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Review: Discovery Cracker 5.2

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Discovery Cracker 5.2

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TechnoScore: 4.9

1 = Lowest Possible Score; 5 = Highest Possible Score

INTRODUCTION

Imagine cracking open a hard drive on the side of your desk like an egg, and have all the email messages, documents, and spreadsheets spill out in nice, neat, organized stacks ready for review. That's the general idea behind [Discovery Cracker](#) from [CT Summation](#), except it more specifically focuses on "cracking" open electronic files to extract their metadata.

Discovery Cracker was originally created by [DocuLex](#), and acquired by CT Summation in August 2007. The acquisition introduced Discovery Cracker to a much broader potential user base since it is a perfect processing tool matched up to CT Summation's document review platform.

If I could simplify Discovery Cracker's capabilities, I would say that it extracts metadata from electronic files and emails ("cracks" them), converts everything into TIFF files, and then bundles everything up into a "load file" for document review platforms like CT Summation or Concordance.

You may have a vendor that does all this extracting and TIFF-ing for you, and all you have to do is import the load file and images into a review platform. There's a good chance that your vendor actually uses Discovery Cracker to do this work. Outside vendors have historically been Discovery Cracker's main customers, but recently many law firms and corporations have purchased the application in an attempt to bring more litigation support work in-house.

The Standard License for Discovery Cracker is \$14,995, which comes with tech support, software

maintenance, and unlimited processing for 1 year (no "per-click" pricing). Discovery Cracker does offer a "Legal Professionals" version for \$7,495 that basically limits the number of processing engines that can be used (although you can purchase more Discovery Cracker Engines if needed).

Discovery Cracker is a professional-grade application and it requires the attention of IT staff to properly install and implement the software.

CRACKING THE INSTALLATION CODE

I have been introduced to Discovery Cracker a few times in my career, but I admit that I was a little daunted by the installation requirements for running Discovery Cracker. I assumed that an application that converted files into TIFFs would be simple and straightforward, similar to how Adobe Acrobat can create TIFF files from a PDF.

Discovery Cracker, however, is a professional-grade application and it requires the attention of IT staff to properly install and implement the software. This is not a knock on Discovery Cracker. In fact the company is extraordinarily zealous in making sure you install their software in a properly configured environment — they've been supporting this software for a long time, and they know what works and what doesn't.

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You can deploy Discovery Cracker in two main setups — on a “single-box,” or in an “advanced solution” installation. I went with the single-box installation for purposes of this review, which I understand is what many law firms deploy. There are some major drawbacks to the single-box installation, most notably the inadequate computer processing power that is found on a single computer. Converting files to TIFF images requires an immense amount of computer processing power. And while Discovery Cracker can operate just fine on a single computer, it is a slow and protracted process when it does the actual processing. This will quickly become frustrating if you have a lot of data to process (and who doesn’t?).

The Discovery Cracker Console looks professional and “Vista-like” since it’s based on the .NET framework.

The better solution is the advanced installation, which takes advantage of multiple computers. Most outside vendors who use Discovery Cracker have a small network of computers that get employed to process electronic data, which is why they can handle high volumes of work. [Discovery Cracker provides an example diagram of a distributed environment on their Web site.](#) If this diagram makes your eyes glaze over, then you need help to install and implement Discovery Cracker effectively.

Discovery Cracker uses the SQL Server framework on the backend to store extracted metadata. Discovery Cracker will work with the free SQL Express (commonly used in a single-box installation), but you will have access to more features if you install the more hearty SQL Standard or Enterprise (version 2005).

You will also need to have the [Microsoft .NET Framework](#) installed on the main machine running the Discovery Cracker application.

Last but not least, Discovery Cracker needs access to a slew of applications such as Microsoft Office 2003 (all pieces such as Word, Outlook, Excel, etc.), Adobe Acrobat 5.0 or higher, WinZip, Internet

Explorer 6.0 or higher, and/or IBM Lotus Notes client. These applications are used by Discovery Cracker when they actually “crack” open the individual files that are getting processed.

