



IYKYK:

How Legal Teams Can
Crack the Code on
Short Message Data



Ready to Learn More About Short Messages?

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The way we communicate is changing.

The way we communicate both at work and in our personal lives has drastically changed in recent years. Short message applications like Slack, Instant Bloomberg, and Microsoft Teams have become a primary form of business communication – often replacing email. Since early 2020, the number of emails sent has remained relatively flat,¹ and businesses that install Slack report a 32% decrease in the number of emails sent across their organization.²

Within the next few years, the amount of data generated every day will reach 463 exabytes¹³ (one exabyte is one billion gigabytes, btw). To put that in perspective, to record one exabyte of data, you would need to run a video conference call for almost 240,000 years. Talk about Zoom fatigue!

What does that mean for e-discovery?

In 2022, workers in the United States used an average of nine different business tools throughout the day.¹⁴ As organizations continue to rely on these messaging channels for their standard business practices, discovery teams need a way to capture short message content across platforms for litigation, compliance reviews, and internal investigations. Unsure where to start? We'll walk you through everything you need to know about short message data, the challenges associated with collecting it, and how to simplify your next review.

¹ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/how-much-data-is-generated-each-day/>

² <https://kommandotech.com/statistics/slack-statistics/>

³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/microsoft-teams-coronavirus-daily-active-users-2020-3>

⁴ <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/microsoft-teams-statistics/>

⁵ <https://www.techtarget.com/searchunifiedcommunications/news/252488584/Zoom-quarterly-earnings-show-sharp-rise-in-paying-customers>

⁶ <https://backlinko.com/zoom-users>

⁷ <https://slack.com/blog/news/slack-announces-fourth-quarter-and-fiscal-year-2020-results>

⁸ <https://slack.com/blog/news/slack-announces-first-quarter-fiscal-year-2022-results>

⁹ <https://blog.whatsapp.com/two-billion-users-connecting-the-world-privately>

¹⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1306022/whatsapp-global-unique-users/>

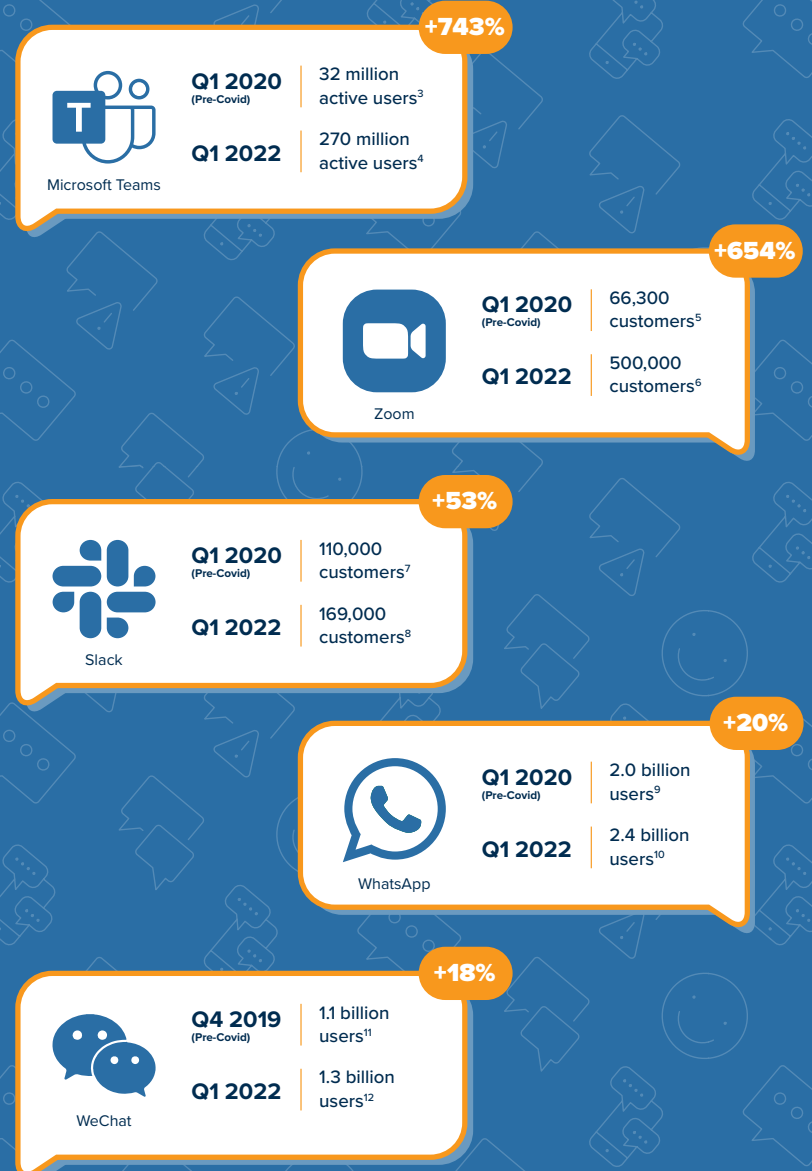
¹¹ <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/wechat-statistics/>

