

# ORGANIZATION

## City of Duluth

### *City of Duluth Saves Time, Money and Space by Moving to Paperless Archiving*

The City of Duluth is saving time previously spent filing and retrieving documents, money for paper and microfiche, and storage space by moving to paperless archiving. In the past the city stored payroll, financial, real estate, utility bills, and other records on paper and microfiche. They faced rising microfiche costs, considerable time spent organizing paper reports, and delays in looking up records on microfiche. Recently, the city moved to an electronic archiving system that automatically stores and indexes reports generated on their mainframe so they can be searched and retrieved instantly by any user and archived to CD-ROM. "The new software has nearly eliminated the need for

microfiche, greatly reduced the need for printing paper reports and saved large amounts of storage space," said Genie Stark, Auditor for the City of Duluth. "The fact that the reports are automatically archived saves a lot of time in handling and filing documents," added Stark. "Users throughout the city are able to access the information they need in much less time than was required in the past."

The city runs American Management System's Advantage Financial applications on an IBM mainframe. A large number of reports are generated on a regular basis and need to be distributed immediately to employees in various departments to keep them abreast. In addition, these reports must be archived and maintained in a secure location. The city also runs a public utility that generates about 30,000 bills a month which need to be available for access by customer service representatives so they can answer questions and send out

duplicates when needed. The assessor's office must archive its records which include real estate and assessments and reports that are used by other departments and sold to real estate professionals. In the past paper reports were generated on a regular basis and



distributed to the various departments who typically filed them in cabinets so that they would be available when questions arose. In addition, to meet requirements for the secure archiving of government records many of these records were also stored on microfiche.

One problem with this approach was that when information was needed, someone would have to go through the filing cabinet to find the right report and then search through the report to obtain the needed information. It could easily take 15 to 30 minutes to find a single piece of information. This meant that when a department head called an accountant to, for example, obtain current expense figures, the accountant could almost never answer the question right away but rather had to research the issue and call back later. Another problem was the amount of time needed to deal with the paper records. At month's end it would take about two days simply to organize

financial reports for distribution to the various departments. The reports required time to file and manage at the department level and also took up scarce storage space. Another concern was the rising cost of microfiche every year. Documents that were stored on microfiche took an even longer period of time to access, and many users had trouble with the microfiche reader.

"We were spending far too much time and money dealing with paper and microfiche," said Jackie Morris, Manager of Payroll and Personnel. "But we were under the impression that an electronic solution would cost more than we could afford." City personnel went to visit another Advantage Financial user, Olmsted County in Rochester, Minnesota, to look at their payroll package. One of the first things they noticed was that they had hardly any paper in their office. They asked them about it, and they said that they were providing access to reports on a PC and archiving the documents on CDs. The focus for the visit immediately changed, and the Duluth people began looking at the Metafile content database, the document management system that Olmsted County was using. The city later sent out a request for proposals for document management software and received information from multiple vendors. The initial focus was on a computer output to laser disk (COLD) storage product that could electronically archive reports generated on the mainframe. The city was also interested in finding a program with imaging

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capabilities that could, in the future, handle scanned paper documents such as incoming correspondence and invoices. "After conducting a lengthy evaluation process, we concluded that Metafile had the strongest product overall," said Robyn Schroeder, MIS Manager for the City of Duluth. "We saw products from a broad range of prices and concluded that Metafile fit our budget, yet offered most of the features of products that cost much more."

### **COLD Implementation**

"Implementing the software was relatively straight forward," Schroeder said. She needed to install TCP/IP and FTP on the mainframe so that the software could access spool files. Other than minor code adjustments to handle "null characters" in existing reports, no other host code changes were needed. Then she manually created a few definition files for the reports to be indexed and made the searchable version available over the network. Later, she set up the program so that it automatically searches for new reports and indexes them on an hourly basis. The program works by reading the spool file and converting it to a compact, searchable file that resides on a Novell server. The computer operators FTP the spool files to a designated directory, then the software, running on a Windows NT workstation, automatically scans that location for the files and, if found, proceeds to index them and put them onto the Novell file server. The files then become immediately available to users. Access to specific reports can be given or denied to groups of users or individuals. The payroll department, for example, archives payroll checks, check registers, deduction registers, labor distribution reports and W2s. Financial accounting archives 50 different monthly reports. The utility department captures a copy of the bills that are run each day and other daily reports. The assessors archive property sales and assessment reports. At periodic intervals all of the reports are downloaded onto CDs and stored in a safe location.

Finance was the very first department to be implemented. "The first thing that we noticed when they installed Metafile is that we now have instant access to reports," said Kevin Scharnberg, Financial Analyst. "If a department head calls me and asks a question, I can give them an answer in a minute or so rather than having to tell them I'll call back in a half hour. For example, someone might be looking at a contract and wonder if the final payment had been made. Or a vendor might call and say they never received payment for an invoice, and I need



to look into whether the check was cut." Metafile has a full text search feature that makes it easy to find this kind of information. This feature eliminates the need to set up fields and determine in advance which ones will be searchable. The user can type in the invoice number, check number, vendor name, account number or whatever information they have at hand and easily find the document they need.

### **Surprised by the Capabilities**

Payroll reports were converted to the COLD system at about the same time. "Every day, payroll users are surprised by being able to do something they couldn't do in the past," Morris said. "Just this morning

someone mentioned that they had to type a W2. I told her that she could simply type in the person's name and get a copy of the report in a few seconds. She was walking around the office saying 'I love this.' We have eliminated tons of paper that used to come in here every week that we had to put away and store. We recently cleaned out two hanging file cabinets that are each four feet long. Plus we can get information immediately rather than having to search through those file cabinets for the right report."

William Leclair, Senior Programmer Analyst said that the utility department was the next to have their reports converted to COLD. "People are continually calling in because they lost their bill," Leclair said. "Because the mainframe program won't create duplicates, the customer service reps used to have to type each duplicate bill from scratch in a word processor. Now they can quickly call up the old bill and print it. A key advantage of our new software is that it lets us create overlays with labels and logos that make the duplicate look just like the original bill."

"Since then, we have also brought several other lower volume users such as fleet services, the assessor's office, and treasurer's office online," Schroeder said. "The new step will be to implement the few departments that are still using microfiche, such as the building safety division. We also are looking at using Metafile's PC PrintCapture product that will let us incorporate letters and other documents into the COLD system. Schroeder concluded that: "All in all, moving from microfiche and printed reports to COLD has been a very significant process change for our organization. We have saved a lot of money and improved productivity and customer service in all of our departments because we now have a common platform to view and share information. Most of the users don't understand how they lived without it."

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