To help with all this, Discovery Cracker provides an innovative “Pre-Installation Environment Checker” utility that will make sure you have everything in place before installing Discovery Cracker. This was very helpful to use, especially with a Discovery Cracker tech support person walking me through each step (and fixing any errors).

THE WORKING PARTS

Discovery Cracker is actually composed of several distinct pieces. First there is the “Workflow Manager,” the task-master/manager for all the machines working together on a project.

Next you have the Discovery Cracker “Engine,” which is the workhorse of the software suite — it does the actual “cracking” and rendering of the electronic files. The Engine can be installed on multiple computers to distribute the workload for more efficient processing.

Last is the Discovery Cracker “Console,” which acts as the main user interface for creating and customizing the “Projects,” “Groups,” and “Jobs” for each project.

Other pieces of Discovery Cracker include the Quality Control Console, and the newer Discovery Cracker Detective, which is a browser-based tool that aids in double-checking work before it gets finalized.

MANAGING THE WORKFLOW

A typical workflow for a project in Discovery Cracker involves processing the files, previewing the documents, quality control, post-processing, and then exporting the final images and load file. Discovery Cracker uses a USB dongle to control the licensing. There is no “per-click” pricing with Discovery Cracker but the USB dongle controls the number of machines on which the Engine piece can be installed.

The Discovery Cracker Console looks professional and “Vista-like” since it’s based on the .NET framework. The extremely useful Help Panel is always available on the far right side of the Console which provides detailed step-by-step instructions for just

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about every task — I frequently referred to the Help Panel when I was stumped for the next step to take.

The first step in putting Discovery Cracker to work is to create a Project, under which you can create Groups to manage your various Jobs. If you choose to de-duplicate your electronic files, you'll need to set this option at the Project level.

Each Group in Discovery Cracker points to the “raw” data that you need to process. Discovery Cracker supports a wealth of file types ([you can download a list here](#)). Commonly, this raw data may be a PST file of email messages, a group of Microsoft Word documents, or a variety of other electronic files.

Once you've created your Group, you can initiate individual Jobs for “spinning” through data, extracting metadata, rendering TIFF images, Bates stamping, and exporting load files. Discovery Cracker is very flexible in that you can choose to have one job do all of these tasks at once, or you can assign individual tasks depending upon your needs. For example, if you just want to get a count of the number of files embedded within a PST file, you could create a Job to do an initial file “spin through.” You could then add a second job to extract the metadata and render TIFF images for the files. At that point, you can do a Quality Control check before you finalize the documents with Bates stamps in a separate export Job.

The Quality Control session is not to be passed over quickly. First, you can find files that did not come through the “cracking” stage appropriately, and the Quality Control session enables you to tag those files for re-rendering as necessary.

Second, the Quality Control session also enables you to view and throw out unnecessary files. The Quality Control Panel and Discovery Cracker Detective Browser Tool enables customers to view data that came through the initial cracking and rendering stages, and eliminate any files that are not necessary for the final export.

Finally, the electronic files are ready to be Bates stamped and collected together into a Volume for export. You can create a simple data delimited text export file, or generate a specific load file for CT Summation, IPRO, Concordance, Ringtail, etc. Again, Discovery Cracker is extremely flexible in the options for exporting data out of the system.

THE DOWNSIDE

It took me several run-throughs working in Discovery Cracker before I finally felt that I was comfortable working in the program. Even then, I was constantly finding new options and features. While this can be a good thing for software, I found it overwhelming and extremely confusing.

CONCLUSION

Discovery Cracker is not an “average-user” kind of software. It's “professional-grade” software. Anyone considering purchasing Discovery Cracker to process data in-house should make sure they are willing to devote a healthy amount of time and effort to learning the program completely. Discovery Cracker is superb at what it does, but it is not an application for the faint-of-tech.

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