¹² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>

¹³ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/how-much-data-is-generated-each-day/>

¹⁴ Asana, U.S. Anatomy of Work Global Index 2022

Two-Year Growth of Short Message Platforms



What Is Short Message Data?

In the new era of hybrid and remote work, apps like Slack and Microsoft Teams allow coworkers, vendors, and customers to instantaneously communicate with one another across the globe. These dynamic tools have fostered an environment of problem solving, planning, and sharing – all within threads and across various channels.

These platforms allow us to share a variety of information (messages, documents, photos, videos, links, and more) faster than a typical email, producing a special kind of data known as **short message data**.

A “short message” is a conversational exchange between one or multiple parties, often in quick succession, that takes place via a messaging or social application.

Examples of short message data include:



SMS/text message conversations



Attachments and external links



Direct message conversations



Emojis and reactions



Public and private channel threads



Metadata like read receipts, participants, time stamps, etc.



Meeting and video transcripts

While these tools have helped businesses become more efficient, the data they generate can be difficult to export and process – creating a complex roadblock for legal teams. With the prevalence of these platforms, it's critical to find a quick (and defensible) way to review and produce this type of data.

Why Your Legal Team Should Care About Short Message Data

TL;DR: Relevant, non-privileged data needs to be considered, regardless of the source.

There have been countless headlines of cases built solely around text message exchanges and social media conversations. While that may be relevant for personal litigation, you might wonder if short message data needs to be taken into consideration for corporate matters. When it comes to professional settings, are email and company documentation enough for discovery purposes?

The short answer: no. Relevant, non-privileged data needs to be considered when meeting your discovery obligations, even if it's in the form of short message data. Just because a conversation took place via Slack or Microsoft Teams, you can't automatically omit it from review. It's the duty of attorneys and litigation support professionals to understand all possible data sources that exist today and how to collect and produce them. At the end of the day, **production requirements haven't changed – it's the types of data, and where it's stored, that have changed.**

And for internal investigations teams, this short message data is crucial – it just might be where you find your “needle in the haystack” evidence.



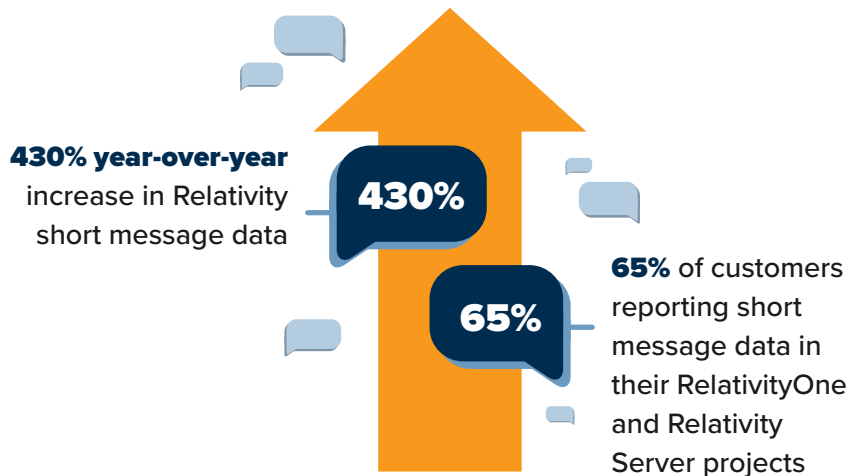
Prevalence of short message data in legal review

