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Evisort:
An AI-Powered Start-up Uses Text Mining to Become Google for Contracts

BY C. DANIEL GUETTA*

Introduction

On a late summer morning in 2018, Jerry Ting, the CEO of Evisort, found himself sitting in an Uber, stuck in slow-moving traffic on California Route 101 just south of the San Mateo exit. He was heading into the Silicon Valley headquarters of Evisort, the company he had cofounded in 2016 with Amine Anoun, Evisort's chief technical officer, and Jake Sussman, chief operating officer. Earlier that morning, Ting had landed at San Francisco International, returning from a trip to the East Coast to pitch a number of potential new clients on Evisort's product: AI-enhanced document management software designed specifically for contracts. He had found receptive audiences at nearly every prospect he had called on, but he was particularly excited about a potential sale to a big life sciences company with headquarters in the Boston area.

The genesis of Evisort was a 2013 paper by Ting, who researched the limited adoption of technology in the legal industry at the time. Two years later, Ting met Anoun, a Ph.D. student at MIT's Operations Research Center, with a background in engineering and applied mathematics. Anoun was seeking legal advice from Ting, who was honing his skills as a student lawyer at Harvard Law School. Anoun was studying AI and its possible applications in accounting, and Ting was helping him with a number of legal questions that had come up in the course of that work.

Student lawyers at Harvard were expected to handle their clients professionally, just as any other full-fledged attorney would. This meant conducting research; managing correspondence, contracts, filings, memoranda, and other documents; and keeping track of billable hours. Through Harvard, Ting had a license to use practice management software,

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which was designed to streamline many of these tasks. As Ting worked with Anoun and became familiar with the market-leading product, he quickly found himself frustrated with its lack of sophistication—a lack that, in Ting's view, bordered on primitiveness. "I realized just how cumbersome it was to try to do the legal work with the software but not have any automated tools to help me,"[1] he recalled.

Ting and Anoun believed that recent developments in AI and machine learning could be used to automate many of the tasks associated with the practice of law, particularly when it came to document management. After validating their hypothesis with some market research—mostly phone calls to partners working at small, midsize, and large law firms—they decided to form a company to develop and market a more sophisticated document management solution that would free up lawyers to use their time more efficiently. Along with Jake Sussman, a Harvard Law School classmate of Ting's, they founded Evisort in 2016. As chief technical officer, Anoun was in charge of product development, while Sussman and Ting worked to get the company up and running and began talking to prospective clients.

The journey since then has been a promising one. Evisort was accepted into the Venture Incubation Program at the Harvard Innovation Lab, an incubator and accelerator founded to support entrepreneurship and collaboration among Harvard students. Through the Harvard Innovation Lab, Evisort's founders were introduced to a number of experts in the industry, many of whom understood the problem Evisort was trying to solve and were enthusiastic about the efforts. Rough Draft Ventures, a student-led fund of General Catalyst whose mandate was to support student-led start-ups in the Boston area, also provided some early funding.[2] In early 2018, Evisort secured an investment from Amity Ventures, an early-stage venture capital firm, and Village Global, a San Francisco-based VC firm backed by some of the world's most successful entrepreneurs, including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos. These were important votes of confidence from the tech-enabled VC community, and the firms' emphasis on connecting promising young entrepreneurs with networking and mentoring opportunities had seemed like a perfect fit.

It was now time for Evisort's founders to demonstrate that Amity Ventures' and Village Global's votes of confidence were well-placed. Thanks in large part to Anoun's deep knowledge of cutting-edge AI research and his software design and coding skills, Evisort's product development group had created an effective and marketable product that Ting, Sussman, and their sales team had little trouble selling. The true challenges for Evisort's founders had less to do with generating revenue than with educating current and prospective clients on the capabilities (and, importantly, the limitations) of AI-enhanced document management and generally shepherding the company out of its early stage and into a place where it could start to scale.

Ting's recent sales trip to the East Coast had sharpened his focus on the importance of charting the right course for Evisort. After presenting to a large multinational life sciences company in Boston, Ting had learned that its chief technology officer was interested in Evisort's software,

but that a number of custom modifications would likely have to be incorporated into the final deliverable version to accommodate the company's desired workflows. As he chatted with the executive vice president on his way out, she had asked him directly whether Evisort would be able to add the features and how much more that would cost. Although he had sidestepped her request for a price—Ting wanted to confer with his colleagues before quoting a figure—he was confident that the sale would be significant, perhaps Evisort's largest to date.

There was no doubt in Ting's mind that Evisort *could* customize the software for this client. The real question was *whether* to do so. It was a more complicated question than Ting would have ever suspected three years earlier, when he and Anoun had begun developing the idea for Evisort. The answer would require Ting and his cofounders to clarify their vision for the company and their plans for growth.

The Practice Management and Legal Data Analytics Software Market

The software Ting had used as a first-year student lawyer at Harvard was called Time Matters, a suite of practice and document management tools sold by LexisNexis, one of the leading providers of legal databases and other technology solutions for US and global law firms. The first version of Time Matters was released in 1989, when the MS-DOS-based Windows 2.11 operating system was state-of-the art, running on x86 personal computers using a 16-bit architecture. The newest version of the software when Ting was a first year student at Harvard Law School was 12.0, although older versions of the software were still widely deployed. While Time Matters had obviously evolved from those early days, in Ting's view, it was still primitive. "If you visualize it," said Ting, "[the version in use in 2013] was built literally in the 2000s and hadn't changed. Everything was done manually. You couldn't search across scanned PDFs, and to store an email you had to save it as a PDF and upload it." (See Exhibit 1 for a screenshot of the Time Matters 12.0 UI.)

