

“If you ever saw the pile of paper work just one court case can produce ... I live in a record-keeping nightmare. We have been working with BMI for over 25 years. The company has consistently delivered on time with the kind of efficiency, quality and accuracy I couldn’t live without.”

Ron Ho, Computer Systems Director
San Francisco Superior Courts

INDUSTRY

- State & Local Government – Courts

LOCATION

- San Francisco, California

CHALLENGES

- Expensive to house 10,000 cubic feet of microfilm and microfiche cabinets
- 15 microfilm readers that carried a collective \$20,000 in annual maintenance expense
- Unacceptable average retrieval time of 4 hours from the microfilm and fiche archive

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- To date, 4,000 rolls of 16mm microfilm (15 million images) digitally converted to 5 terabytes of data
- Digital ReelL is available to all court staff and is accessed by approximately 100 users on a daily basis

BENEFITS

- Elimination of all film and readers
- Estimated 100 hours per day of collective time saved
- Faster retrieval and elimination of the back-log vastly improved service levels to attorneys and judges

Case Study



Overview

The California court system, the nation's largest, has more than 2,000 judicial officers, 22,000 court employees and an average of 9 million cases filed per year. The majority of cases in the California courts begin in one of the 58 superior courts, which reside in each of the state's 58 counties. As an integral part of this system, the San Francisco Superior Court has trial jurisdiction over all criminal cases (e.g. felonies, misdemeanors), civil cases (e.g. family law, probate, and juvenile) and traffic matters within the City and County of San Francisco.

Each of the legal matters that the Court handles typically generates large amounts of paper. Although new filings are converted from paper to digital and stored within a document management system, the Court continued to house an enormous microfilm and fiche archive of older cases. Aware of how inefficient this archive was, the Court evaluated several potential solutions. In the end, BMI Imaging Systems was selected for its 100% conversion accuracy, image quality and ease of use.

Maintenance and Reader Printer Breakdowns Sparked the Desire to Eliminate All Film and Fiche

The San Francisco Superior Court's Records Management department is the custodian of nearly 10,000 rolls of microfilm and 100,000 microfiche containing approximately 30 million images. It is estimated that there are at least 100 court staffers who require access to this information on a regular basis. This department also serves attorneys, judges and the public with information such as criminal and civil dockets, traffic citations, probate, immigration records and family law case files.

A typical microfilm retrieval request would start with a name look-up on the judgment microfilm to find the appropriate case number. Once the case number was located, the search for the microfilm roll(s) containing the actual case file could begin.

Ron Ho, IT Director, states, "We estimated that an average search, from start to finish, was taking us an incredible 4 hours. With an average of 150 daily requests, the back-log of retrieval requests was unacceptably high." Ho explains "we were always under pressure from the attorneys and judges and because we were heavily using the reader printers, breakdowns were not uncommon, further exacerbating the problem. When several of our machines required outright replacement, we knew that the time was appropriate to seek a cost effective way to digitize the archive."

The Only Solution that Eliminated the Need to Retain Any Film, Fiche and Reader Printers

"When BMI explained that we could begin a journey that would completely eliminate our film and fiche archive, including all reader printers, we became very interested. Other potential solutions did not offer the 100% conversion accuracy and image quality that BMI offered,"

explains Ho. "We would have been required to keep the film/fiche archive along with several reader printers in case we could not find a record after the conversion."

Typical conversion processes are prone to miss images because they decouple each image from the roll. Human keying is required at this point which always introduces an element of error. Because of this, organizations typically keep their film and fiche along with several reader printers as a fail-safe archive in case an image is lost during conversion.

Unlike typical conversions, the Digital ReeL Conversion Service made an exact digital replica of each of the 4,000 microfilm rolls that the project began with. The Digital ReeL Conversion Service is unique because it maintains absolute roll integrity during the process – it literally is a digital image of each roll, thus guaranteeing that every single image is converted and capable of being found.

Ho continues, "Our concern that image quality might be compromised during conversion, thus requiring us to keep the film and reader printers, was resolved with Digital ReeL's grayscale feature. Our archive's overall image quality was not only maintained but also improved with this feature. As each image was converted from film to digital, a photographic quality was added, enabling users to adjust the brightness and contrast of an image until it is optimized.

Retrieval Times Reduces from Hours to Minutes

Using Digital ReeL, users can quickly scroll through digital replicas of the film and then easily print or email the required information to the requestor. "Our customers are the attorneys and judges that need to regularly access the court documents that we manage," states Ho.

"The speed with which we are able to deliver them information has gone from

hours and days to under 30 minutes. We've increased the efficiency and speed of our department as well as the productivity of the attorneys and judges we serve with BMI Digital ReelL."

Protection of Sensitive Information Contained Within the Court Records

"One of the happy surprises we achieved with this solution was the ability to redact and block out sensitive information that might be contained within a file", states Ho. The Court is able to disseminate the required information without compromising sensitive citizen information such as Social Security numbers, Driver's License numbers and addresses. Redactions can also be temporary for specified users during their session so that no information is permanently deleted.

Case Management System Integration

Once the microfilm conversion is complete, we look forward to working with BMI on the possible integration of the microfilm content with our Case Management System. Of course, BMI will continue to provide document capture and data acquisition services for the various Court departments as well as support the current system software.