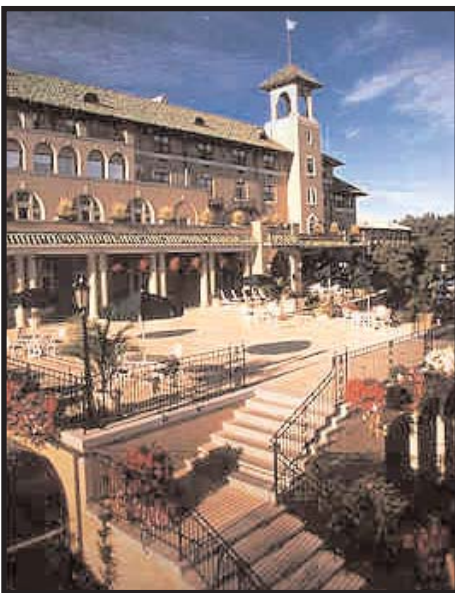# Integrated COLD and Imaging Systems Streamlines AS/400 ERP Information Management

Installing a Computer Output to Laser Disk (COLD) system helped Hershey Entertainment and Resorts save 1000 hours per year in retrieving enterprise resource planning (ERP) information stored on an AS/400. In the past, it took inordinate amounts of time for business and financial users to locate needed information on paper and microfiche reports. William Sheaffer, Director of Information Technology and Barry Smith, Manager of Financial Applications and AS/400 Technical Services, evaluated several COLD systems and selected the only one that provided a vast full-text search capability, The Total Solution from Metafile. "The 10 users of the system save huge amounts of time," Smith said. "Instead of searching through a report trying to find payroll records for certain employee, they simply type their name in a search field and are instantly transported to the right spot in the report.

"Hershey Entertainment and Resorts, Hershey, Pennsylvania, operates a major theme park, two resorts, an arena with an American Hockey League team, a campground and several smaller businesses. Hersheypark is a world-class theme park boasting more than 60 rides on a 110-acre site. It includes nine roller coasters, seven water rides, more than 20 kiddie rides, restaurants, snack shops, games and gift shops. It also includes an 11-acre zoo with more than 200 animals. Hershey Resorts includes the Hotel Hershey, a four-diamond property with 240 rooms and suites. The Hershey Lodge is Pennsylvania's largest convention resort with 665 new or renovated guest rooms, three restaurants, two lodges, three pools and many other amenities.

Reams of paper reports

Hershey Entertainment and Resorts is an AS/400 shop that runs the Infinium ERP system from Infinium Software, Inc., Hyannis, Massachusetts. The firm runs general ledger, accounts payable, payroll, human resources, and fixed assets modules on an AS/400. Storage and retrieval of the information produced by the system was previously a major challenge. Reams of paper documents were produced every week by payroll and other applications. The company was quickly running out of space to store these documents. For legal and historical reasons, some reports were also sent on magnetic tape to a service bureau where they were converted to microfiche. This archiving method required less space but was expensive.

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>
> Barry Smith
> Manager of Financial Applications &
> AS/400 Technical Services
> Hershey Entertainment & Resorts

Industry:

Entertainment

Metafile Solution:

AS/400 Integration
Accounting
Data-Mining
Payroll

Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Corporate Profile:

Major theme park and resort operator

Founded in 1927

1,400 full-time and 4,500 seasonal/part-time employees

METAFILE
Capture
Organize
Index
Deliver

http://www.sbsusa.com

The biggest problem in the past, however, was the amount of time required to access this information. "There are approximately 10 managers and accountants who use this information on a regular basis," Smith said. "It used to be a major chore to find even a single payroll record. Imagine trying to find John Jones' information in 1000-page paper report. In the case of historical records, things were even more difficult. The manager or accountant had to first locate the correct piece of microfiche, then use the reader to view the report. It could easily take 30 minutes to find a single record. It just didn't make any sense to have highly-skilled employees spending their time this way."