While Time Matters was the most widely used practice and document management software for lawyers—according to the company website at the time, approximately 50,000 law offices in the United States were using it[3]—the marketplace was crowded with a number of competitors. Among the most popular alternatives were products from Abacus, Amicus, MyCase, HoudiniEsq, and Clio.[4] Although financial data for the practice management software market was difficult to come by, it was clearly a large and lucrative market. The Anglo-Dutch company Reed Elsevier, LexisNexis's parent, reported 2013 top line revenue of £6.0 billion, with 66% of the total derived from database subscriptions, software licenses, and other digital products.[5]

E-DISCOVERY SOFTWARE

In addition to practice management software for law firms, there was a large and growing market by 2013 for electronic discovery, or "e-discovery," technology solutions. Unlike practice management software, which was designed to streamline the administrative tasks

associated with running a law office and managing a caseload, e-discovery software was expressly designed with one task in mind: the review and production of documents in complex litigation matters.

Every party to a civil suit filed in US federal or state court was required to produce all relevant, nonprivileged documentary evidence to adversaries during an early phase of the litigation process known as discovery. Depending on the complexity of the issues litigated or the amount of monetary damages at stake, the volume of documents produced during the discovery phase could easily run to the hundreds of thousands or millions of pages. During the course of a single suit in its long-running patent dispute with Samsung, Apple produced 338,860 separate documents totaling nearly 3 million pages.[6]

The push to move the US legal profession away from the use of paper documents and into the electronic age began in the late 1980s, with the creation of the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) program for the federal court system. As electronic submission and storage of pleadings, motions, and other court filings increasingly became the norm during the 2000s, electronically stored information (ESI), rather than warehouses full of bankers' boxes, was where attorneys had to search for relevant documents during litigation. Thus e-discovery was born, and software companies began releasing products to cater to this market.

The earliest e-discovery software dated from the late 1990s. These first-generation products featured basic optical character recognition (OCR) technology and Boolean searching (the ability to search for multiple terms in a document). To lawyers at the time, even these very basic features were revolutionary; they lowered the barrier to performing complex queries and enabled far more detailed exploration of discovery files. By the late 2000s, e-discovery software began to incorporate so-called predictive coding, an AI-enabled form of machine learning that created an algorithm using small, human-labeled training examples, sometimes called "seed sets," and then refined it by applying it to ever larger sets of documents. Although human intervention was required to check the accuracy and effectiveness of the algorithm, predictive coding became an important tool for attorneys in litigation practice who needed to search through large amounts of ESI and quickly identify relevant and privileged documents. E-discovery software with predictive coding was not only able to process documents more quickly than a human attorney doing traditional manual review, but often capable of doing so more accurately.

By the early 2010s, predictive coding and other forms of so-called technology-assisted review (TAR) were in wide use among the largest US and global law firms and corporate counsels' offices—the attorneys most frequently called upon to manage large document productions in the course of complex litigation. In a 2017 survey, the legal industry publication *Corporate Counsel* found that 40% of more than 100 attorneys working at large US corporations reported using some kind of TAR in their day-to-day work.[7] The largest e-discovery providers in the United States included CloudNine, which acquired LexisNexis's e-discovery portfolio in March 2018; Symantec; and HP Autonomy.

Interestingly, Ting's initial vision for Evisort was in the e-discovery space. "I actually thought I was going to be an e-discovery provider," he said. "Evisort is for 'evidence sorter.' That's actually where the name came from." Ting quickly learned, however, that e-discovery was a crowded marketplace with well-established players using advanced technology. Nevertheless, his work with Anoun had convinced him that there was still significant room for improvement in the way the legal profession managed and processed its documents. He decided to refocus Evisort where he thought there would be more opportunity. "I looked around, and I thought: Why don't I go to the other side of the house where there's nobody?"

The "other side of the house" Ting referred to was the so-called transactional practice that most large US and global law firms have. In contrast to litigators, who advocated on behalf of the parties to a dispute, transactional attorneys researched, drafted, and reviewed contracts, handled large corporate mergers and acquisitions, managed securities offerings, and prepared closing documents for the sale and purchase of real property.[8]

Evisort's Technology

THE EARLY VISION

Given the crowded e-discovery space and the relatively advanced stage of the technology in that corner of the market, Ting's earliest vision for Evisort had evolved. He decided to set his sights on creating document management and processing solutions for transactional attorneys.

Although Ting and cofounder Sussman, both law students, understood the centrality of contracts in both the legal profession and the business world more generally, they were nevertheless surprised at just how big the untapped opportunity was. As they continued to talk with prospective clients—mostly lawyers, at least at first—they gained a deeper understanding of how contracts were—and were not—used in the course of their practice. As a result, the initial focus on attorneys and the legal profession began to shift. The data contained in contracts were not just meaningful to the attorneys who drafted, reviewed, and processed those documents, Ting and Sussman realized. These data were also driving, for instance, how CFOs billed and sent out invoices, or how, when, and to whom a sales team would sell a given product or service. "It even drives *what* they choose to sell," said Sussman.

For the modern US business enterprise, particularly Fortune 1000 companies with annual revenue of $1 billion or more, contracts contained immense amounts of important data. These data defined a given company's relationships with its suppliers, clients, and employees and, in many ways, underpinned and guided everything it did from day to day. "You can break down a company into its entire value chain by looking at its contracts," said Ting. "So that's the type of business intelligence work we started focusing on." The usefulness of such contract data seemed almost limitless. "It can help you better understand how much should you pay for vendors, how much you charge your customers, and even how much you should compensate your employees," Ting pointed out.

