

“Digital Reel is incredibly intuitive and easy to use. When we first deployed it, we had not had the chance to show anyone how it worked. Yet, researchers started coming in, opening the application on the public computers and were able to immediately start running searches to locate documents.”

Jane Hrabik
Clerk of the District Court
Rice County, District Court



INDUSTRY

- State & Local Government > Courts

LOCATION

- Rice County, Kansas

CHALLENGES

- No in-house IT team (nearest teammate 30 miles away)
- Manual record management processes offered no standardization and relied on existing staff (not transferrable to future District Court managers)

BMI PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- 300 microfilm rolls digitized at BMI's California document and microfilm conversion facility
- Document data sets included public and confidential records
- Digital ReelL microfilm conversion solution
- CJIS-compliant hosted solution

BENEFITS

- Solution requires no IT support from the District Court
- Digital Reel app offers easy to use search and retrieval options for public, without staff help
- Adjustable grayscale makes it easy to optimize what once were illegible records on physical microfilm

Case Study

Rice County, KS

Overview

The Twentieth Judicial District Court Office serves Barton, Ellsworth, Rice, Russell, and Stafford counties in Kansas.

Jane Hrabik, Clerk of the District Court, states, “We had a goal of digitizing and standardizing records management processes at our office. Converting a portion of our records that were still archived on physical microfilm was an important step towards achieving this initiative.”

When Rice County learned about Digital ReelL, the application showed promise but it was important to understand the organization supporting the software and research other similar customer experiences using Digital ReelL. After learning more about the application and discussing the solution with BMI customers, Hrabik and team determined it was the right solution for the District Court.

Thinking about the Future & Applying a Systematic Approach to Records Management

In the past, Rice County District Court archived old court records on paper and microfilm in an attic. Hrabik states, “We were regularly in the attic, retrieving files from an underground storage facility, or digging through physical microfilm in search of marriage licenses, probate real estate records, etc.” With a staff of three people, it consumed a lot of time.

Hrabik continues, “I am also focused on standardizing the records management process here at the court. Our team is working hard to build a system that is not reliant on unwritten knowledge that only current team members are aware of. When our team moves on, we want a system that is modern, digital and easy to use for anyone new to it. Digital ReelL was the answer.”

Nearly 300 Microfilm Rolls Digitally Converted at BMI Scanning Facility in California

Rice County District Court records were comprised of a public-facing dataset and an internal, confidential data set. The public facing information included marriage licenses, probate, civil, criminal, domestic, traffic and mechanic liens. The confidential data set included criminal, juvenile, care/treatment, and probate/adoption records.

“We worked with BMI to gather up our microfilm and prepare them for shipment to their California microfilm scanning facility,” states Hrabik. “We received regular updates on the stages of conversion and were able to get answers to our questions. An area that would benefit future customers is to consider how you want your system set up. We needed to work through this a little bit on our end and in retrospect we would have worked to determine this prior to shipping the microfilm off-site.”

Hosted, Intuitive Application Makes it Easy to Search and Retrieve Digital Records

After all the records were digitally converted, BMI hosted the records and presented them back to the District Court over the Internet via Digital ReelL’s hosted application. Public access computers have replaced the physical microfilm room.

Hrabik states, “Digital ReelL is incredibly intuitive and easy to use. When we first deployed it, we had not had the chance to show anyone how it worked. Yet, researchers started coming in, opening the application on the public access computers and were able to immediately start running searches to locate needed documents.”

Digital ReelL offers blip navigation and range searches. Users can simply type in the case number they are looking for and the microfilm roll containing the information will open.

“Our users also are enjoying the adjustable grayscale feature”, continues Hrabik. “We are storing records that date back to the 1800s. Those records vary in quality depending upon how they were originally converted from paper to microfilm. With Digital ReelL, we can adjust the clarity of a record and fine tune the image until we can read information that in the past was illegible. It’s a real advantage for those older records.”

Conclusion

Today, Digital ReelL is currently available within the District Court. Over time, Rice County is considering to make it available outside the District Court to more regular users like attorneys and abstractors. In that way, these users could log in from their own offices and desks, saving a trip into the Court.

Redaction is another project. Hrabik states, “We were unable to block certain pieces of data before on the physical microfilm. Now that we use Digital ReelL,

we are looking to redact certain cases that have been expunged over time so that the public no longer has access to them.”