RECORD RETRIEVAL OUTSOURCING · PHILIPPINES

The Court-Ready Standard.

Why cost per court-ready record has replaced cost per request as the governing metric for litigation, claims and compliance retrieval — and how disciplined custodian outreach and chain-of-custody architecture turn a 45% first-contact rate into 76%.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

This series exists because outsourcing decisions are usually made with less evidence than any other spend of comparable size. Volume by volume, it publishes the material PITON-Global builds for clients privately — cost mechanics, verified benchmarks, provider-field analysis, and governance patterns — so that executives can pressure-test the business case before a single vendor conversation takes place.

THE PITON-GLOBAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

About the authors

John Maczynski

Chief Executive Officer

John's career divides into two acts with one constant. In the first, he spent thirty-plus years running outsourced operations for household-name US enterprises — insurers and litigation-heavy financial institutions among them — accountable for the results vendors delivered. In the second, he crossed the table to represent buyers full-time. The constant is the standard: every shortlist PITON-Global issues under his leadership is one he would sign a contract from himself, and he stays in the engagement until the program is live and proven.

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Manila has been Ralf's operating base for more than twenty years — long enough to have built and run the kinds of regulated back-office floors this paper describes, for insurers, law-firm service providers, and records-heavy enterprises on three continents. He leads the research side of the practice: the provider dossiers, cost curves, and diligence protocols that every PITON-Global engagement draws on, and that give this series its data.

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ABOUT PITON-GLOBAL

A quarter century in the Philippine market has given PITON-Global something no directory or marketplace can replicate: firsthand knowledge of how more than a thousand providers actually perform — who keeps commitments after the sales team leaves the room, whose certifications survive a floor walk, whose attrition numbers are real. The firm, decorated with numerous industry awards over the years, puts that knowledge exclusively at the service of buyers: scoping requirements, gating the field, running competitive RFPs, and staying on the client's side of the table through launch. Tripadvisor, TSYS, HealthPartners, Yetipay, Workrise, and Norman Disney & Young are among the companies that have built Philippine teams this way.

SECTION 01

Executive summary

48 hr	99%	76%	-50%
Average turnaround, request to indexed record (Section 3 cohort)	Complete-and-accurate rate under dual-control QA	First-contact success under disciplined custodian outreach — vs. ~45% typical in-house	Cost per court-ready record vs. in-house retrieval at standard mix

Record retrieval looks clerical from the outside: request a record, receive a record, file it. Anyone who has run a mass-tort docket, a claims-litigation portfolio, or a regulatory response knows better. Retrieval is a deadline instrument. The record that arrives incomplete surfaces at deposition; the record that arrives late costs a continuance; the record that arrives without a defensible custody trail may not come in at all. Yet most retrieval is still bought the clerical way — priced per request, awarded to the lowest bidder, and measured by volume processed rather than by what litigation actually consumes: complete, certified, court-ready records that land before the deadline.

The correction is a metric: **cost per court-ready record** — the full cost of the retrieval operation divided by the records that arrive complete, accurate, certified, and on time — with re-requests, gap remediation, missed-deadline consequences, and admissibility failures charged back to the operation that caused them. Measured this way, the disciplined Philippine top tier does not merely undercut an in-house retrieval bench; it beats it on completeness and turnaround while costing half as much per usable record. Five findings frame this volume:

1. **Cost per request and cost per court-ready record rank vendors in opposite order.** In the Section 2 comparison, the cheapest per-request bidder is the most expensive per usable record once re-requests, gap chasing, and deadline slippage are counted. The metric you contract on determines the operation you get.

2 **First contact decides the timeline.** A request that reaches the right custodian, in the right format, with the right authorization on the first attempt resolves in days; one that doesn't enters a follow-up spiral that averages three weeks. The gap between a 45% and a 76% first-contact rate is not effort — it is contact-strategy engineering (Section 3).

3 **Admissibility is an architecture, not an affidavit.** A record survives challenge when every touch — request, receipt, indexing, certification, release — is logged, dual-controlled, and reconstructible. Section 4 specifies the chain-of-custody controls that let an offshore-retrieved record stand in a US courtroom.

