

Top 10 Tips for Better Audio Evidence Handling

- 1 Know what you have.** Document your process for chain of custody, authenticity and inquiry challenges. Some corporate or government systems store audio locally, with local management, rather than centrally. Since audio files are larger than text files, they are often erased to make more disk space on expensive storage media, leaving the record but not the audio file itself. The identification, hold and preservation efforts must include audio.
- 2 Understand how audio eDiscovery works.** Because the index is made of phonemes (sound snippets) there is no step to transcribe to text and then search. Normal Boolean searches can be done on the audio content immediately upon ingestion without training the system to recognize the speaker. This is called speaker independent audio search.
- 3 Negotiate a timeframe, and use the recording system's metadata for data reduction based on date.** Call recording systems allow date range, time of day and duration of calls filters without indexing the audio content. The audio files may show a date that does not conform to the database tracking the actual date and time of the call, but rather when it was copied/saved/accessed by the recording system.
- 4 Negotiate a specific phone number, or series of phone numbers.** Both the originating number and the receiving number can be tracked in metadata. Receiving numbers for corporations may be switchboard main numbers, or something called a DID (direct inward dial) that may or may not correspond to an individual. Specialty numbers are often tracked, like 800 numbers that ring on another phone line, called DNIS numbers. DNIS stands for Dialed Number Identification Service.
- 5 Understand that some older caller recording systems will not record names or IDs of the individuals on the call, instead of recording a "trunk line".** Trunk lines are allocated dynamically by the internal phone system. However, most modern caller recording systems will have an account number or agent ID.
- 6 Understand the workings of Quality Control and Escalations in the caller recording system.** It is important to know if the calls "under management review" are isolated from general search queries.
- 7 Understand the format in which recordings will be exported, and consider asking for simply "audio files with corresponding logs".** MP3 and WAV are universal formats for audio. If you ask for WAV files, and the system you are targeting stores MP3's, both your own IT/Telecom professionals and the responding party may tell you there are no files.
- 8 Understand if any clipping, normalization or conversion will take place prior to exporting,** to stop it from happening or to disclose it before it is discovered and held against you (for example, clipping the first 10 seconds, eliminating background noise or changing from one format to another).
- 9 Keep the export log from the original system with the audio files when submitting it to an eDiscovery system.** The log function can function like a load file with TIFF's, allowing eDiscovery systems to enrich the files with searchable metadata to reduce "ears on" review. Make sure the log metadata replaces or augments the metadata of the audio files, or you may find all of the dates to be the date of export. Audio system exports are similar to document management or archive exports in this regard.
- 10 Use an eDiscovery system that keeps audio with all of the other documents for reduction, review and production.** If that is not possible, update project management protocols for an additional converging workflow for privilege, quality control and production.