AccessData® offers industry-leading solutions that put the power of forensics in your hands. For 30 years, AccessData has worked with more than 130,000 clients in law enforcement, government agencies, corporations and law firms around the world to understand and focus on their unique collection-to-analysis needs. The result? Products that empower faster results, better insights, and more connectivity. For more information, visit www.accessdata.com

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