DIGITAL ReeL™

CASE study

Alameda County (California) Clerk-Recorder Case Study

"Digital ReeL proved to be a practical, easy to install and maintain solution for us. Our legacy records from 1970-1850 are infrequently accessed and Digital ReeL proved to be the best solution for digitizing these records."

Mathew Eates
Information Systems Specialist
Alameda County Clerk-Recorder's Agency, Technology Services

INDUSTRY

- State & Local Government – County Clerk-Recorder

LOCATION

- Alameda County, California

CHALLENGES

- Legacy microfilm archive resulting in slow record retrieval times
- Poor quality microfilm, making it difficult to view records

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- Microfiche and microfilm roll archive digitally converted at BMI's California facility
- Digital ReeL installed on approximately 15 County public workstations
- Users easily access digital records with the ability to adjust the quality prior to email or printing

BENEFITS

- Enhanced data protection now that records are in a digital format and integrated into IT data management processes
- Employees and citizens easily access records from a PC rather than physical microfilm
- Adjustable grayscale enables difficult-to-read records to be enhanced prior to emailing, saving or printing

OVERVIEW

The Alameda County California Clerk-Recorder's Agency is chartered with providing superior protection of public records through advancements in technology and the optimization of its employees.

Public records (e.g. property records, birth/death certificates) from 1970-1850 were archived on legacy microfiche/microfilm. Record requests from this microfilm archive required lengthy searches that consumed staff time and delayed response time to citizens. The microfilm, prone to cracking and decay, had also put the records at risk. As part of procedures to continuously review and update public records, the County decided to digitally convert this microfiche and microfilm archive.

Mathew Eates, Information Systems Specialist, Alameda County, states "Digital ReeL proved to be a practical, easy to install and maintain solution for us. Our legacy records from 1970-1850 are infrequently accessed and Digital ReeL proved to be the best solution for digitizing these records."

Approximately 15 public facing computers act as Digital ReeL workstations. County employees as well as citizens can easily access the legacy records from a computer through Digital ReeL. Researchers can optimize the images with adjustable grayscale and then email or print the requested records.

Digital Conversion Accuracy: Records Stored Securely and Protected within Existing IT Infrastructure

Records from 1970-present are digitally converted and imported into Thompson Reuters' Anthem electronic recording system. However, the legacy records from 1970-1850 sat in their own archive, separate from the Anthem application. Users searching a record in Anthem would receive a roll or book number as an Anthem search result for any records residing on the 1970-1850 archive. These 1970-1850 public records were infrequently accessed and it didn't make financial sense to convert them from the microfiche and books. However, microfiche tends to crack and only a few staff members could access the records from the books, resulting in slow response times to the public.

BMI's Digital ReeL solution provided a cost-effective way to bring these legacy records into the digital world. BMI Imaging completed the microfilm conversion at its California facility. Poor microfilm quality, human error during quality assurance and a host of other factors can cause record images to be missed during the conversion process. BMI's microfilm conversion eliminated these risks by accurately converting each microfiche and microfilm roll in its entirety. As a result, the County avoided the risk of losing public records during the microfilm conversion service.

Mathew Eates states, "We not only made it easier for our staff and public to access these records, but we've enhanced our data protection and disaster recovery plan because these records are now digital, stored on a server and protected with our existing IT data protection and disaster recovery procedures."

Digital ReeL Interface Enables County Staff and the Public to Quickly Locate, Optimize, Print and Email Records from Public Workstations

Mathew Eates states, "The County installed Digital ReeL on approximately 15 public-facing workstations. The product requires almost no end-user training, enabling County staff and citizens to research and instantly access records that once were only available on microfiche, microfilm and books."

A typical search may start in the Anthem application. Anthem search results that include records from 1970-1850 display roll and book numbers. Rather than relying on County staff to conduct record retrievals from physical microfilm and books, the public easily leverages Digital ReeL to type in the roll number or book number.

The Digital ReeL application looks just like a reader printer. Users can type the roll or book number into the system, press the Go button and immediately get presented the digital microfiche or microfilm roll containing the requested record. Users can then scroll through digital representations of the microfiche or microfilm roll to locate the record just as one would do with a physical reader and microfiche/microfilm. Record searches that might have taken 30 minutes or longer in the past are now completed in a matter of seconds using Digital ReeL.

In some cases, these legacy records present images that are poor quality and difficult to read. Digital ReeL's adjustable grayscale enables users to adjust the quality of an image until it is readable. Users can bring the image into focus by lightening it and darkening it as necessary until a high quality document emerges. From there, users can print or email the record from the public workstation.

Next Steps

The Alameda County Clerk-Recorder's Agency has been successfully using Digital ReeL for over 5 years. The County is currently using the Digital ReeL workstation client, but is in the process of evaluating the Digital ReeL Web Client. The Web Client enables users to log into Digital ReeL through a web browser such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. Users log into the system from any computer using a password and log-in.

Next steps

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