

Electronic Document Management

Texas A&M Agriculture is approaching a new era in document management with the implementation of the Laserfiche Electronic Document Management System. Electronic document management will redefine our way of doing business as we change from paper documents to electronic documents and it will result in new business processes. A brief look at the problems associated with our current processes followed by a look at the benefits can provide a better understanding of the need for the Document Management System.

Problems and costs of current systems:

- According to the Department of Entomology, time is lost when an individual is asked for a document and goes to retrieve it – even more time is required when the requester is not sure of the title or date of the document. In addition, while the requester is waiting, he/she has lost “thought” time as he/she cannot fully concentrate on a different subject while waiting for the document. The person retrieving the file also loses time as he/she returns to work and determine where he/she was in his/her project plus the additional time lost when the document needs to be re-filed.
- Gartner Group estimates 3 ½ hours per person are lost each week finding, sharing, distributing, and archiving documents (as reported by Tim Nolan of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission).
- Copier contracts – over \$250,000/year – not including paper. (We will still need copiers but may not need as many nor will we need to make as many copies)
- Costs for runners for on-campus delivery – includes wages, vehicle maintenance costs plus the increasing gasoline costs.
- Cost of maintaining file cabinets – Coopers & Lybrand study indicates the cost to be \$2100/year for one 4-drawer file cabinet.
- File and office space constraints: file cabinets occupy some wet lab or office space better suited to other purposes.
- Costs of adding file space includes equipment cost plus the cost of the additional space for the filing cabinets.
- Remote storage costs and the possibility of the loss of documents due to moisture, rodents, or insects.

Benefits of a Document Management System:

- Using or converting documents to electronic media can save the majority of mailing costs (current overnight mailing costs exceed \$200,000 annually).
- Electronic documents are available immediately – without the wait for the mail.
- Documents can be e-mailed to recipients outside the Laserfiche system.
- Multiple copies maintained in separate file cabinets can be eliminated – one copy can be viewed by many individuals at the same time.
- Documents accessible via the web almost 24/7 from anywhere.
- Search features enable a document to be located quicker, as the search can be as a full text search.

- Electronic storage eliminates the need for many of the file cabinets currently used to store the more archival type document.
- Back-up copies of electronic documents are positioned in different locations thereby making documents more secure.
- Workflow module can improve business processes as a document can be routed and signed/approved electronically.
- System linked to the Records Retention Schedule which reduces confusion about when to destroy a document – administrators are notified when a document needs to be destroyed.
- Documents can be scanned into the system or printed direct to Laserfiche by the snapshot method from common software programs.
- Time spent in shredding documents after records retention expires will be eliminated and replaced by a review of electronic records to be purged and a few keystrokes.

Summary

The Laserfiche Document Management System that Texas A&M Agriculture is currently implementing, as noted above, can save time, money, and space – all of which can be put to other uses. Electronic documents can even improve our business processes. This system will not eliminate all paper, nor is it a replacement for your server or PC hard drive. Instead it is a system which can help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our business processes as it will assist in document storage, retrieval and destruction in accordance with the Records Retention Schedule. As this system is implemented, units will face new challenges as they shift from some paper to electronic documents; however, as we integrate this into our business processes, information accessibility and time spent looking for documents in file cabinets or other storage locations will soon outweigh these challenges.