4 **Completeness is engineered, not hoped for.** The 99% complete-and-accurate rate comes from a gap-detection pass against the request specification, a dual-control QA gate, and a re-request loop that fires before the file reaches the requester — not from asking custodians nicely (Section 5).

5 **Litigation-grade retrieval capacity is rare.** Of 1,000+ Philippine BPO operations, PITON-Global's mapping confirms genuine litigation-and-compliance retrieval depth — live custodian-outreach floors, certification workflows, chain-of-custody tooling — at fewer than twenty. Finding them is a research problem before it is a procurement problem.

The intended reader runs litigation support at a law firm, claims litigation at an insurer, legal operations at a corporate, or production at a court-reporting and records company — at the point where request volume is scaling faster than the team that clears it. Sections 2–5 present the evidence; Sections 6–8, the method and the proof.

SECTION 02

The metric shift: from cost per request to cost per court-ready record

Per-request pricing survives because it is legible to procurement. It fails because it prices the attempt while ignoring the outcome. A retrieval operation produces four things simultaneously: records that arrive complete and on time (the only output litigation can use), records that arrive incomplete (which generate re-requests and gap chasing), records that arrive late (which cost extensions, continuances, and leverage), and records that arrive without a defensible custody trail (which may be excluded outright). A contract that compensates requests is indifferent among all four.

FIG. 1 — THE COURT-READY DEFINITION

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Cost per court-ready record = ( retrieval operating spend + re-request & gap-remediation cost + deadline-slippage cost ) ÷ records delivered complete, certified & on time
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Each component is measurable on requester-side systems: QA logs for completeness, matter calendars for timeliness, re-request tickets for remediation. Method in Methodology & notes.

Figure 2 compares two anonymized requesters from PITON-Global's engagement base — a claims-litigation team contracted per request with a commodity vendor, and a defense firm on outcome-linked terms with a vetted Manila retrieval specialist. The per-request buyer pays 31% less per request and 2.1× more per court-ready record.

FIG. 2 — TWO REQUESTERS, TWO CONTRACTS: THE SAME QUARTER, PRICED BOTH WAYS

METRIC	PER-REQUEST CONTRACT	OUTCOME-LINKED CONTRACT
Price per request	**$24.00**	$35.00
First-contact success rate	**44%**	**76%**
Complete on first delivery	**81%**	**99%**
Median turnaround	**11.5 days**	**2.0 days**
Cost per court-ready record	**$61.30**	**$29.10**

Anonymized engagement data, normalized to the same quarter and request mix. Completeness measured against request specification at first delivery.

The mechanism is incentives, not competence. A vendor paid per request optimizes throughput: log the attempt, send the form letter, close the ticket. A vendor whose credits ride on completeness, turnaround, and certification quality optimizes exactly what the matter calendar feels. Tie compensation to court-ready output and you spend less *by not absorbing the re-requests, extensions, and exclusion risk the cheap model silently generates*. That contractual inversion is the standard this paper is named for.

SECTION 03

The custodian-outreach discipline: engineering a 76% first-contact rate

Every retrieval timeline is decided in its first seventy-two hours. A request that reaches the right custodian, with the right authorization, in the format that custodian actually processes, resolves in days. A request that misfires — wrong department, stale fax number, unsigned authorization, wrong fee enclosed — enters a follow-up spiral whose median length, across the engagements behind this paper, is three weeks. The difference between a 45% and a 76% first-contact rate is therefore not diligence; it is infrastructure:

CUSTODIAN GRAPH	A maintained database of custodians — departments, submission channels, fee schedules, authorization formats, turnaround histories — built across millions of prior requests. The first attempt goes where the record actually lives, not where the letterhead says to write.
REQUEST HYGIENE	Authorization validity, date-range precision, record-type specificity, and fee tender are QA'd *before* the request leaves the floor — because the most common cause of a dead request is a defect the requester shipped.
CADENCED FOLLOW-UP	Every open request sits on a follow-up clock — day 3, day 7, day 12, escalation — worked across US time zones by agents whose only queue is chasing. Nothing ages silently; every custodian contact is logged with outcome and next action.
ESCALATION BENCH	Non-responsive custodians route to a senior desk that works phone-first, invokes statutory response obligations where they exist, and flags the file for subpoena support before the deadline makes it an emergency.