Using these insights, Evisort's CTO, Anoun, began designing and coding the first iteration of the company's software, a process that was informed both by his own understanding of client pain points when it came to unlocking contract data and by the specific features that prospective clients began requesting. During the market research phase, back in 2015, Anoun had been just as surprised as Ting at the state of data analytics and document management in the legal sector. "I had a hard time believing that lawyers were actually manually going through documents and searching for and redacting information, when it's so easy to automate these processes," Anoun said. Part of the disconnect was due to Anoun's academic work and his deep familiarity with AI and its evolving capabilities. "I was coming from an environment where natural language processing [NLP] machine learning is kind of an average skill," he recalled. "Suddenly, I was in a new environment with lawyers and businesspeople who didn't know much about artificial intelligence and didn't see how to apply it to their day-to-day jobs."

THE TECHNOLOGY'S CAPABILITIES—AND LIMITATIONS

Like all good entrepreneurs, the cofounders had developed a concise "elevator pitch" description of Evisort's product: document management software that enabled the client to sort, search, and classify legal contracts, as well as to extract useful information from them.

To Sussman, the most impactful way to convince potential clients of Evisort's value proposition was to guide them through a series of scenarios. "Suppose you're acquiring a medium-sized company with a large number of procurement contracts, as well as agreements with suppliers," he said. "To correctly evaluate the company's value, you would need a holistic view of these contracts. Unless the company happened to be exceptionally good at cataloguing them, this could take hundreds of hours of manual labor—and even with a state-of-the-art cataloguing system, any company that has existed long enough will have changed the structure of its contracts multiple times over the years. With Evisort's technology, you can easily and automatically extract all the relevant data from the contracts and build this holistic view in days rather than months."

Getting increasingly excited, he gave another example: "You've just joined a midsized consulting company. They've experienced exponential growth in the last few years, but are lacking direction, and you've been brought in to figure out how to focus operations and tighten the ship. You'd probably have many questions—which contracts are about to expire? What are the usual terms we offer to our clients? What counterparties do we typically work with? These are exactly the kinds of questions our software can answer for you."

For specialized audiences and people familiar with computer science or NLP, Anoun would go into more detail: Evisort's software integrated optical character recognition and natural language processing to extract metadata from the client's contract, and then to allow the client to easily search through this metadata. After importing a document into the app, the software would run OCR and enhanced legal contextual spell-checking to gather data for machine processing. On top of that, layers of AI would 1) classify the document using metadata; 2)

extract and identify relevant information at the paragraph level using a combination of classification methods such as linear models, decision trees, and neural nets; and 3) extract specific entities from the text using recurrent neural net technology, such as long short-term memory (LSTM) and convolutional recurrent neural networks (CRNN).

Despite the machine learning functions and layers of AI built into Evisort's software, the OCR piece in some ways presented the most difficulties. The premise of OCR—which referred to the process of scanning a PDF and converting the images therein to computer-editable text—was simple, but in practice it was often fallible. Documents that had been image-scanned and converted to PDFs were often blurry, and even those that appeared clear to the human eye were sometimes unreadable by the OCR. Rather than build its own OCR capabilities in-house, Evisort had chosen to partner with a number of leading companies developing sophisticated OCR algorithms, and then to build its own innovations on top of that technology to suit its purposes.

There were other limitations to Evisort's AI-enhanced technology. Some contracts by their very nature lent themselves more readily to it than others. Low-dollar-value vendor agreements that were largely consistent from one to the next in format, terms, or contract language, for instance, represented "very good problems," in Ting's view, that Evisort's NLP technology was able to solve. Unique, highly detailed, or complex contracts—or contracts, such as M&A agreements, where more was at stake than simply the dollar amount of a routine vendor order—called for human interaction. Ting referred to these as "high-risk" contracts. However, even in instances such as these, where human intervention was necessary, Evisort's technology and custom workflows made it possible for users to review these documents in a fraction of the time it would have taken by hand.

When working with such contracts, the AI's first cut would need to be validated by a human reviewer using human intelligence, or "humint." How to do validation using humint for high-risk contracts became one early area of focus for Anoun and his development team.

While the AI couldn't complete the processing of high-risk contracts on its own, it could significantly reduce the amount of time required for a satisfactory review. "For contracts where you're buying and selling large companies," said Ting, "AI can take you maybe 80% of the way." Evisort's approach was to use a combination of AI and non-AI-enhanced software as different "levers" to solve this particular client problem. Whenever the human reviewer needed to step in to take over from the AI, Evisort provided a suite of non-AI-enhanced tools that streamlined the manual review process. As a result, instead of taking three hours, the review process for high-risk contracts might take only half an hour of a highly paid C-suite executive's or general counsel's time. "I think this is a really fascinating area," said Ting. "We're seeing a lot of AI companies, including ourselves, innovate on it."

These limitations—the fallible OCR and the high-risk contract problem—represented a challenge for Ting and his sales team. They found that it was important to educate clients about the limitations of AI and manage their expectations. Ting was fond of using what he

referred to as the "80/20" rule. "AI is a wonderful invention," he would tell Evisort's clients, "but it's important to understand that it's a work in progress. It's going to work on about 80% of your docs, but for 20% you're still going to have to review by hand." Evisort had designed its software so that, in the event the OCR was unable to convert a PDF into an editable file format, the AI would be prevented from running, and the user would be alerted that a manual review was required.

