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Bobbi Pirkola
Assistant City Clerk
City of Duluth, Minnesota



INDUSTRY

- State & Local Government > City Clerk

LOCATION

- Duluth, Minnesota

CHALLENGES

- Days of staff time consumed with trying to locate information only available on physical microfilm
- Inability to easily print and read information requested from physical microfilm archive

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- 400 microfilm rolls digitized at BMI’s California conversion facility
- Document data sets included historic City Council meeting minutes and agendas dating back to the 1890s
- Digital ReelL hosted solution provides staff online search and retrieval from elegant web-based app

BENEFITS

- Information search staff time reduced from 3 days to a few minutes
- Staff can enhance previously illegible documents and then print/email from one screen

Case Study



Overview

The Duluth, Minnesota City Clerk’s Office handles elections, voter registration, and the issuance of certain licenses and permits, such as liquor licenses, pet licenses, and general business, among others. The City Clerk serves as Secretary to the City Council and handles City Council record keeping of meetings.

Bobbi Pirkola, Assistant City Clerk, states, “We were having issues with our physical microfilm archive. It was difficult to find information requested, it would not print properly, and often the words printed out were terrible and in some cases illegible. We put a microfilm scanning project into the budget and started to research solutions.”

“We talked to colleagues across the County and conducted our own research”, continues Pirkola. “After reviewing approximately four different products to convert microfilm, we selected BMI Imaging’s Digital ReelL because it was the simplest and most effective product for our Office.”

Microfilm Conversion Avoided Risk of Missing Important Records During the Conversion Process

The 400 roll physical microfilm archive stored historical legislative information dating to the 1890s and into the early 1900s. Information included City Council agendas, minutes, and public hearing transcripts. Pirkola states, “It was the only copy we had and there was concern we were going to lose it as the microfilm eroded.”

The microfilm rolls were packaged and sent to BMI’s California conversion facility. Unlike other scanning solutions that dissociate images from the rolls, the Digital ReelL scanning process converts each roll in its entirety. As a result, the City Clerk eliminated the risk of losing any of these important records during the conversion process.

City Council Avoids Need to Engage Limited IT Staff with Digital ReelL Hosted Option

The City Clerk decided to leverage Digital ReelL’s cloud hosting option. After BMI scanned the microfilm, all virtual microfilm rolls were imported to Digital ReelL and the City Council staff now logs into the application to search and retrieve records. BMI has a partnership with Raging Wire data centers; the images and data are securely hosted at Raging Wire’s Sacramento data center and collocated at BMI’s Sunnyvale data center.

Pirkola states, “Our IT team is limited and has a lot of other projects going on. Leveraging the hosting option with BMI Imaging made it that much easier for us to logistically complete this microfilm conversion project.”

Intuitive Application Makes Finding Records Near-Instantaneous

The Digital ReelL application replaced the physical microfilm archive and the microfilm reader printers that City Council staff were using in the past. Pirkola states,

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City Council staff will get an information request and access the Digital ReelL application. The app resembles a reader printer which provides familiarity for microfilm users but in a contemporary format to appeal to tech-savvy folks. For example, an attorney might request a vacation petition. If that petition is located within Digital ReelL, staff can quickly run the search, find the document, optimize the quality, and print it for the attorney.

Improved Image Quality with Adjustable Grayscale

Pirkola states, “The records we are working with are of very poor quality. In the past, our staff would struggle trying to print out a record that was actually legible.”

Digital ReelL offers the ability to optimize difficult-to-read records with brightness and contrast enhancements. “It’s absolutely perfect for us,” continues Pirkola. “We can tune the quality of a record so that it looks like the day it was written. After we render a record to our liking, we can then print or email it to a requester.”

Conclusion

The City is looking at other record sets for Digital ReelL consideration. Pirkola concludes, “The entire project, from start to finish, was very straightforward. The BMI team kept us updated at all times during the conversion process. Before we knew it, our records were uploaded and hosted from the app and we were running searches. It truly is an easy to use, no hassle, affordable solution for microfilm conversion. “