"Researchers can search for all records from our existing system and if the record is older than 1987, they are presented with instructions on how to find the information in Digital ReeL. All of this is completed from a computer, removing any physical microfilm from the retrieval process."

Scott Gaines, Chief Deputy
Lancaster County Assessor-Register of Deeds

Case Study

INDUSTRY
- County Government

LOCATION
- Lancaster County, Nebraska

CHALLENGES
- Legacy microfilm archive resulting in slow record retrieval times
- Too much staff time spent on helping individuals find records as well as maintaining the physical microfilm archive

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES
- Approximately 850 microfilm rolls scanned and digitally converted at BMI's facility
- Digital ReeL available online from County web-site

BENEFITS
- Number of faxed requests for information nearly eliminated
- Citizens needing access to records no longer require Lancaster staff to fetch records on their behalf
- Ink, paper and other peripheral costs down to nearly zero
- Eliminated man hour requirements to organize physical film

Overview

Lancaster County is essentially paperless, having digitally converted public records from 1987-present. The County leverages Tyler Eagle's software system to enable researchers to access these records. However, the County was never able to find the budget to digitally convert the infrequently accessed records older than 1987 that resided on microfilm.

Scott Gaines, Chief Deputy, Lancaster County Nebraska, states "Digital ReeL was by far the most affordable solution we looked at to bring this legacy microfilm archive into the digital age. Researchers can search for all records from our existing system and if the record is older than 1987, they are presented with instructions on how to find the information in Digital ReeL."

Microfilm Conversion of Legacy Archive of Property Records Older than 1987

The County protects and maintains nearly every type of document that affects land in Lancaster County. There are 20-30 different types of deeds, deeds of trust and other property-related records that the County manages on behalf of the public. Records from 1987-present have been digitally converted. Gaines states, "Our environment is essentially paperless today, with new paper records scanned upon arrival and imported into the County's Tyler Eagle software system."

Researchers such as title company representatives, attorneys, surveyors and appraisers start their records searches with the Tyler Eagle software system. If a requested record is older than 1987, the researchers were presented with information as to where the record is located within the physical microfilm archive. Gaines states, "Users that regularly conduct searches get familiar with the microfilm but it still took time as well as staff time. Significant staff time was required for users that never worked with microfilm and it was always a hassle for us to keep the microfilm archive organized."

Having looked at several potential microfilm conversion solutions, Digital ReeL was selected due to its affordability for this legacy set of records. During the microfilm conversion process, County workers were able to monitor the microfilm conversion process as each microfilm roll was digitally converted. The BMI team presented a web log-in so that the County could view each digital microfilm roll as it completed as part of the quality control process.

When a physical microfilm roll of poor quality didn't digitally convert well, higher quality duplicate rolls were sent to BMI.

Digital ReeL Incorporates Handwritten Indexes

The pre-1987 records on legacy microfilm were accessed via a handwritten index. Users would search this index to identify the physical microfilm roll(s) to retrieve. It would have been cost prohibitive and impractical to leverage this handwritten index to individually index each individual record on the microfilm. Gaines states, "Only Digital ReeL presented a solution to us that allowed us to maintain this existing index after the microfilm rolls were digitally converted."

Users searching for a record are able to use that handwritten index in a digital format to locate the digital microfilm rolls needed for record retrieval. Rather than accessing physical microfilm and using physical reader printers, researchers now simply use the index to locate the virtual microfilm rolls from within the Digital ReeL interface.

Gaines continues, "Our users can now access these records online via our website and access these older digital images through the Digital ReeL web interface. We have the digital solution we were looking for but at a very affordable price consistent with the infrequency that these records are accessed. We are excited that we are finally removing physical microfilm from the day-to-day retrieval of records from our County."