The Philippines is the natural home for this discipline for the same reasons it dominates voice-and-back-office work generally: tens of thousands of legal-management, paralegal and records-administration graduates a year; near-native English on the phone with US custodians; an overnight time zone that turns a US afternoon request into a next-morning result; and fully-loaded costs 60–70% below a US bench. What the top tier adds — and what Section 6 vets for — is the litigation-grade layer on top: certification workflows, custody tooling, and QA benches that treat a record as evidence, not paperwork.

SECTION 04

Chain-of-custody architecture: making the offshore record admissible

The first question every litigator asks about offshore retrieval is the right one: *will the record survive a challenge?* The answer depends entirely on architecture. A record is admissible when its journey is reconstructible — who requested it, who received it, who touched it, what was certified, and that nothing changed in between. The vetted tier builds that reconstructibility as a system:

FIG. 3 — THE CUSTODY TRAIL, CONTROL BY CONTROL

STAGE	CONTROL
Request	Authorization validated and versioned; request specification locked; every outbound logged with channel, timestamp, and agent identity
Receipt	Intake hashing on arrival; source, format, and page count recorded; original preserved read-only — all work happens on controlled copies
Indexing	Dual-control processing on non-persistent VDI; no local storage, no removable media; 100% activity logging under SOC 2 and HIPAA controls
Certification	Completeness attested against the request specification; certification and affidavit packets prepared to the requesting jurisdiction's format; senior-reviewer sign-off
Release	Encrypted delivery to the system of record; release logged against authorization scope; full custody report available per record, on demand

Composite of controls observed on vetted Manila retrieval floors, 2024–26. Specific tooling varies by provider; the control objectives do not.

THE DILIGENCE QUESTION THAT SORTS THE FIELD

"Pick any record you delivered last month and show me its full custody report — every touch, every hand, every timestamp." A litigation-grade provider produces it in minutes, because the report is generated, not assembled. A clerical-grade provider offers a delivery confirmation instead — which is precisely the problem.

> PITON-Global asks this question on every floor walk in Step 4 of the vetting framework; most providers cannot answer it.

SECTION 05

The completeness problem: engineering 99% complete-and-accurate

An incomplete record is worse than a late one, because its incompleteness is usually discovered at the worst possible moment — at deposition, in expert review, in a regulator's follow-up. Custodians do not deliberately short files; they deliver what their own systems surface, which routinely omits the second facility, the archived years, the billing ledger behind the treatment notes, the amended pages. A retrieval operation that forwards what arrives is a mail room. The vetted tier interposes three gates between receipt and release:

GATE 1 · GAP DETECTION

The delivered file is reconciled against the request specification and against internal continuity signals — date-range gaps, referenced-but-absent documents, page-sequence breaks, missing attachments. Detected gaps fire re-requests automatically, while the custodian contact is still warm.

GATE 2 · DUAL-CONTROL QA

Indexing and pagination are verified by a second reviewer on complex or litigation-bound files; certification packets get senior sign-off. Accuracy is sampled continuously and calibrated against the requester's own QA, not self-graded.

GATE 3 · THE RE-REQUEST LOOP

Nothing releases with a known gap unless the requester elects it. The re-request rides the same follow-up cadence as an original, and the file's status stays visible to the requester throughout — no silent aging, no surprise at the deadline.

The output of the three gates is the number that matters: **99% of records complete and accurate at first delivery**, measured against the request specification on requester-side QA. The residual 1% arrives flagged, with the gap identified and the re-request already in flight. That is the difference between a retrieval vendor and a retrieval operation: one delivers documents, the other delivers certainty about what has and has not been obtained.

SECTION 06

Sourcing discipline: the 7-Step Vendor Vetting Framework, applied to record retrieval

Record retrieval compresses the framework's funnel harder than almost any service line: the field collapses at capability screening (live custodian-outreach floors with certification workflows are rare) and again at the compliance audit (the custody-report test of Section 4 is pass/fail). The stages below show a representative search for a litigation-support buyer.