With the popularity of messaging platforms today, it's likely you're already working on a case that includes short message data, potentially across multiple sources.

As of January 2023, more than 65% of customer accounts have reported short message data in their RelativityOne and Relativity Server projects. Of those accounts, the top ten averaged more than 10.1 million short message data files and more than 5,900 GB worth of data in each of their Relativity workspaces – data that needs to be culled, reviewed, and potentially produced.

Moreover, **short message data in Relativity has increased more than 430% year-over-year and is expected to surpass the number of emails by 2024.** The problem is not going away – it's only getting bigger.

Relativity customers are managing an extraordinary amount of short message data:

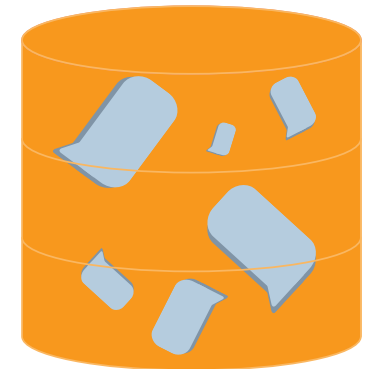


Of accounts reporting short message data, the top ten averaged:



10.1 million short message data files

5,900+ GB average of short message data in each of their Relativity workspaces



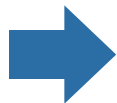
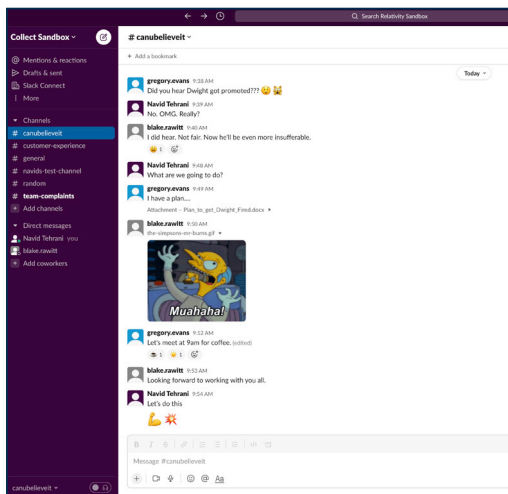
Collecting Short Message Data

Short messages are messy

While digital data sources have rapidly evolved, the processes for collecting and reviewing this data haven't adapted as quickly. Unfortunately for legal teams, short message data is vastly different than standard email when it comes to the collection and review process. For the most part, email threads are linear and are usually limited to text or document attachments. Email messages also export neatly into .pst or .eml files.

On the other hand, short message conversations about a single topic can flow across platforms or different sub-channels within the same platform and involve multiple parties – who can be added and removed at varying points in time. These conversations can also include shorthand or non-text responses like emojis and GIFs – making their exports unstructured and more complex (to say the least). Pair that with the potential 10.1 million files per case, and that makes for an overwhelming review process.

