

The City of Camden, New Jersey

Customer Profile

The city of Camden, New Jersey is the state's 10th largest municipality, serving the needs of approximately 100,000 citizens. Formally established in 1828, Camden's municipal government consists of nine (9) departments - Administration, Law, Health & Human Services, Public Works, Finance, Code Enforcement, Development and Planning, Police and Fire - and employs a total of 1,200 employees. Given the city's population and age, records management plays a significant role in day-to-day governance.

Despite its reputation as a city with a weakened socioeconomic status, Camden is currently experiencing revitalization. Redevelopment projects like the construction of new schools, hospitals, businesses and housing developments demand much from the city's operations - a task made more difficult with limited resources and budgets. However, the city is increasingly becoming a model of open government, historical preservation and effective records management with the introduction of the docSTAR system.

Application

Presently, the city of Camden possesses a fully networked and integrated docSTAR document management system with a comprehensive disaster recovery service and backup system that is capable of handling additional users.

As with any major urban center, a significant volume and variety of documents must be filed on a routine daily basis. It's estimated that city employees handle about 400 standardized document types across all departments and file more than 1,000 documents per day. However, this figure does not take into account the number of documents that are recalled and reviewed, re-filed, referenced or referred, and/or cross referenced by other county and/or state agencies, making the actual total even greater.

Background

The city maintains a multitude of vital public and private records and historical documents that covers a timeframe of nearly 200 years. In addition to the everyday paperwork the city handles, the amount of inactive permanent records - records that are not used but mandated by law to be maintained - range from 1,200 to 1,500 standard banker's boxes for a total of 2,400 to 3,000 square feet of paperwork. Given that, it's no surprise that the phrase "miles of files" was often used to describe Camden City Hall prior to the docSTAR installation. Due to a severe shortage of space, filing cabinets and office files were often stacked up in the hallways, lining the walls.

An initial review of the city's operations confirmed that, on average, an employee spent approximately 1 to 10 minutes seeking a physical hard copy file. In some cases, the time wasted trying to locate files was even greater. Interdepartmental, or common, files are those that require the involvement of several departments

and might therefore be spread out among offices at any given time. As a result, city employees might spend hours, if not days, attempting to ascertain the status of a particular application.

The Problem

In 2005, Camden completed a comprehensive records needs assessment. As part of this assessment, a physical review of the city's records and files with regard to their condition, the state of storage and their organizational structure was conducted, allowing the city to better determine its needs and to develop an appropriate strategy to address its problems.

The study determined the file situation to be so dire that it mandated emergency involvement from state representatives to expedite the formal destruction of damaged documents. Many of these files had been placed in unsuitable locations due to space limitations and as a result had been exposed to asbestos, water damage and a host of other environmental factors.

Following the assessment, the decision was made to move forward and begin the process of developing a comprehensive records management process, a key part of which would be the implementation of an electronic document management system in an effort to avoid any future loss of invaluable records.

The Solution

The city, in conjunction with docSTAR corporate, originally purchased the docSTAR 3.7 version. Because of its ongoing commitment to Camden, docSTAR then offered the city an opportunity to undertake and beta test its new 3.9 version, through which the city has attained a degree of success that enables both docSTAR and Camden to develop a new and effective system specifically suited for governmental applications.

Currently Camden's system is set up with a total of 35 view and 20 scan files, with this figure anticipated to expand as more users access the system. The city also utilizes a DVD / RAID array and multi-server backup in addition to the docSTAR server.

Besides conducting day-to-day scanning, the city is simultaneously undertaking the arduous task of electronically converting many of its records dating back to its founding in 1828. By doing so, they can allow not only internal access to these important files, but also allow external users invaluable information for genealogical or historical research. These efforts are being funded in large part through competitive grants offered by state and federal funding sources.

In terms of disaster recovery, Camden went above and beyond the standard requirements for NJDARM (New Jersey Division of Archives and Records Management) certification and developed a new version of Document Mall, in conjunction with docSTAR and the Ricoh Corporation. Through this system, documents and files stored on the docSTAR system are automatically stored off-site enabling better client control and redundant back-up while also ensuring that the stored information is the most up-to-date version.

The Benefits

Following the docSTAR installation, Camden became one of a selected 83 entities (out of a total of 566 municipalities, 40 counties and more than 150 authorities and independent agencies within the state of New Jersey) to attain state certification by the NJDARM. All electronic document management systems within the state of New Jersey must pass a rigorous review and application process in order to be considered for certification. Certification is most desirable, as any hard copy documents scanned on a certified document imaging system can then be destroyed unless they have a required retention of more than ten years or by law must be saved in permanent hard copy. As a result, Camden has experienced a tremendous reduction in the amount of paperwork while achieving a superior means for records referral and protection.

Utilizing docSTAR's WebView option permits not only greater public access, but also greatly improves workflow efficiency by allowing the general public to view and determine the status of specific items (permits, inspection results, application status, etc.) and thereby decrease the amount of telephone calls city offices receive. In addition, municipal staff can access records while working off-site. In-house testing has shown that the docSTAR WebView option also works on wireless handhelds, such as Palm Pilots, iPods, and other wireless communication devices.

Camden has achieved so much success that it has recently become one of the first to add a shared services component, by which 10 other municipalities now link to the city's network to form The Southern Jersey Shared Services Coalition (SJSSC), which serves the needs of nearly 200,000 residents across an area of more than 400 square miles. Each member obtained their own docSTAR system, linking theirs with that of Camden's to take advantage of the city's extensive disaster recovery/data support as well as its broad knowledge and expertise on both records management and document management software.

In exchange for the opportunity to utilize the city's backbone, each SJSSC member agreed to a five year commitment and pays Camden an annual fee which ultimately covers the city's cost for the infrastructure installation and its yearly operational costs. Because the members of the SJSSC were able to piggyback onto Camden's system, and therefore did not need to purchase and develop the complete disaster recovery/IT infrastructure that Camden already had in place, the total potential cost savings coalition-wide were about \$1 million. Other cost savings are achieved through the sharing of training facilities, user insight and practical exposure to system usage, as opposed to the repeated hiring of outside consultants or programming engineers.

Internally, Camden received an additional boon. As part of its NJDARM certification, the city retained the ability to utilize its existing MFDs (Multi-Functional Devices), such as copiers, scanners, and printers. This yielded substantial savings as the city did not need to replace its 54 existing high-speed and desktop scanners with high-capacity scanners. As the city already possessed a robust and extensive in-house network, consisting of some 15 servers, 53 printers/MFDs and nearly 600 PCs, the docSTAR system was readily able to integrate into the city's network services and thereby connect all city departments and agencies.