County Governement Gets Rid of the Auditor Without Getting Into Hot Water

In the early part of 1995, paper and microfiche costs rose suddenly and dramatically. Olmsted County's monthly microfiche bill was going to double. This, coupled with the increase in the cost of paper, prompted a search for a better method.

Olmsted County, Minnesota, employs 900 people, with one central finance office keeping the financial records for all the different departments Reports were printed out and then distributed. Doubling paper and microfilm costs caused Bob Bendzick, CFO, and Chris Simonson, Coordinating Controller, to take a long, hard look at the whole system. Each month they spent two days distributing reports, using 6' of expensive three-part green bar paper. The Central Finance reports covered two walls of the offices, and checking a report meant lugging a 20# ledger to the desk. Some reports were printed daily, and were available to only one person. The amount of information meant they had given up hope of training the average departmental user how to find current information on the accounting system, they used the month-end reports only. As with many office sys-

tems, it had gradually developed into a monster with a voracious appetite for time, space and money - a system

COUNTY OF *Olmsted*

that instead of serving the staff, had the staff servicing the system!

Jim Reese, Systems Coordinator, explained that they started a search for a product with:

❏ Report distribution as well as storage and retrieval

❏ Ease of use - for users and administration.

❏ Short training curve - required because people using it in different departments, and staff turnover.

❏ Security features - used by different departments, including payroll, so needed to restrict access to relevant data only.

❏ Full text indexing - would facilitate training, and eliminate need to predict areas of future searches.

❏ Windows look product - not an emulation.

❏ Good vendor support - Olmsted

called references.

Their search led them to Metafile's MetaViewer COLD system, which met all the required criteria and outputs exact copies of any form from scanned in templates.

For the initial installation they had to buy an indexing PC, hard drive, updated memory for the server (they could store on the AS 400 but decided a server was the best route for them), and a CD writer/recorder. All data is left on the server until year end when it is written to CD and stored on a 150 platter CD jukebox. They write four copies - for the jukebox, the archives, off-site, and for users to work at home on their laptop. Brian Erwin, an Accountant with the Central Finance Office, estimated they saved enough on paper and microfilm to pay for the system within a year, without counting intangible benefits and productivity gains. "Now we print only a few reports that take under half a day to distribute. Our goal is to have no

reports and all Department Heads linked - even if they are not PC literate they can quickly pick it up."

"The training curve was pretty short", according to Jim Reese. "We had no complaints - everybody really liked it. It is one of the easiest products I've seen for employees to use and the productivity gains are real easy to see." He went on to explain that Finance now has 145 reports defined, Human Resources 51 and Real Property/Land Management 204. The finance department is now 'printing' 13,900 pages daily to the server. As they are cumulative reports, by year end there will be 21,700 pages daily. Budget preparation requires 1,500 pages daily and Payroll some 6,000 bi-weekly. "When a report is defined we can create family report groups e.g. budget reports, financial statements, daily reports, interim reports etc. and once defined, we don't have to touch it again. The user agrees on the report families upfront. However, it is a very flexible product so we can regroup at a later date if needed, adding or removing reports. Also security is easy to set up, insuring departments see only their areas of the reports."

"It is the best tool I've come across in a long time", said Deb Lamm, Payroll and Benefits Manager. "Payroll used to take two reams of paper bi-weekly which was then microfiched for permanent archiving. Now accessing our reports is more efficient and more effective, besides being less taxing on physical demands. Payroll records are permanent reports, so outputting to CD gives us tremendous space savings. For an employee's home loan application we can retrieve exact copies of the last four pay period checks within seconds. If payroll balancing is off by a certain amount e.g. $15.72, the system will find it within the report. It has eliminated a lot of time spent in writing reports - we can access all people who worked less than 80 hours in any given pay period in a second."

Brian Erwin is delighted with the system. "We can run the income statements and balance sheet each night, deleting the previous copy. We can answer questions immediately with up-to-the-minute data, helping our managers make decisions faster. It enables us to get the jobs done, taking on more tasks without hiring additional staff. 75-80% of government department's budgets goes for labor so this really helps keep the costs down."

Both Mr. Reese and Mr. Erwin commented on an unforeseen, but now a major benefit of the new system. Virtual elimination of the State Auditors from the premises. Previously auditors arrived each year, took over the conference room for some six weeks, and would be in the office every ten minutes to ask questions. Olmsted County printed out two or three sets of 26,000 pages of reports for the auditors. Now they 'print' the reports to a CD, and give the auditors a couple of copies to take back to their office. Mr. Erwin has found the time savings so great as to be unquantifiable. "If the auditors are looking for something, say items greater than $50,000, they can do a search and pull it up in seven seconds. With full text retrieval they no longer have to ask where to find something, they can look it up themselves under whatever parameter they choose."

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> *Brian Erwin*
> *Chief Financial Officer*
> *Olmsted County*

APPLICATION OVERVIEW