Most e-discovery platforms turn short message data into this. **Don't settle for scrambled message data.**



Time Stamp	Participant	Message Body
2023-03-29T14:38:14.048369Z	gregory.evans	Did you hear Dwight got promoted??? :astonished: :scream_cat:
2023-03-29T14:39:17.439639Z	navid.tehrani	No. OMG. Really?
2023-03-29T14:40:10.753539Z	blake.rawitt	I did hear. Not fair. Now he'll be even more insufferable.
2023-03-29T14:40:10.753539Z	gregory.evans	Weary
2023-03-29T14:48:42.210019Z	navid.tehrani	What are we going to do?
2023-03-29T14:49:24.011309Z	gregory.evans	I have a plan...
2023-03-29T14:49:24.011309Z	gregory.evans	Attachment - Plan_to_get_Dwight_Fired.docx
2023-03-29T14:49:24.011309Z	gregory.evans	
2023-03-29T14:50:30.649409Z	blake.rawitt	Sometimes I just feel like I can't work here anymore
2023-03-29T14:51:10.265239Z	navid.tehrani	Let's meet at 9am for coffee.
2023-03-29T14:52:42.954109Z	gregory.evans	Sunny
2023-03-29T14:52:42.954109Z	blake.rawitt	Coffee
2023-03-29T14:52:42.954109Z	navid.tehrani	Looking forward to working with you all.
2023-03-29T14:53:50.288299Z	blake.rawitt	Let's do this
2023-03-29T14:54:33.233719Z	navid.tehrani	Let's do this
2023-03-29T14:54:40.174979Z	navid.tehrani	:muscle: :boom:

The context surrounding each message is vital to the review process but can be easy to miss given this convoluted output. For example, subtleties like timing of replies, 'likes' or reactions, emojis, nested replies, and threads within a thread are nuanced and almost impossible to detect if viewing in a non-native format.

No two data sources are the same

Collecting records from a messaging platform can be extremely difficult without the right tool in place and trying to export chat and message data on your own can be time consuming and error prone. Imagine the headache of downloading thousands of messages into a .CSV file and reviewing in Excel – not only does that make for an inefficient review, it's possible the metadata of interest isn't included.

But let's say you've managed to export data sets from these messaging apps and you're ready to load them into your review platform. You'll likely find yourself with countless exports – all in different formats that require different processing or troubleshooting capabilities.

Evidence must be in a “reasonable format”

In the United States, the Federal Rules of Evidence requires litigators to produce evidence in a “reasonably usable” format. Likewise, many other nations have similar rules of engagement for legal parties. If it’s not possible to produce natives – as is often the case with electronic data – then the evidence needs to be produced in a readable format and should include full metadata and text, any accompanying images, comments, or tracked changes.


Of course, messaging platforms have not been created with ease of e-discovery in mind, so it’s vital to find a tool that will allow you to easily review from convoluted sources like external links, private versus public channel conversations, and video call transcripts.

In the U.S., the Federal Rules of Evidence require evidence in litigation to be kept in a “reasonably usable” format and should include full metadata and text, any accompanying images, comments, or tracked changes.

e-Discovery requires efficiency – and defensibility

Without a way to effectively collect, standardize, and review various messaging data sources, legal teams have to comb through thousands of pages of screenshots or garbled .txt files to determine the content, participants, and potential relevance. Not only is that inefficient, but you’re also more likely to lose the important metadata that will help you weave together timelines and effectively tell your story.

And with any data source that’s being collected, maintaining a conclusive audit trail is critical to ensuring a defensible process. If you don’t handle this intricate short message data correctly as you’re collecting or “decoding” it for review, you risk losing its defensibility.



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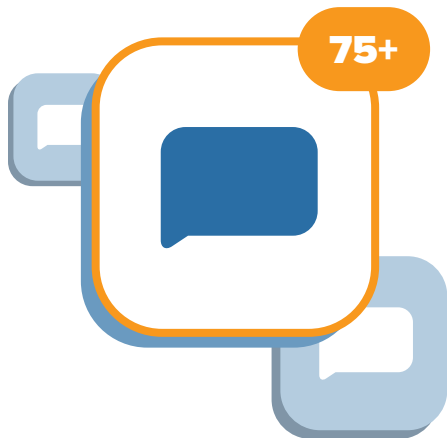
RSMF: Relativity's Solution for Reviewing Short Message Data

It's clear that obstacles of short message data are a big challenge to those leading the collection and review process – a challenge that will only continue to grow as more organizations rely on chat platforms for communication.