For the most part, though, calling on clients and sales prospects tended to focus on the power and capabilities of Evisort's AI-enhanced software. Ting recalled occasionally visiting a client and learning that it was still using last-generation technology to keep track of contracts. "They're so used to tracking things with MS Excel with three or four fields," said Ting. "Basically, all they know is how much the contract value is and what it does. They've built business processes around a limited data process." When Ting demonstrated that, instead of tracking a handful of data points in Excel because it had been too expensive to do more, clients could track 100 data points, they almost immediately grasped the implications for their businesses. "Now, they have an innovation tool," said Ting. "They start asking themselves, 'How does this impact my business?'"

During the early product development days, Anoun and his team spent much of their time fielding client requests for more features and building additional functionality into the software. As Ting and his sales staff had continued to talk to current and prospective clients, however, they had seen the market converge around a discrete set of features. By Q3 2018, the early feature-building phase of product development appeared to be winding down. "We've been getting a lot of redundant asks from clients," said Anoun during an interview in August 2018. "We see that there is a finite set of features everyone is interested in, but that doesn't mean there aren't some extra features we'd want to build for specific industries."

Because the market for AI-enhanced NLP document management software was relatively new and still growing, however, Evisort's leadership realized that they would need to be able to adapt the software and the user interface (UI) as the market matured and client needs evolved. Ting explained, "We were very aware of building the UI in a dynamic way to be able to customize it."

From the start, then, Evisort had designed its software to be both scalable and flexible. One of the company's earliest hiring goals was to assemble a talented web development group that could design and code the UI and make modifications when necessary. As with much of the initial work on the underlying software, the UI started as a collaborative effort between Ting and Sussman, who talked directly to the market to learn about client pain points and specific requests. They would then report back to the UI team to discuss the feasibility of adding new features.

As of Q3 2018, the Evisort UI dashboard could display a preview of any OCR-recognizable contract in the client's database, along with metadata extracted by the AI that enabled the user to perform a certain number of actions on the document. For example, clients could edit the

metadata or use it to search for all documents involving a certain party, or all contracts expiring within 60 days. In addition, Evisort provided a document storage solution that clients could use to organize their contracts, employing multiple parameters, and to identify them with a client-created key.

Charting a Course to Scalability

Evisort's founders faced a number of challenges as they guided the company out of its start-up phase. Among the most significant was where to focus the research and how to think about new product development. Ting's recent sales trip and the request from the Boston-area life sciences company for a heavily customized version of Evisort's software were perfect examples. While the sale was likely to be significant, the customization work would also require an appreciable investment of resources that could be deployed elsewhere. As Sussman remarked, "There's so much we can do with AI. There is so much data in contracts. Where do you focus to get the biggest value add? That's something all three of us have to keep each other honest on."

One of the biggest resource constraints was Anoun's time, and he had learned early on that seemingly simple client requests were often far more complex than they appeared. During the market research phase and on early calls with clients, one of the features most commonly requested was the ability to search for and manage contracts by the names of the parties to it. "When you hear a request for this feature, it didn't sound very difficult, but when you looked at the data and the scanned images of the contracts, you saw a lot of blurry information and handwritten party names and stuff like that," said Anoun. To gauge the complexity of adding this feature, Anoun plotted out a step-by-step development process. "First, I would think about how to perform OCR on scanned documents to extract the text, and then think about how to process the text with customized spell-checking to correct for any mistakes, and then how to extract the relevant information from that text using NLP." As more requests for features rolled in, Anoun had to think carefully about what value the additional functionality would bring to the overall market, not just one or two clients. "I also had to ask myself: Does this scale across clients and industries?" he said.

As with any start-up, funding was also an important consideration. The January 2018 seed investment from Amity Ventures and Village Global had been an important confirmation that Evisort was on the right track. "What that tells me," said Ting, "is that the market is excited about applications of NLP to contracts and business problems. We think it's one of the major areas where NLP is going to transform business, and so do some of the best entrepreneurs of our generation." Despite the enthusiasm among investors for Evisort, the founders knew that venture capital funding was a finite resource, and they would need to move quickly to get the company to the next stage.

In terms of hiring, Evisort's efforts continued to focus on supporting Anoun in his work. For a company in a cutting-edge field like AI, hiring the top talent available was an imperative. As

Ting noted, "The AI is the inspiration, but it's also the limiting factor because we're doing original research." In mid-2018, Evisort hired a Ph.D. to work with Anoun on that crucial research. Evisort was also looking for talented non-tech employees to fill sales, marketing, and customer service roles. As of Q3 2018, however, the focus remained on technologists, for the simple reason that the founders viewed the technology as the principal driver of sales. "As Amine's research continues, and our solution set grows, we're not going to have a problem selling our product," said Ting.

Pushing the research forward was also important for Evisort's competitive positioning. The company had two direct competitors in the market for AI-enhanced contract management software. These were companies for which AI was at the heart of the technology, not a bolt-on whose real value was as a marketing angle. The first of these companies was Kira Systems, a Toronto-based company founded in 2011 with $3 million in estimated annual revenue and 83 employees as of Q3 2018.[9] The second was Seal Software, founded in 2010 and with headquarters in Walnut Creek, CA. As with Kira, Seal was larger than Evisort in terms of both estimated revenue ($15.7 million) and head count (174 employees) as of Q3 2018. Both companies, in Ting's words, "put AI first," as Evisort does. The difference, according to Ting, was that Kira and Seal targeted the high end of the market. "I would hear of some very large companies considering using the technology of deep AI providers, but not many companies outside of the Fortune 1000," Ting said. "I think this is true across all AI industries, not just ours, simply because training AI models is complicated and costly. Because of our advances in scalability, both on the software and the data science side, we're optimistic we can even bring the power of AI to companies with fewer than 200 employees, packaged in a simple SaaS [software as a service] model with very little custom modeling work."

