

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT...

Electronic document management processes help this county protect nearly \$9 million in annual revenue and provide immediate access to more than 13,000 case files.

by Vicki Amendola

Aheadquarters in America's Revolutionary War effort and home to the Second Continental Congress in 1777, York County, PA has a long history of revolutionizing the way things get done. In recent years, York County has been home to another revolution — a document management revolution. Born from the simple pilot project of scanning the minutes of the County Commissioners' meetings to make them more publicly available, an EDM (electronic document management) solution from Laserfiche quickly became the catalyst for a countywide initiative that's revolutionizing the way York County does business, department-by-department and process-by-process.

EDM GETS ITS DAY IN COURT

Despite its largely agricultural landscape, York County is ranked within the top 100 fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States, growing nearly 10% between 2000 and 2006. This fast-paced growth had many of the county's departments bursting at the seams with paper, most notably in the Clerk of Courts Office. The Clerk of Courts is responsible for preserving court records and for making sure records are accessible. York County processes more than 13,000 cases annually. In the Clerk of Courts office, chasing around these paper files chipped away at the \$9 million in

annual revenue that the county collected in the form of court costs, bail fees, fines, and restitution.

When the project started in the Clerk of Courts office, the intent was to use an EDM solution from Laserfiche to manage the criminal court records for the York County Court of Common Pleas. Now, these records are used by 25 other county departments. At the most, three years' worth of files could be stored on site, while more than 4 million additional pages of files were placed in an off-site storage facility located five miles away. As such, transporting paperwork between the courthouse, prison, and records storage facility often led to hearing or booking delays. For example, using paper files sometimes meant that the paperwork required to process an inmate into or out of jail wouldn't show up in time, stalling the entire process. For an inmate waiting to get out of jail to join family, just a few extra hours can seem like a lifetime.


For court workers, this paper chase created what became known as the "sneaker-net nightmare," due to staff continually running to the clerk's office to locate and retrieve records. "Before a document was filed, it could be on the desk of any one of 16 different clerks. Just finding the document could be a nightmare," says Mary Jane McCluskey, IS department project supervisor at York County. Once located, the records had to be copied so

the originals could remain in the office to be filed, adding another layer of duplication and cost. "Thousands, if not millions, of paper copies were being made," says McCluskey, who describes the time spent traveling to retrieve records, waiting while the clerks copied the records, and then being frustrated when needed records could not immediately be found as a major disruption to court processes.

To protect the revenue being generated in the courts, the clerk's office set two original goals for its EDM project. The first was to have internal staff develop a logical, electronic file structure that would be similar to the existing paper file structure. The second was to commit to scanning incoming files within four hours of receipt — before they were docketed and distributed to judges, deputies, DAs, and defense attorneys.

To create the file structure, staff took the time to identify the major categories or filing topics, which include items such as motion-petition and disposition-sentencing orders. "My staff put their institutional knowledge to work and developed 17 criteria, or file chapters, from the myriad filings we receive daily," says Don O'Shell, York County's Clerk of Courts. "Our judicial services manager and our records unit manager deserve tremendous credit for developing the basic building blocks that were used to create the electronic file structure to be used in Laserfiche."

A REVOLUTIONARY PLAN

A photograph of two women standing in a room with several flags in the background. The woman on the left is wearing a bright pink blazer over a light-colored top and a patterned skirt. She is smiling and has her hands clasped in front of her. The woman on the right is wearing a green sleeveless dress and a blue beaded necklace. She is also smiling and has her hands on a white podium. The background features an American flag and other flags on poles.

Mary Jane McCluskey (left), project supervisor, and Michelle Lombardo Smith, project coordinator II, have witnessed an enterprise-wide transformation of electronic document management processes.

