

Georgia County Uses Document Management To Streamline Constituent Service: Digitizes 200 Years Worth Of Business Documents

Floyd County implements document management solution to protect critical legacy documents dating to the 1800s; disaster recovery plan and document workflow tailored to each department assures fast access to county's business documents

By Joan Honig is product marketing manager at Westbrook Technologies, Inc.

Paperwork is the indispensable currency of all public sector agencies—the myriad forms and documents required to respond to, and satisfy, constituent inquires, complaints, filing requirements, and claims. As anyone on the other end of the process will tell you (i.e., the person waiting on the phone for information), ready access to the pertinent form or document also plays a central role in the perceived quality of constituent service; information must be easily accessible in order to provide efficient responses, processing, or even complaint resolution.

In order to assure information availability, public agencies must have, at a minimum, a disaster recovery plan in place. However, developing a disaster recovery plan can itself have disastrous consequences if not implemented properly—particularly in cases where the solution needs to be implemented across several agencies, where each has different processes and workflows.

Floyd County, Georgia faced such a challenge. The county required a solution to safeguard current documents as well as its archive of historical paper documents that date back to the turn of the century. The implementation of their disaster recovery program began with converting large volumes of paper to digital documents. However, early on, they realized that this wasn't simply a project based on scanning and archiving documents. They also needed to design workflows tailored to the way each agency within the county retrieves and uses their documents, while providing for centralized access across multiple government agencies.

A SHORT HISTORY LESSON

Floyd County, which celebrated its 175th birthday in 2009, retains wills, marriage licenses, and deeds in their files dating back to the 1800s. Among the historically significant documents that

they archived is the will of education pioneer Martha Berry, founder of Berry College, which was established in 1902.

“In addition to facilitating ongoing operations, there are some very important records that we must preserve for our citizens,” explains La Sonja Holcomb, MIS director for Floyd County. “We needed a document management solution to handle disaster recovery and preservation issues, on top of centralizing access to documents used by multiple government departments.”

A FLEXIBLE SOLUTION FOR MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS

Floyd County issued an RFP and considered about 10 document management applications before choosing Westbrook Technologies' Fortis, which was implemented by IKON Office Solutions, a Ricoh company “Fortis is easy to use, which was a big plus for us because we planned on rolling it out to so many different departments,” Holcomb says. “The other main reason was Westbrook's track record and IKON's expertise in setting up document management systems for local governments. Our selection committee visited customer sites where they were using our two top selections. Everyone saw the benefit of choosing Fortis because we could get a faster start. We were able to begin with a proven system design, which included many things we wouldn't have thought of on our own, and then tweak it for our environment.”

Floyd County's implementation started in their Probate Court, the Tax Assessor's Office, and the Finance and Purchasing departments.

The Tax Assessor's Office deals with real estate, inventory and other business assets. Personal Property and Real Estate tax returns are archived in the document management solution along with related e-mails and documents. “We've set up a document type inside that return where they can attach the e-mail,” Holcomb explains. “The electronic file contains all the information related to that return, including the envelope that shows the date and time they received it. We are able to automate the indexing of Tax Returns, Property Record Cards, and Notices by using the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) function.”

In the Finance Department, Floyd County uses software that enables variable data printing output management to automatically archive accounts payable checks and reports from their financial system into the document management solution. The software checks for certain file

extensions and file names; based on these criteria, it identifies the correct document type and printing location. It also creates the indexes for these documents as it saves a copy.

Floyd County is also archiving reports from their line-of-business systems. For example, they can import cash journals to save a record of an adjustment that has been made for a general ledger account. They have utilized a feature in the document management solution that will automatically index the documents. This feature is also used by their judicial system to index traffic files based on the person's name and the ticket number from the line-of-business application.

As Floyd County adds new departments to the document management repository, they benefit from the flexibility their solution offers in terms of capture options and workflow design. "We can look at each situation and find the most efficient way to automate it," Holcomb says.

DOING MORE WITH FEWER RESOURCES

As is the case across both private and public sectors, the business imperative has become doing more with less. "The administrative side of local government is changing due to the amount of work you have to accomplish with fewer resources. Our plan was to add two or three departments each year, but those plans had to be deferred because of the budget crunch," she explains. "However, with the capabilities of our document management solution, the County can begin to archive records before a department is actually using the software."

For example, Floyd County began archiving payroll checks in the document solution in order to create a document history for the department. "The process is automated and the Payroll staff isn't even involved. Three years from now when they want to locate a check that was sent out, they can look up the recipient's name and find a copy," Holcomb says.

Today, if a staff member requests a copy of a check they are only able to get a report containing most of the information on the check, not an actual copy. The Tax Commissioner's Office is also not fully implemented, but because the tax bills are available electronically, it's easy to archive them automatically as well.

"We definitely see the benefits increasing the longer we work with the system," Holcomb notes.

SERVING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE NEEDS

Floyd County developed an overarching disaster management scheme tailored to the workflow of each agency and department. Their objective was to not only assure availability of important documents in the event of a disaster or unforeseen circumstance, but to allow each agency to retrieve documents and, without interruption in standard business processes, continue to operate seamlessly, maintaining high levels of constituent satisfaction.

Indeed, providing superior constituent service is the paramount goal of all government entities at every level. The solution implemented by Floyd County enables employees at different departments to easily access a will written 200 years ago, or a tax notice issued that very day.