In mid-2018, Evisort relocated from Boston, where it had had headquarters since its founding in 2016, to an office building on Industrial Road in San Carlos, CA. The decision had involved a number of tradeoffs, and Sussman, who grew up on the East Coast, was initially reluctant to move. Why not go to New York? After all, the city was where many of Evisort's current and prospective clients had either headquarters or significant footprints.

Ultimately, however, Ting, Anoun, and Sussman realized that if they wanted to expand their business, they would need to transplant their company to a new environment, one with more fertile ground for entrepreneurs. As Ting said, "We wanted to be surrounded by entrepreneurs who had built technology businesses at scale. When I think about what inspired me to build a company when I'm in San Francisco and I look around, there's Google, Uber, Salesforce, Oracle, SAP, and so many others."

Fundraising concerns had also contributed to the decision to move. Because AI was a nascent field, Evisort's leadership believed their best chance at raising enough—and the right kinds of—funding was in Silicon Valley. "We have to have investors who are familiar with the technology," said Ting. "Some of our investors are technical themselves, and they understand what it means to have 12 months', 24 months', or 36 months' worth of runway."

One notable example of the difference between Silicon Valley and the East Coast occurred at a dinner hosted by Village Global. At the event, Sussman found himself seated next to the CEO of a company that had been working on OCR for handwriting. "It's an impossibly difficult field," said Ting. "And he had been working on it for eight years. Only in San Francisco would you run into somebody so determined and dedicated, and only in San Francisco would someone have been willing to support the pursuit of such a difficult goal for so long." Ting believed the presence of these and similar technologists in Silicon Valley provided an important signal to Anoun and his team: "It's helpful to let him know that he can leverage his research and what *may* be possible."

Evisort's Dilemma

For a small software start-up like Evisort with a single product in the marketplace, there was a relatively narrow spectrum of options for future development and tapping new sources of revenue, at least as the company's founders saw it. On one end of that spectrum was pure, client-driven development, i.e., the product could evolve based solely on feature requests from Evisort's current and future customers. On the other end was what the founders thought of as the "vision" approach, i.e., the product could evolve based on their conception of the ideal client solution for managing and processing contract data. While neither extreme, of course, would dictate the direction in which Evisort's software evolved in the real world, it was a handy way to think about the way forward.

For his part, Anoun saw the most promising path nearer the "vision" end of the spectrum. "Using features that clients ask for [to drive development] can lead to losing focus on the core values that we're offering," he said. Those core values had to do with further leveraging the company's technology to deliver ever more valuable and actionable business intelligence to customers.

As of Q3 2018, Evisort's product development team was primarily focused on building more functionality into the dashboard tools available to individual users. "We're now honing our capabilities around presenting the contract data that each person cares about," said Sussman. The executives in charge of companywide procurement, Sussman explained, were more likely to be interested in supply chain data, whereas the CFO might be eager to work with data having to do with large cost centers, such as employment contracts, health insurance agreements, or high-dollar-value leases. "We can present that information coming from the same source using similar techniques, but present it to different people who can take very different but important actions with it," said Sussman.

"In some ways," Ting added, "this is one of the key ways Evisort distinguishes itself from other players in the legal analytics field. Many of our competitors focus on building analytics for the lawyers in a company—they focus on e-discovery and writing new contracts, for example. We quickly realized that the scope for this work is so much broader. Contracts are the skeleton of all modern enterprises, and you'd be hard-pressed to find any part of a

company not affected in some way by a company's contracts. We realized, therefore, that we had to take a more holistic approach—a business intelligence platform centered around contracts can become a business intelligence platform for the whole company, from operations, to supply chain, to advertising."

There was thus an obvious tension between responding to customer requests and keeping Evisort moving forward, guided by the founders' vision for the product. As Evisort's client roster grew, Ting, Anoun, and Sussman increasingly considered how best to navigate the course to scalability. Should they let client requests be the basic driver of development, or should they adhere to their overarching vision for the software? Given their resource constraints—particularly Anoun's time—they didn't think they could effectively do both.

Conclusion

As Ting hopped out of his Uber and headed into Evisort's offices, he reflected on his latest sales trip. After he had spoken with the CTO at the Boston-area life sciences company and learned of her interest in Evisort's software—albeit a heavily customized version—he immediately called Sussman to discuss their next steps.

It promised to be a significant sale—almost certainly Evisort's largest up to that point—and the prospect of the additional revenue was undoubtedly enticing. Amity Ventures, Village Global, and Evisort's other investors had placed their faith in the company's ability to generate revenue, and this sale would confirm it. It would also be one of Evisort's first sales to a Fortune 500 company, a lucrative market that Ting had been interested in for some time.