Working with DocuScan USA, a local Laserfiche reseller, Leggett & Platt developed and set up a series of batch headers to automatically pull case numbers from the state database and create a pre-determined folder structure using the file chapters established during the scanning process. DocuScan USA accomplished this using Laserfiche's Quick Fields, data capture software that can capture data from documents and sort according to custom criteria, such as York County's 17 pre-determined file chapters, and a real-time lookup that interacts with the state database. "All the Clerk's staff needs to do is create batch header sheets with bar codes, and Quick Fields does the rest," says Michelle Lombardo Smith, project coordinator II with York County's IS department.

With the first goal met and a file structure created, it was time for the county to take the next step. A step that, for some, became more like clearing a frightening leap. Clerk of Courts O'Shell's goal was to have incoming files scanned before they were distributed and before they were docketed. As he soon discovered, justice is not only blind; it can also be a little short-sighted. Both McCluskey and Smith recall one judge who was so adamant about continuing to receive his paper files first that he threatened to hold O'Shell in contempt of court if his paper files weren't immediately available. "It was a bit of a gamble on my part to trust my staff, trust our vendor DocuScan, trust Laserfiche, and trust the overall process that all would go as planned and we would meet our four-hour or next-day turn around times," O'Shell admits. "It's always gut-check time facing the displeasure of the court, knowing that the judge has the authority to cite you for contempt and require you to pay a fine, send you to jail — or both!"

According to McCluskey, the coups de grace in gaining the acceptance of



Michelle Lombardo Smith, project coordinator II with York County's IS department.

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the judges — and avoiding a contempt of court charge — was providing thorough, convenient training. "We worked very hard to accommodate the judges and their staff in order to provide hands-on training at their convenience, even if it meant doing it on their lunch hour, or one-an-one," McCluskey explains. "Once the judges saw what the new system could do, they were won over." With the Laserfiche system in place, even the paper-first stalwarts are embracing ECM. McCluskey says that one judge who couldn't find a paper copy of a certain file was spotted logging into Laserfiche to retrieve a scanned copy. Eight years of old files, equating to more than four million pages, are now not only archived, but also searchable and disaster-proofed in Laserfiche.

EXPAND EDM'S REACH

For York County, deeming a project successful was not determined on hard-dollar ROI. Success was measured in process improvement, efficiency gains, and the impact on staff morale. Smith recalls with satisfaction the fact that "staff is no longer held hostage by mandatory overtime, especially the overtime which was required over holidays — including Christmas." There is no denying the value of process improvement when you see that the Clerk of Courts project was only one of several successful EDM deployments that York County has accomplished with Laserfiche recently.

In the Divorce Masters Office, attorneys with experience in family law conduct trials in contested divorce

proceedings. Prior to a trial, a Divorce Master reviews the sworn arguments presented by both sides. However, the testimony that is made while in court can often deviate from the sworn, pre-trial depositions submitted, complicating and slowing the proceedings.

A Laserfiche EDM solution within the Divorce Masters office has streamlined these proceedings. The office uses Laserfiche to compare the information submitted by each side in the case to identify specific areas of disagreement and eliminate duplicate trial exhibits. Masters can cross-check witness testimony with the documents that support that testimony in real time, and any ambiguities can immediately be clarified with the witness in question while they are present and can explain. Using Laserfiche also makes it easier for the Master to cross-reference specific exhibits in the final report, eliminating arguments over whether the Master's findings are supported by the record. This not only makes for smoother divorce proceedings in general, but it also streamlines the entire trial.

York County's CYS (Children and Youth Services) Department had its own specific document management challenges to solve as well and has found relief by revamping its work processes with Laserfiche. In CYS, staff manages files that need to be maintained for families as whole, as well as for each child in the system. These case files could stay open for 21 years, acquiring additional documentation along the way. Internal reviews and oversight of cases were time-consuming and inefficient using paper, and shuffling files to the court-

house for court cases added another layer of duplication and cost.