Looking at COLD systems

"I was already aware of COLD systems and felt that the time had come for us to take a serious look," Smith said. "Their basic advantage, of course, is the ability to archive print spool files from a host system in electronic format for fast retrieval. We looked at several different alternatives. The most important thing in my mind was how quickly our users would be able to access information. All of the systems that we looked at made it possible for users to define fields in advance upon which the data could be searched. The problem with this approach is that we have many different reports with a huge number of fields. Indexing these reports on every possible field would have been a big waste of time and storage space. On the other hand, if we didn't do that, I was certain that we would frequently run into the situation where we would have to resort back to manual searching because the right field wasn't indexed."

Then they discovered a COLD system with a unique approach to indexing and searching. The Metafile COLD system from Metafile Information Systems Inc., Rochester, Minnesota, creates a full text index that includes every word in every report stored on the system. This makes it possible for users to perform impromptu searches on any field in any document. For example, to find a payroll record for Susan Smith, the accountant simply types in her name in the search box. The program finds the record almost instantly. This capability should be distinguished from conventional full text search features that take a long time to find records because they do not create a full-text index file. It should be noted that the index file created by Metafile is highly compressed so it takes up very little space. The program also provides the ability to index particular fields in advance.

Setting up the download

Smith used Metafile's Windows-based, menu-driven download software to manage the downloading of host spool files. The program works by reading the spool file and converting it to the compact, searchable file format that resides on the Windows NT server. No host code changes were necessary. Smith specified which reports should be archived, when and how often downloads should occur, and what should be done with the spool file once it is downloaded. Besides the payroll reports, Hershey is currently archiving payroll, accounts payable, balance sheets, profit and loss statements and cash flow reports. Once the initial setup is performed, the program works without further intervention. At any time, the reports or the archiving schedule can be changed or the

user can reach out to the host and download a single occurrence of a report. For reports that are printed on paper forms, Smith scanned copies of the forms and imported them so that the form now appears on the screen and is printed along with the report, i.e. W2's.

Access to the information is provided to users in six different locations through the company's wide area network. "The COLD system has dramatically reduced the amount of time required to access business records," Smith said. "All that the user has to do now to find a payroll record is type in the name and hit search. The record appears on the screen almost instantaneously. One of the reasons that this is so fast is that I put the archive records on hard disk. This is one of several different storage options provided by Metafile in additional to the traditional laser disk. The hard disk gives us the fastest possible access speed. As our storage needs increase, I intend to move the older archives onto CDs and put them in a tower."

Archiving scanned documents

"The result is substantial time savings for the 10 users of the system," Smith said. "By eliminating the need to manually retrieve records from paper and microfiche archives, I estimate that each staff member saves two hours per week. This adds up to a total of about 100 hours per person per year or a total of about 1000 hours per year. These time savings easily pay for the cost of the software. Besides saving time, we have greatly improved the security of these important historical records. In the past we ran the risk of losing a microfiche strip. Now we can archive the reports as part of our existing backup process."

After using the system for while, Smith decided to take advantage of its ability to archive scanned documents as well as print queues. The company's amusement park is required to regularly inspect each of its rides and store the inspection reports for a considerable period of time. Each time a member of the maintenance staff inspects a ride, he or she fills out a paper form to indicate the rides condition. These documents are now scanned and imported into Metafile. They are now available over the company's wide area network where they can be accessed by staff members at any location.

The new COLD system works so well, according to Smith, that he intends to substantially expand its implementation. "The search feature of the COLD system has already demonstrated its ability to save our staff considerable amounts of time in finding records," Smith said. "I'd like to increase those savings by adding many new reports and documents to the system. There's really no cost or time penalty involved because they can be set up very quickly and from that point on run automatically."

> "The (full-text) search feature of the COLD system has already demonstrated its ability to save our staff considerable amounts of time in finding records."