

CASE study

Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder (Aspen, Colorado)

“When we reviewed the Digital Reel solution, we found the price very appealing. It was cost effective, practical and enabled us to digitally convert our entire set of records, thus relieving our staff and the public of having to deal with large historical books and microfilm and in the process created a digital backup of our records dating back to the late 1800’s.”

Linda Gustafson
Chief Deputy

Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder

INDUSTRY

- Government, County Clerk and Recorder

LOCATION

- Pitkin County (Aspen, Colorado)

CHALLENGES

- Slow, inefficient public record retrieval from books and microfilm
- Outdated microfilm reader printers (broken reader printer)
- Traditional microfilm scanning approaches too expensive

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- Microfilm, microfiche and aperture cards digitally converted at BMI's Sunnyvale, CA facility
- Digital ReeL software and digital records delivered to Pitkin County
- Digital ReeL software installed on several workstations at the Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder

BENEFITS

- Cost effective solution to digitally convert record archive prior to 1977
- Staff and public saves time by digitally accessing records
- Greatly reduces wear and tear on books; only occasional usage of old microfilm printers and historical books

OVERVIEW

The Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder's Office is dedicated to providing citizens with easy access to public records. Although Pitkin County archives records from 1977-present in a digital recording system, legacy County records prior to 1977 were archived in two rooms on a combination of books and microfilm.

Any time a citizen needed a pre-1977 record, historical books and microfilm had to be accessed. It was a time intensive process for not only the general public, but also the Pitkin County staff. Pitkin County had been systematically digitizing the County records and had plans to digitize the records on books and microfilm, but price was always an issue.

Linda Gustafson, Chief Deputy, Pitkin County Clerk and Recorder states, “We continued to re-visit the issue of scanning our older records, but found traditional microfilm scanning approaches too expensive. “

Gustafson continues, “Digital ReeL was a fast, inexpensive solution that gave us digital access to over 100 years of historical, recorded documents within a few weeks. Even though Digital ReeL is not integrated into our existing recording system, it has proven to be a vastly more affordable solution with immediate payback results.”

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Time-Intensive Physical Book and Microfilm Retrieval Process

Before Digital Reel, Pitkin County's pre-1977 records were archived on a combination of books and microfilm. Approximately 50 books contained the index information and 230 books contained the actual recorded documents. In addition, two, five-drawer cabinets housed the remaining records on film. The physical books as well as the microfilm cabinets were stored in two public research rooms along with two microfilm reader printers and the computer workstations running the digital recording system.

"After we implemented a new online record request system, we saw citizens take advantage of this convenient way to order records by using a credit card for payment," states Gustafson. "One of our staff's least favorite activities was trying to locate pre-1977 records archived on the books or microfilm. The books were large (15-20 lbs.) and some were high up on the shelf, requiring a ladder," continues Gustafson. "Trying to set them on a copying machine was difficult. The microfilm records required dealing with out-of-date reader printers. A staff member could easily find themselves searching for an hour or more."

Digital Reel: A Practical, Affordable Microfilm Conversion Solution

Pitkin County had been looking to digitally convert these records, but cost and budget constraints had been an issue. Gustafson states, "When BMI Imaging introduced us to Digital Reel, we were impressed with its simple, yet practical approach to converting our legacy records. For the first time, we were looking at a solution that would enable us to cost effectively convert our entire physical archive prior to 1977 at once."

BMI Imaging completed the microfilm conversion at its California facility. Although the book records were used by the public and staff, Pitkin had an archival copy of the books on microfilm that were digitally converted to Digital Reel by BMI Imaging.

Digital Reel converts the entire microfilm roll or microfiche. As a result, all of the images are kept together on the microfilm roll or microfiche – just as they existed in a physical state. "Other scanning solutions we looked at would have dissociated the individual images from the microfilm roll or microfiche. One of the nice features of Digital Reel is that it created a digital, virtual replica of our microfilm rolls and microfiche; we now have a digital backup copy of our records just as they existed on the original microfilm and microfiche," states Gustafson.

Pitkin County now has Digital Reel installed on several workstations. Pitkin staff and the public can easily access digital microfilm rolls from a computer rather than hassling with books and physical microfilm. "Occasionally, when we try to find a document and it is not located in the exact spot we thought it would be, we're able to easily scroll back and forth on the virtual microfilm roll to get some context about the information surrounding the record we are looking for. This would not have been possible with another scanning solution," states Gustafson.

After records are found in Digital Reel, users can enhance an image using the adjustable grayscale feature of Digital Reel prior to saving, printing or emailing the information. Gustafson states, "The only limitation we found with the solution stems from the fact that some of our microfilm and microfiche was very poor quality. Some of our images on microfilm were too poor in quality for the adjustable grayscale to enhance into a readable form. But, overall, the solution has been very well received by our staff and the public."

Next steps

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