Relativity short message format (RSMF) changes that. With RSMF, legal and compliance teams can streamline short message review and treat collaboration data like an actual conversation.

What is RSMF?

RSMF is a platform-agnostic data format that allows you to quickly and easily bring short message data into RelativityOne or Relativity Server. Data from more than 75 different chat platforms has been transformed and reviewed in RSMF. If an app's functionality contains messaging capabilities, RSMF likely supports it.



75+ chat platforms have been transformed and reviewed in RSMF

RSMF provides the visibility you need to uncover the smoking gun in your case. Who received a specific message, and did they actually read it? Did someone edit their message after the original send to try and cover their tracks?

With RSMF, you can easily account for the metadata you really want to expose:

Frequently deleted chat data, such as text messages

Read receipts

Message direction (inbound/outbound)

Historical edits to a message

Custom platform-specific icons and emojis

This information is crucial to discovery because it helps paint a complete picture of the activities, intent, and context of conversations involving certain individuals across channels.

Reduce your time to review with Collect

Without RSMF, the process to convert and import your short message data into your review platform is cumbersome, and you're often left with unreadable formats or lengthy error logs. But with the combination of Collect in RelativityOne and RSMF, this process is quick and easy.

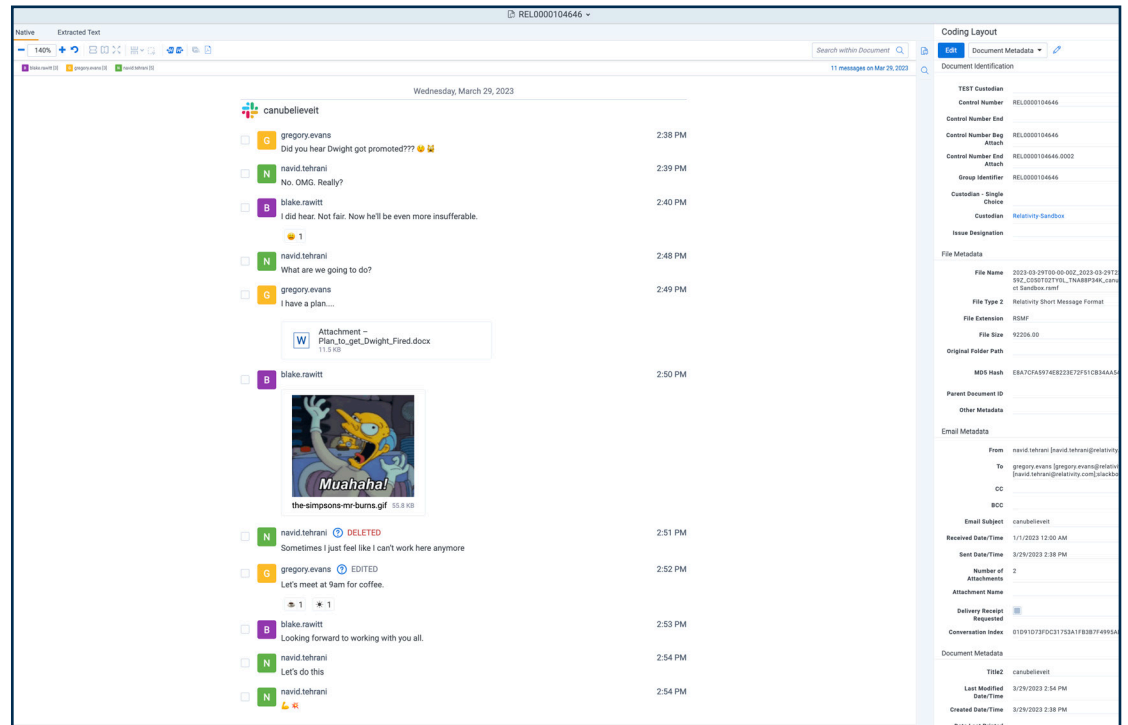
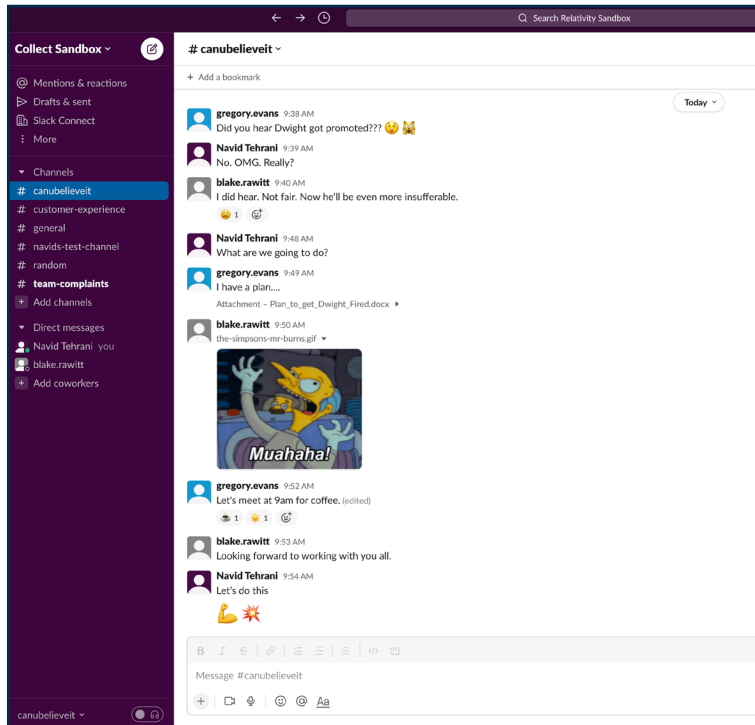
The Collect wizard allows you to quickly gather and convert chat data to RSMF in four simple steps. And to make your review even more convenient, you can start your processing job straight from Collect.