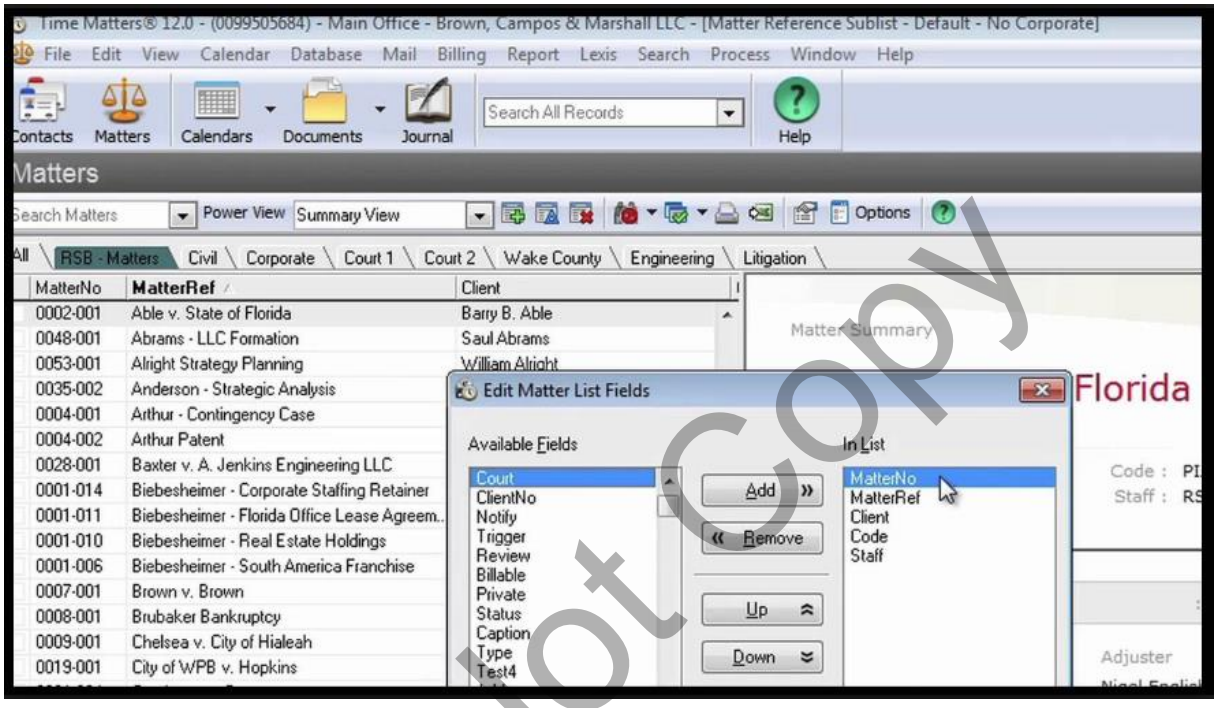
It was, however, crucial for Anoun to continue to push his AI research forward. Depending on the complexity of the customization, it might take him several weeks or even months to finalize a deliverable version for this new client. Ting wondered whether addressing this bottleneck was simply a matter of building out the product development team with a few new hires. Even if it were, recruiting new candidates would take some time. Sussman was adamant that Evisort needed to be extremely careful and deliberate with its hiring at its current stage. The company was too small—and at too delicate a juncture—to make a mistake by hiring the wrong person. "One bad person could take the company back a year or two years," according to Sussman, and Ting couldn't help but agree.

It wasn't clear to Ting what the right decision was on the prospective new client. He had become more comfortable saying "no" to clients lately, but he had never turned away such a large potential sale. He dropped his carry-on in his office and headed down the hall to Sussman's office, where he took a seat across the desk and picked up the phone to call Anoun. Evisort's cofounders had a lot to discuss.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1

Time Matters UI as of 2013 (version 12.0)



Source: "Streamlining Document Management with LexisNexis Time Matters," YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYn1HxY6sSY, last accessed September 3, 2018.