Just as in the Clerk of Courts office, DocuScan assisted with the customization of seven batch-header sheets specifically for CYS, simplifying the scanning and data capture process. "Our batch header fields can expand to manage up to 26 kids per family," McCluskey explains. "It may seem excessive, but we actually have one family with 23 kids, so by using this feature we're saving hundreds of pages in overlapping documents-and that's just one family." Now using Laserfiche to make secure case information instantly available for internal and external requests, CYS is enjoying a new and inspired level of efficiency and service. The implementation of Laserfiche has proved to be invaluable in daily operations, particularly for the effective management and supervision of caseloads. It

means that paper records that needed to be transferred

and reviewed can be pulled from a single repository, while the instant access to files means off-hours emergency calls no longer require a night attendant to rifle through caseworkers' desks looking for documentation; instead, they can pull up the necessary information right from their desk.

FOLLOW YORK COUNTY'S FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS

Achieving success with any technology solution takes proper planning, and the team at York County recounts five small steps that have helped them achieve big success.

1. Start small to keep things manageable and realistic. The EDM solutions in York County began with just a very small pilot program in 2005 to digitize meeting minutes, making

them more publicly available. There have been other small steps along the way as well, such as scanning beneficiary cards and personnel handbooks

in the HR department. It was the success and experience gained from these implementations that enabled the county to press on.

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2. Work with your reseller to initiate pilot programs. "A partnership with a reseller who has the skills to customize your system is really important," says McCluskey. Specifically, she points to the ability to work with a local reseller to set up customized test folders before going live as a key factor in the county's smooth EDM implementations.

3. Educate. "We worked very hard to work with clerks, and even the judges, to offer hands-on training. We accommodated their schedules, even if it was on their lunch hour." McCluskey says that there were many occasions when judges would get thrown off schedule, requiring training to be



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Mary Jane McCluskey, IS department project supervisor at York County.

rescheduled on a one-on-one basis. Without the willingness and commitment of the reseller and the staff, the initiative to scan court records prior to docketing would have failed and would have thus reduced the positive impact of the EDM solution.

4. Trust the process. Once users get a taste of how the solution really

works and witness the improvements afforded to their daily work processes, the question is no longer "how does this thing work?" It becomes "how can we shave seconds off a process?" When you have 15,000 folders, time savings are exponential. In the County Clerk's office, a clerk recovers another 45 minutes each day just due to the new batch header process for scanning. That is a savings of nearly one whole day's productivity time in the course of one week.

5. Attract more than promote. Following the success builds on success theory, McCluskey and her staff took a proactive approach when it came to getting each individual department to really examine internal processes and consider how they could improve operations with EDM. Furthermore, they encouraged each department to investigate its needs individually, avoiding the temptation to use a cookie cutter approach. As each department experienced success, the excitement bled into other departments.

The excitement that really started in the Clerk of Courts office has become an enterprise-wide phenomenon in York County, with the Sheriff's Department, Children and Youth Services, Divorce Masters, Treasurer's Department, and currently its Human Resources Department adopting and adapting Laserfiche to their respective needs. And, these departments won't be the last, because, as McCluskey says, "Our project list extends out until 2011, and more departments are always asking to be on our list." ■

IMAGING, CAPTURE, AND EDM SOLUTION GET SHERIFFS BACK ON THE STREET

Seeing the Laserfiche electronic document management solution spread so organically across York County's departments has given Mary Jane McCluskey, IS department project supervisor for York County, some perspective on what leads to a suc-

cessful enterprise deployment. "We talk a lot about baby steps," says McCluskey in reference to the archives office five miles away to dig up a file when a suspect who has been released claims they didn't get back all of their personal belongings. What's more, the police officers are immediately back out policing York County's communities instead of sitting in a booking office filling out paperwork.

To speed the booking process even more, the county uses Laserfiche tools to enable a unique video arraignment process. With Laserfiche WebLink, arrest histories and outstanding warrants are available to the judge, who appears on a monitor in Central Booking's processing room for a video arraignment to set bail, which means no more unreadable faxes, extra manpower, or transportation costs for the five-mile trip to the courthouse.



The York County Sheriff's Department relies on a customized e-forms solution within Laserfiche to help keep police out on the street, rather than behind a desk.

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