- 1 Pick your source**
- 2 Identify custodians**
- 3 Define your criteria**
- 4 Complete & process**

User-friendly Collect import wizard, only available in RelativityOne.

Read the whole story

Once your RSMF data has been collected, our enriched viewer experience makes it easier than ever to organize your data. Instead of hard-to-read JSON or XML exports, RSMF showcases messaging threads in a near-native layout:



Side-by-side comparison of a native Slack chat compared to how the same thread is displayed in the Relativity viewer.

Get a clear view

In a single view, you get a holistic look at which participants were involved in these chats, a clear timeline to help you better understand when conversations took place (it will even highlight key search terms), and enhanced filtering options to focus your review on a particular custodian, date range, type of message event, or any other metadata. With all these critical elements at your fingertips, you can drastically reduce your review time. And when a case or investigation comes in, the timeline tool will help you identify the window in which the alleged activities took place.

The screenshot displays the Relativity viewer interface for a document titled "REL000000008". The main view shows a WhatsApp chat log for Sunday, April 28, 2019. The chat includes messages from John Edge (JE), James Bond (JB), and System Messages (SM). A media file (DFBE7742177D020F4F4D75EF5F413BF4134D38D3BE74.mp4) is also visible. Below the chat log is a timeline visualization showing message activity as vertical bars along a time axis from 11:15 AM to 12:01 PM. The interface includes a left sidebar with filtering options for Conversations, Participants, Event Types, Date Range, and Time Range. The right sidebar shows the "Coding Layout" and "Case Dynamics" sections, including a "First Pass Review" table with fields like Control Number, Relevance, Privilege, and Confidentiality. The bottom of the interface features buttons for "Translate", "View Similar Documents", "Save as new document", and "Family Group" / "Document History" dropdowns.

The Relativity viewer clearly displays the RSMF details critical to your next case or investigation.