1	**Requirements definition** Request types, volumes, custodian mix, jurisdictions, certification formats, turnaround targets — fixed before any vendor contact	1,000+ →
2	**Market mapping** Eliminates providers without records-operations delivery units in the required scale band	~45 →
3	**Capability screening** Live custodian-outreach floors, certification and affidavit workflows, first-contact and completeness metrics — evidenced, not asserted	~18 →
4	**Compliance & security audit** The custody-report test applied on the floor: SOC 2 and HIPAA controls, non-persistent VDI, dual control, full-trail reconstruction on demand	~9 →
5	**Operational diligence** QA calibration, attrition cohorts, tenure economics, reference calls with comparable requesters	5–8 →
6	**Competitive RFP & negotiation** Finalists compete on transparent per-record terms; credits tied to first-contact rate, completeness, turnaround, and certification quality	2–3 →
7	**Transition & launch governance** PITON-Global stays embedded buyer-side from signature to certified steady state — then hands over	1

As throughout the practice, the framework is **vendor-neutral by construction** — no inventory, no placement quotas, no way to buy a shortlist position — and **right-sizing-led**: for a 10-to-60-seat retrieval program it deliberately surfaces specialist mid-sized providers for whom the account is a flagship, carrying the certifications of the majors with the governance access of a boutique. Output: a compliance-gated shortlist within 48–72 hours, free to the buyer, competing through a fully transparent, fair, comprehensive, and highly competitive RFP.

SECTION 07 · ANONYMIZED CASE STUDY

Before and after: a mass-tort record pull, reconstructed

Engagement RR-085 is a US insurance-defense firm on a mass-tort docket: tens of thousands of medical, billing and employment records to retrieve from thousands of custodians before a discovery cutoff. The in-house team of nine was stuck at a 45% first-contact rate; records were arriving incomplete; and the calendar said the pull would miss the cutoff by six weeks. The firm's conditions for outsourcing were two: a custody trail that would survive challenge, and the deadline — not just cost relief. Identifying details are anonymized under NDA.

SELECTION (WEEKS 0–5)

Requirements fixed a 30-seat scope — custodian outreach and follow-up, intake and gap detection, indexing and pagination, certification and release — under SOC 2 and HIPAA controls with full custody reporting. Mapping yielded 41 claimants; capability screening on live retrieval floors cut the field to 16; the custody-report floor walk left 8. Diligence produced a shortlist of 6; a competitive RFP concluded with a Manila records specialist on per-record terms, credits tied to first-contact rate, completeness, and turnaround.

TRANSITION (WEEKS 6–14)

Two certification-gated waves. The custodian-outreach pod went live first against the backlog, working the firm's request specifications behind a one-week parallel run; intake, gap detection and certification followed with dual review on every litigation-bound file for the first month. The provider's custodian graph replaced the firm's contact spreadsheets in week 8. PITON-Global chaired weekly buyer-side governance through steady state, certified in month 5.

FIG. 4 — RR-085 AT MONTH 6: BEFORE → AFTER		
FIRST-CONTACT RATE ~~45%~~ → **76%**	MEDIAN TURNAROUND ~~12.4 days~~ → **48 hrs**	COMPLETE AT FIRST DELIVERY ~~82%~~ → **99%**
COST PER COURT-READY RECORD ~~$58.40~~ → **$28.70**	CUSTODY-REPORT COVERAGE ~~partial~~ → **100%**	DISCOVERY CUTOFF ~~−6 wks~~ → **+2 wks**

Requester-side QA and matter-calendar data, month 6 versus trailing pre-engagement quarter. The pull cleared two weeks ahead of the discovery cutoff.

FIRST-YEAR VALUE COMPONENT	YEAR 1	BASIS
Retrieval cost reduction vs. in-house bench	$1.06M	Volume × ($58.40 – $28.70) per court-ready record
Re-request & gap-chasing labor avoided	$0.31M	Completeness lift 82%→99% × observed remediation cost per gapped file
Deadline exposure retired (extensions, motion practice, expedite fees)	$0.24M	Trailing-year actuals for deadline-driven spend, conservatively discounted
Gross value created	**$1.61M**	
Less: engagement & transition costs	($0.28M)	Transition, parallel runs, custody-tooling integration, governance overlay; advisory fee $0 (provider-paid model)
Net value ÷ cost = first-year ROI	5.8×	$1.33M ÷ $0.23M annualized engagement base

Figures rounded; avoidance effects conservatively factored. Method in Methodology & notes.