Exhibit 2
Screenshots of the Evisort Interface

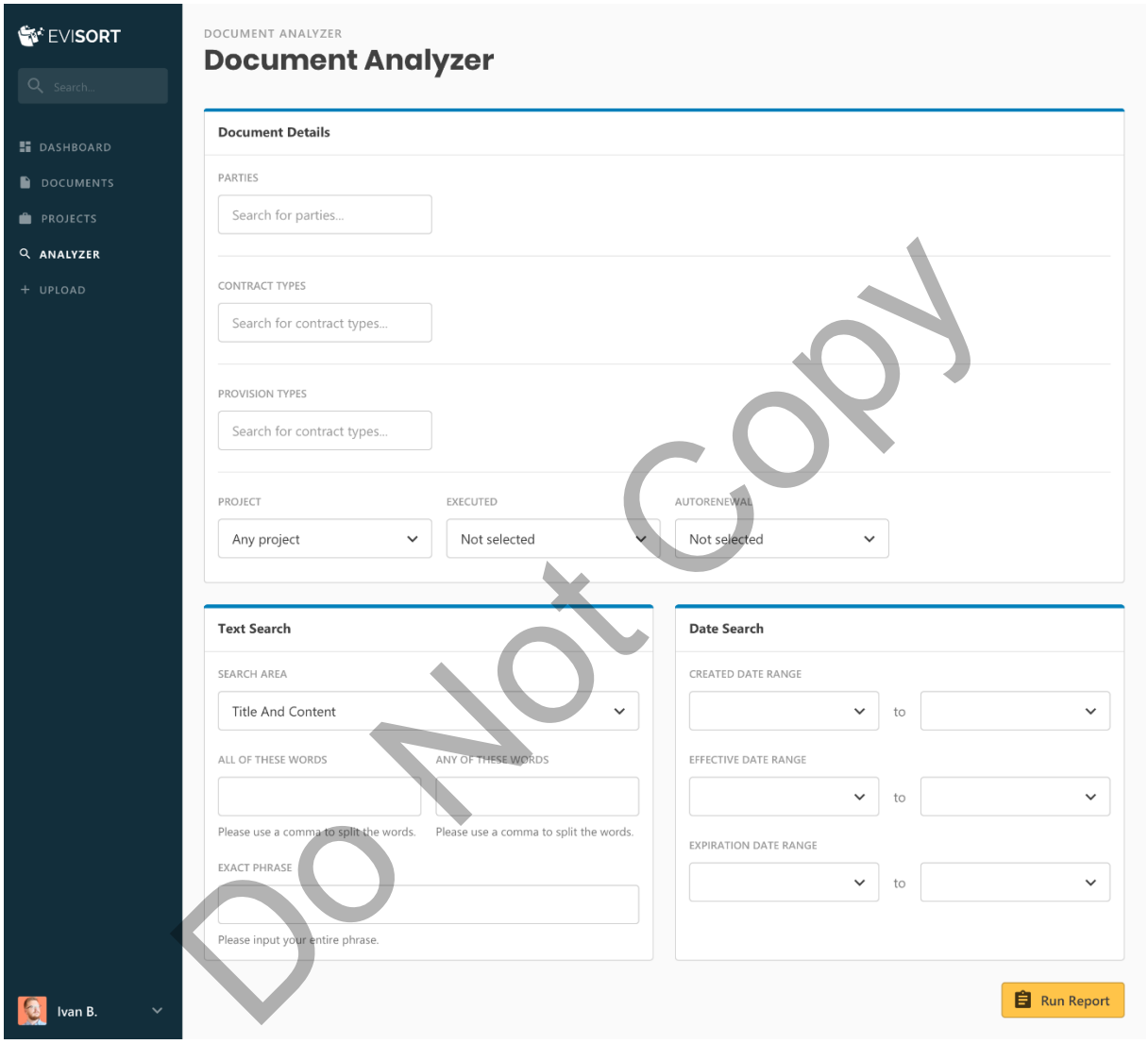


Exhibit 2 (cont.)