Reduce complexity of short message data with RelativityOne

On their own, features like the enhanced viewer and streamlined Collect functionality make it easy to ingest and cull short message data across a wide variety of communication platforms. Pair them with the rest of RelativityOne's powerful cloud-based features, and you'll further reduce the complexity of your end-to-end review.

Advanced Text Search

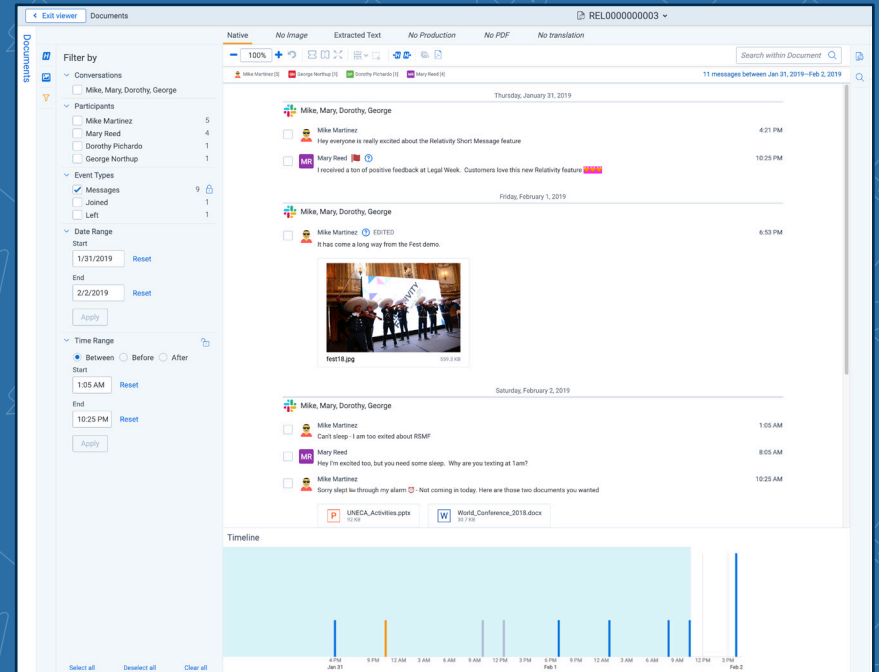
Through powerful searches, you can create indexes of your short message data that allow you to search for the criteria, like extracted text and metadata, that matters most.

Slicing

Chat threads can be lengthy, with most of the content being immaterial to your matter. With slicing, you don't have to waste time redacting pages and pages of irrelevant chat logs and conversations. Quickly select specific events or messages in a conversation and "slice" them to create a new document containing only the relevant information. You can then image and produce the slice like any other document.

Persistent Filters

With Persistent Filters, you can reduce clicks and shorten the time to insight during the review process. You can automatically ignore the noise of join/leave notifications and other platform-standard disclaimers, as well as set time ranges to be applied across all RSMF – saving reviewers from having to manually enable those filters from source to source.



Slice the parts of the conversation that are most relevant to your investigation and reduce clicks by setting up Persistent Filters.

The Future of Short Message in RelativityOne

Communication styles and channels are constantly evolving. No one could have predicted the pandemic, nor the rapid shift in business messaging that came with it. In any case, short message data is now a critical component to any data collection and review process.

With the daunting amount of data on the horizon, your legal team needs to be prepared to efficiently collect these complex data sources and keep pace with the ever-evolving platforms that will help generate it. As these tools continue to change, it will be crucial for review teams to have an easy way to gather the data and track conversations/actions taken across multiple channels.

With the abundance of digital collaboration and communication tools being used today, efficient legal reviews and investigations will likely contain more topics and timelines in a chat thread rather than typical documentation and memos. But no matter what the future may hold for chat and messaging tools, Relativity will be there every step of the way to help ensure a seamless review experience – regardless of the data type.

Ready to see RSMF in action?

[Request a Demo](#)



The background is a solid blue color with a repeating pattern of white line-art icons. The icons include speech bubbles, smiley faces, and two hands shaking, representing communication and collaboration.

 Relativity[®]