Note the composition: the rate arbitrage is only two-thirds of gross value. The rest came from what per-request pricing never sees — gaps that never shipped, deadlines that stopped costing money, and a custody trail that turned admissibility from a risk into a formality.

SECTION 08

The executive playbook: governance for the first 180 days

Retrieval programs live under two clocks — the matter clock (discovery cutoffs, filing dates, regulator deadlines) and the queue clock (request aging). The governance below keeps both, with the requester in command throughout.

DAYS 0–30

Wire the custody trail before the volume

Validate the custody report in person on a live file. Lock request specifications and certification formats per jurisdiction. Contract per record with credits on first-contact rate, completeness, and turnaround — and lock the named roster that won the RFP. Route the backlog first; it is the cheapest proof of the contact strategy.

DAYS 30–90

Certify, parallel-run, then release volume

Run outreach and certification pods behind parallel runs scored on your own QA; release each wave on certification, never on dates. Chair weekly governance with the outcome dashboard first — first-contact rate, completeness, turnaround, aging — and the cost dashboard second. Put litigation-bound files under dual review until sampled accuracy holds for a month.

DAYS 90–180

Optimize the queue, then hand over

With SLAs stable for 60 days, point governance at the tails: the non-responsive-custodian workflows, subpoena-support handoffs, aged-request forensics. Extend to additional matter types and jurisdictions. Certify steady state; hand over on dated, documented criteria.

THE FIVE FAILURE MODES WE ARE HIRED TO PREVENT

Contracting per request and expecting court-ready outcomes · accepting a delivery confirmation as evidence of a custody trail · treating completeness as the custodian's job instead of the operation's · ramping on dates instead of certification gates · discovering a jurisdiction's certification format at the filing deadline. Every one is prevented in selection and transition — never cured afterward at the same price.

The court-ready standard is not a technology and not a geography. It is a contract that pays for what litigation actually consumes, an outreach discipline that decides the timeline in the first seventy-two hours, and a custody architecture that makes admissibility a formality. The Philippine top tier offers all three at half the in-house cost per usable record — but only the top tier. Fewer than twenty genuinely qualified providers hide inside a field of a thousand; disciplined vetting is how they are found, and a fully transparent, competitive RFP is how their best terms are won.

METHODOLOGY & NOTES

How the numbers were built

Operational metrics (first-contact rate, completeness at first delivery, turnaround, custody-report coverage) derive from PITON-Global record-retrieval engagements active 2024–26, measured on requester-side QA and matter-calendar systems and validated in client governance. Completeness is measured against the request specification, not the delivered page count.

Cost figures are fully-loaded costs per court-ready record — wages, benefits and statutory charges, facilities, technology and security stack (including custody tooling), management and QA overhead, attrition-driven recruiting and ramp — net of shrinkage, plus re-request and deadline-slippage costs where charged. US baselines reflect Tier-2 metro litigation-support labor; Manila figures reflect 2025–26 engagement pricing. The –50% headline compares cost per court-ready record at the standard request mix; plain per-seat comparisons run 60–70% below a US bench.

The case study (RR-085) is anonymized under NDA; volumes, docket descriptors, and platform details are generalized, figures rounded. Value factors are conservative: deadline-exposure avoidance counts only trailing-year actual spend categories, discounted; completeness value counts only measured remediation labor. ROI = net first-year value ÷ all engagement-related client costs. PITON-Global's advisory fee is provider-paid and appears at $0 in the client cost base; neutrality safeguards are documented at piton-global.com.

Market context draws on IBPAP reporting, US civil-procedure and records-statute frameworks (HIPAA, state records acts), and PITON-Global's proprietary provider mapping (1,000+ operations; records-operations capabilities re-verified July 2026). Estimates and projections are PITON-Global analysis and should be cited as such. This publication is not legal advice; certification and admissibility requirements vary by jurisdiction.

Which record-retrieval BPOs belong on your shortlist?

Forty-five minutes with John will tell you. Free to buyers, strictly vendor-neutral — a compliance-gated shortlist within two to three business days.

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