

Step BY Step

By Vicki Hodder

Steady progress on document management has given colleges the tools to process everything from admissions applications to purchase orders much more quickly — and that has translated into major savings.

Think about it: 400 square feet.

That's the space the purchasing department at the University of Miami allotted for storing records only a decade ago on the Coral Gables, Fla., campus. Record seekers would search for paperwork via a walkway along the side of the room that gave access to row upon row of vertical and horizontal cabinets filling the entire space.

The inefficiency of that process helped persuade UM's James H. Balter to become an early adopter of document management. Balter, a UM senior business systems analyst who worked in purchasing at the time, took part in implementing a document management system in use elsewhere on campus for the purchasing staff.

"I saw a big need for it for my purchase orders, vendor applications and contracts," Balter says. "I loved it."

The University of Miami launched its IBM Content Manager system in 1993, following a hurricane that caused an estimated \$50,000 in water damage to university records. Originally covering only the Employee Benefits Office, the system, using Kofax Capture software, now serves 108 departments on the university's three major campuses and manages about 14.5 million documents, says Freddie L. Robinson, UM's executive director of technical services.

In practice, what that means, for instance, is that a financial aid officer can immediately access all of a student's paperwork on short notice for an appointment. The registrar's office can immediately look up grades and transcripts for student or parent callers, or check into other matters such as a student's dining services account, without having to bounce the caller

to another department. And the university can immediately tell a vendor the status of a bill, without having to track down paper copies.

Together with UM's report distribution system, inaugurated by Balter in 1997, the document management system has helped save the university \$10 million between 1998 and 2008 in paper, delivery and storage costs.

UM is not alone in reaping such benefits. Deployed by higher education institutions in varying degrees since the 1990s, document management systems are widely credited with cutting costs, saving space, and improving efficiency and customer service. New technology offerings such as web-based Microsoft SharePoint promise to make these systems even more ubiquitous and will prompt colleges to extend their technological reach.

A Step Beyond

At its core, document management lets workers more easily share information in a controlled manner by using scanners to turn paper materials into electronic documents. But document management systems have more elaborate capabilities than simple document digitalization and retrieval, says Brian Babineau, vice president of research and analyst services for Enterprise Strategy Group.

Document management systems include:

- collaboration tools to allow several people to view and work on a document simultaneously;
- workflow functions to automatically move a file through an organization, either in a single direction or along multiple processing routes;
- security services to track and control access to data;
- retention abilities to archive and dispose of documents at appropriate times.

JAMES H. BALTER (left) and FREDDIE L. ROBINSON say document management saved the University of Miami \$10 million on paper, delivery and storage costs over 10 years.



6,000

The number of five-drawer file cabinets that would be needed to house hard-copy versions of the 75 million pages in the University of Miami's document management system

SOURCE: University of Miami

Collaboration and workflow efficiencies have let the Oregon State University admissions office dramatically increase its workload. The admissions office for the Corvallis, Ore., university will handle about 18,000 applications this academic year with fewer staff members than it needed to process about 12,000 applications in 2008–2009, says James Day, OSU's IT manager.

"With imaging, you have access to all the files. Three people can look at the same file at the same time," Day says.

That ability carries particular weight at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, an institution specializing in aviation and aerospace that has two traditional campuses in Daytona Beach, Fla., and Prescott, Ariz., as well as more than 150 smaller locations throughout the world.

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Keith Mattingly, an Embry-Riddle systems analyst, says Oracle's Imaging and Process Management system lets the university's Worldwide Campus rapidly process numerous transfers by students between sites.

The system's workflow efficiencies also are significant, Mattingly says. Before the university installed the Oracle imaging product in 1994, its admissions and student records department used 42 four-drawer, legal-size file cabinets to store department records. The fireproof filing cabinets were expensive to maintain and required 600 square feet of space. Each year, the university had to hire someone to inspect and vacuum debris from the fireproof bricks that lined the cabinets.

More glaring, the file cabinets took hours every week simply to open. Each of the cabinets was secured with a combination lock, and an employee had to spend a full half-hour every morning dialing in the correct number sequences required to open all of the file drawers. Now, employees have no need to unlock file drawers or search for records, creating a substantial efficiency savings.

Embry-Riddle also takes advantage of the system's distributed document capture capability. Employees around the world can now scan documents directly into the system through the capture feature, rather than mailing hard-copy versions to a central scanning site, Mattingly says.

Distributed document capture services have slashed Embry-Riddle's worldwide campus paper usage in half, from 140 tons to 70 tons annually. It also estimates saving another \$300,000 a year on paper, postage and time costs.

The University of Miami reports similar paper savings from changes in its workflow. By integrating its report distribution and document management systems, UM cut paper waste in myriad daily processes.

For example, the university used to print and manually distribute six copies of every purchase order, a process that often took as long as two weeks, Balter says. The new process calls for only two purchase order printouts, one apiece for the buyer and the vendor, and all orders post online the morning after creation.

Quality Decisions

Rick Bischoff, vice president for enrollment management at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, says the university's document management system lets it handle more than double the admission applications with fewer staff members. But Bischoff also points to intangible benefits, such as improved decision-making.

In the past, the admissions process would bog down when someone had questions or required more information. But digital applications can be in several places at once, which means the admission process continues even while one person holds off on an approval to allow for further consideration. The breathing room that gives staff members leads to better admission decisions, Bischoff says.

"It's the improvement in the process and the quality of the process that gets overlooked," he says. "And there's a value in that." That's why relatively new users and early adopters alike see

The Customer Is Always ... DIGITAL

Although most users of document management systems say the technology improves productivity, some higher education officials identify their customers as the big winners when colleges adopt document management.

Document management has given Oregon State University the opportunity to improve its customer service. Mickey Reynolds, OSU associate director of operations, recalls how a customer service representative (CSR) would need to retrieve an application file before answering a caller's question.

While the CSR was locating the file, the caller would either be placed on hold or the CSR would need to return the phone call. With document management, the CSRs can answer questions by locating files in the document management system at their desks. Paper admission applications took an average of three to five days before an evaluator could review the application. Now, OSU can often review the application the same day it's submitted.

"We are not filing and refilling an application folder like we did before document management," Reynolds says.

Freddie L. Robinson, the University of Miami's executive director of technical services, also cites some intangible customer benefits: The ability to immediately respond to customer inquiries or retrieve documents improves overall customer satisfaction, which in turn improves the university's ability to compete, Robinson says. "It basically boils down to serving students and their parents better."

worth in document management and plan to do more with these systems.

Colleen Nagy, Case Western's senior director for strategic initiative policy and portfolio management, says her university wants to build on the system it installed six or seven years ago. "It's the next step in enterprise resources planning," Nagy says.

And longtime document management user UM will start reviewing additional features this fall. Balter will look at redaction (which permits automatic blackout on documents to protect student privacy while allowing wider record access) and lifecycle management (which would automate document retention and disposal).

UM also will consider e-mail capabilities that would allow it to track all incoming and outgoing mail for legal and insurance purposes. Also on the table? E-discovery capabilities to retrieve electronic documents for legal cases, exemplifying a trend toward increased e-discovery investment noted in ESG research.

ESG's Babineau says document management is becoming more universal with the advent of easier web-based technologies, such as SharePoint. Often, users don't see themselves as adopting a document management system, he says, but consider the project a move to improve productivity.

Even so, an ESG survey of SharePoint users found that the top three reasons organizations deployed the Microsoft product were tied to document management. All those surveyed said they wanted an easy way to collaborate, centralize document storage and manage document versioning.

When it comes to the value of document management on campus, UM's Balter summed it up simply: "It improved our life almost unbelievably."

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