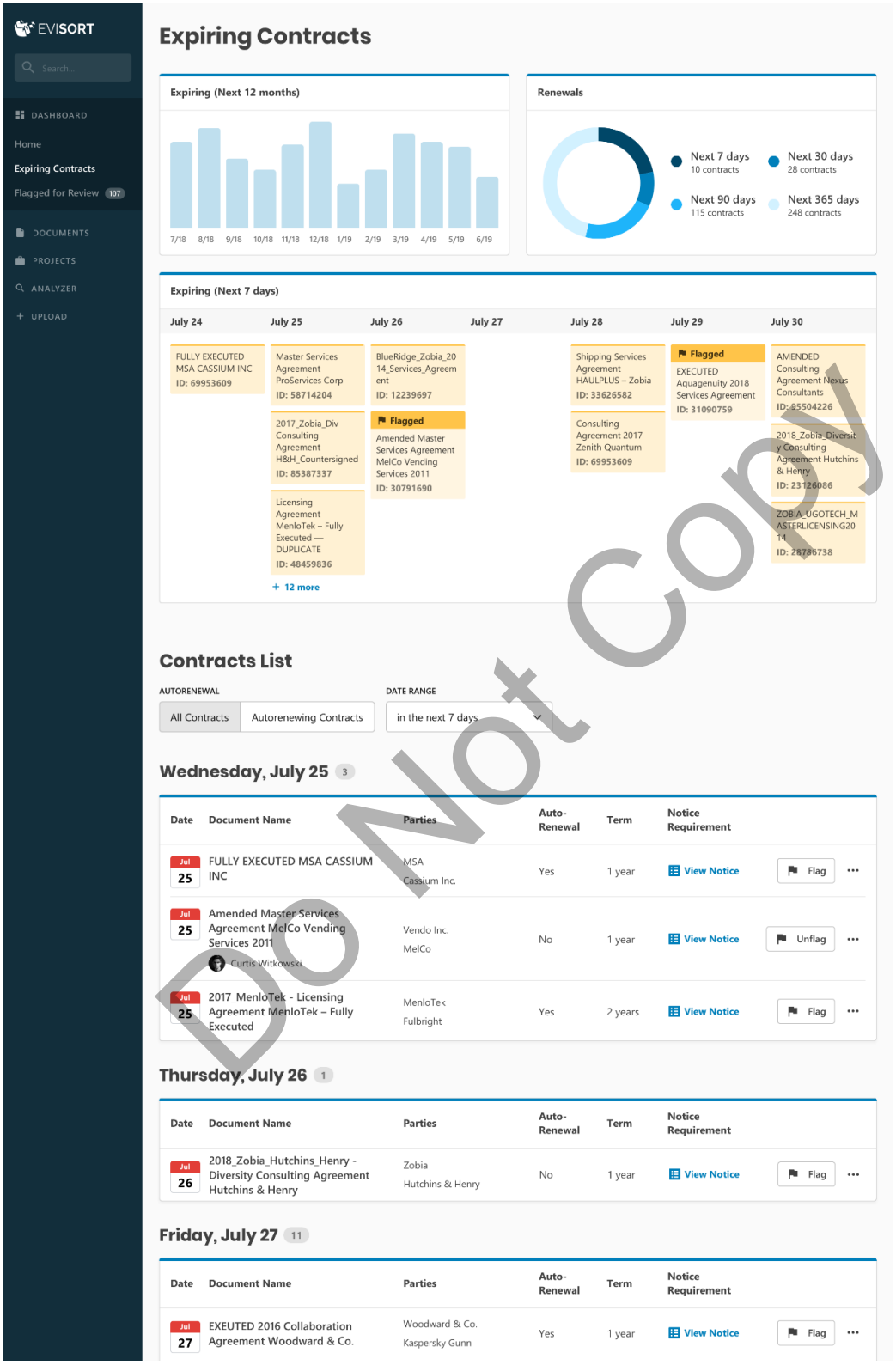
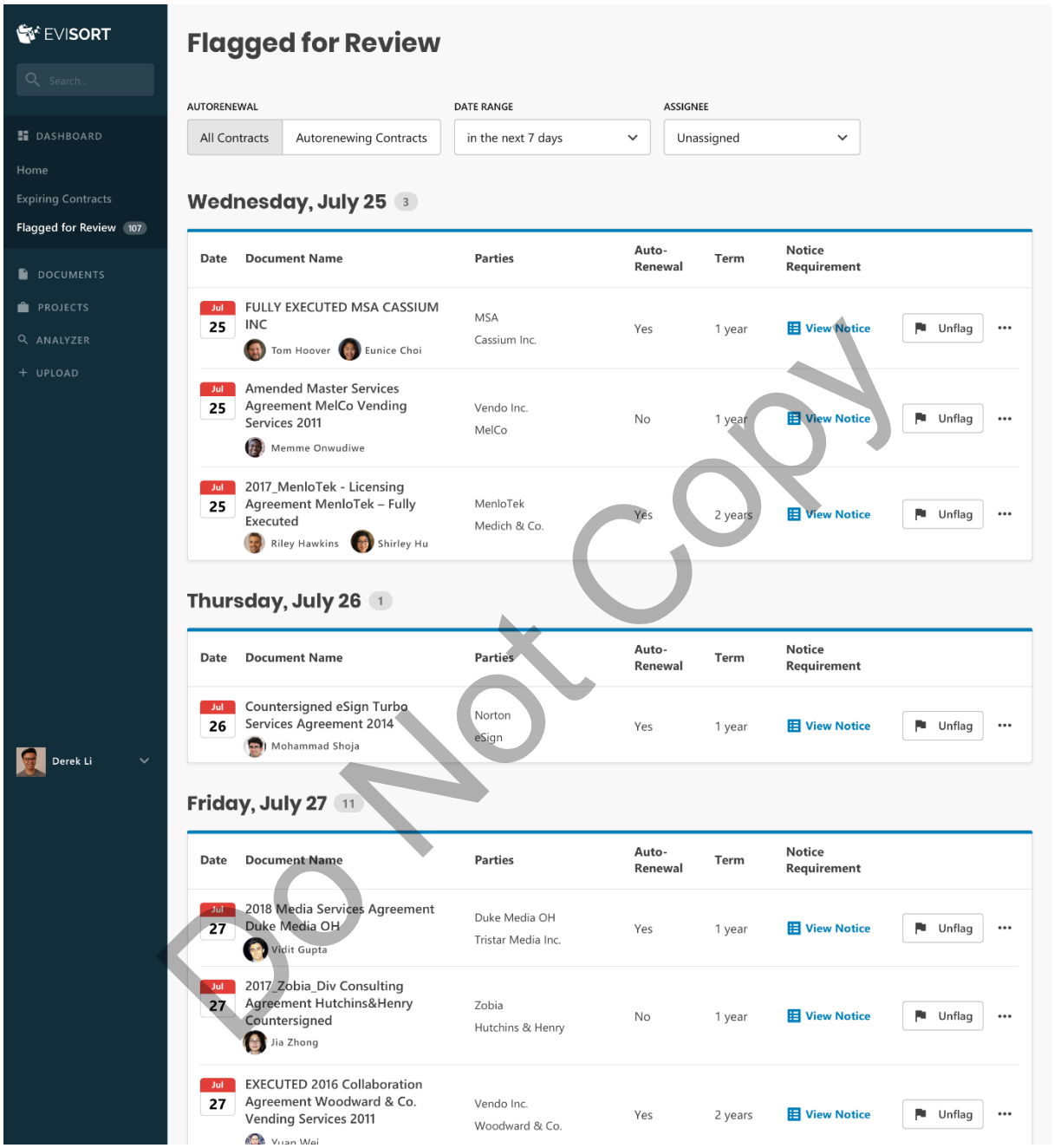


Exhibit 2 (cont.)



Source: Provided by Evisort CEO Jerry Ting.

Endnotes

[1] This quote and all others in the case are from a phone interview with Jerry Ting, Amine Anoun, and Jake Sussman conducted by Daniel Guetta on August 9, 2018.
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[4] Andrew Cabasso, "The Best Law Firm Case Management Software—An In-Depth Comparison," JurisPage.com (updated April 21, 2014), https://jurispage.com/2013/law-practice-management/the-best-law-firm-case-management-software-an-in-depth-comparison/, last accessed September 3, 2018.
[5] Reed Elsevier, *Annual Reports and Financial Statements 2013* (February 26, 2014), https://www.relx.com/~/media/Files/R/RELX-Group/documents/reports/annual-reports/2013-annual-report.pdf, last accessed September 4, 2018.
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[8] "Transactional practice vs. litigation," University of Massachusetts Amherst Pre-Law Advising Office (2018), http://prelaw.umass.edu/topics/transactional_vs_litigation, last accessed September 3, 2018.
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