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Merchant & Gould gets into the software business with Elumis

Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal - June 29, 2007 by [Bryant Ruiz Switzky](#) Staff Writer

Intellectual property law firm Merchant & Gould is getting a taste of its own paperwork.

The Minneapolis-based firm has secured a patent for an internally developed case-management software program called Elumis. It's partnered with a software-industry veteran and is now looking to land a licensing deal with a software company to sell the program to other law firms.

This is a first for the 111-year-old firm, said Dan McDonald, a Merchant & Gould attorney who is leading the Elumis charge. "We're practicing what we preach."

It all started seven years ago when McDonald, then head of the litigation group, wanted electronic access to all the documents associated with his cases.

Attorney Robert Glance had a background in Web-based software development. He and paralegal Kimberly Newell put together a basic program for McDonald and put it on a CD so that he could take all his documents on the road. It worked so well and saved so much time that McDonald asked Glance to put something together that other attorneys could use.

Glance expanded the program, added features, then presented it to a room full of litigators who applauded the intuitive Web-based interface, case standardization, point-and-click table of contents and indexed correspondence, McDonald said. "It saved hours and hours. We thought, 'We could find what we were looking for in a flash if we had access like this!' Then someone in the back of the room shouted, 'We should get a patent on this. This thing is great!,' " he said.

And they did. The patent was granted three months ago.

Both Glance and Newell have since left the firm.

Merchant & Gould paid its former employees who developed the program for full rights.

The firm has retained independent technology consultant Kris Tufto to secure a licensing agreement with a legal software company.

Tufto's expertise bodes well for Elumis. He was president and CEO of Jasc Software Inc., which built a loyal following for PaintShop Pro until the company was sold to software developer Corel Corp. in 2004.

Tufto is "very confident" that he will find a partner for Elumis, though he wouldn't be specific about which software companies he's talking to, only that his search is national and that it'll probably be a couple months before he reaches a deal, he said.

There are competitors for Elumis in the marketplace, Tufto said. But because Merchant & Gould has been using the software and tweaking it since 2000, the program is very solid. "It's been used

so much more than any other product out there," he said.

"[Elumis] has been a nice competitive advantage for us for a few years," McDonald said. "At a certain level, we were thinking we would keep it for ourselves. We're still deciding exactly what we're going to do, but there's really some potential for us to have this take off."

When asked to be specific about the firm's hopes for Elumis, McDonald was somewhat cautious. "It's a good technology. It has great potential," he said. "But I don't think we're planning on quitting our day jobs."

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