

Case Study

Managing Document Mayhem with a Bar Code Based System

Apex Managers cut costs, saved time and increased efficiency through the implementation of a bar-coding systems to keep track of its 500,000 plus files.

Due to Hurricane Andrew, Doris Miller daily tracks a half million insurance files that could be in the hands of any of Apex Managers' 200 employees. Thanks to a new bar code scanning system, however, she does it with half the employees previously required.

Miller supervises two large file rooms for Apex Managers, a quickly growing records management firm that services five insurance companies offering homeowner policies to Florida's residents and one company in New York. Among the Florida companies is the Florida Residential Property and Casualty Joint Underwriting Association, created to provide insurance to homeowners otherwise unable to purchase it in the hurricane-prone area. All the paperwork involved with establishing and servicing customer accounts for these companies goes through the Rockledge, FL's 52,000-square-foot office, specifically designed to efficiently process large volumes of insurance policies. Long rows of open-shelf racks store the files that are added to monthly.

"We put the policies together, mail them out, collect the money for payments, do endorsement changes. We keep the hard copy. We also have a claims department," said Miller. Records must be kept for all of it.

But Apex Managers' success and growth, from just two employees, brought document management problems to the six-year-old firm.

When files were needed by employees to make updates or alterations, underwriters had to come to the file rooms and fill out pink requisition forms. "It was very time-consuming," said Miller. Locating where the requested files were if they were checked

out also was time consuming. "There are times when one or more underwriters may be working on the same policy, just different parts of it. If another request came in for the same file, we'd have to run around the building to locate it" since usually only the first user's pink request form was on file.



Under the former system, when a checked-out file was transferred to a second or third party, that person was supposed to go to the file room and fill out a pink request form. Then it had to be filed and the one for the previous user removed.

"It (making new requisition forms) wasn't always done because it took a lot of time. That is why we went to a bar coding system," said Miller.

"We wanted to improve the standards of our service with more efficient procedures in our file room," said Miller. "We wanted to be more efficient because we are a service carrier. The more efficient we can be, the better it is for us too."

So, Apex Managers began looking for a better file tracking and requisition method. "We were basically looking for check in and check out, to access files,"

said Miller. The solution came via an Internet search where Miller discovered DHS Associates, an Orange Park, FL-based value-added reseller (VAR) for Compsee, a national, automatic data capture manufacturer and systems solution integrator.

DHS provided Apex Managers with a total software and hardware solution featuring a bar code-based, web-browser accessible records management system. Called Total Records Management Software, the product automatically imports account numbers, names and related data from the corporate mainframe, avoiding rekeying data, and then tracks every activity involved with each file.

No more pink forms

In place of those pink requisition forms, “employees can pick up the phone, call us and say they need such and such a file,” said Miller. When the employee gets to the file room, workers scan a bar code on the records with a Compsee Apex II (no relation to insurance service firm) hand-held, battery-operated, laser scanner. After a second bar code is scanned from a printed menu identifying the requesting underwriter, the files are released.



Now, when checked-out files are switched, the agent has three choices. The person can bring it to the file room for a quick scan, just call up the file room or indicate the new person possessing the file on a daily running sheet. When an agent calls the file room, the file clerk scans the corresponding name on the bar-coded menu and hand keys the policy number into the Apex II scanner. The faster and easier processes increased agent use of the tracking system.

Policy renewals also no longer involve time-consuming filing and completion of hundreds of requisition forms. Instead, computerized sheets indicate which files to pull. “Now we just pull the files based on the sheets and scan them to the renewal drawer,” said Miller.

Data is downloaded hourly from the APEX II scanner to a Pentium 166 PC in the file room. The bar code labels applied to all files and on the menu are created with a Sato 408CL printer and designed with the DHS Total Recall Records Management Software. Code 39 bar code symbology was used because it is a records management industry standard, said Steve Hyman, president of DHS Associates. The

Apex II scanner was selected for several features. It’s ruggedness meant it could survive a 4-foot drop to the floor and its ergonomic design makes it comfortable to use all day long. Finally, its alphanumeric keypad makes it easy to key enter file numbers and letters if a bar code is damaged or when a file is transferred to another agent without going back to the file room.

Plenty of management benefits too

With the new system, “I can key enter a file number in my PC to verify all my files, or pull up reports for a given day to show what came in, what went out and who it went to and what time they took it and when it is due back,” said Miller.

Numerous reports give Apex information by company, by user, by file, etc. “I get daily reports on each insurance company we service, reporting how many files were moved in and out. I can tell how many times one specific file has been moved in and out. I can use pull sheets to make sure all the paperwork is with each file and nothing extra is included. If misfiled, I can make sure they put back the material that needs to be in a different file,” said Miller.

More than 150 standard reports are available from the records management software program. Among them are automatic tracking of current file status and access history of everyone who touches a file. A Boolean search capability lets users locate files by a wide range of parameters, said Hyman. The data can be exported to an Excel spreadsheet or any standard format program like Lotus 1,2,3 or Word. It will also notify managers when files should be sent off site and when it is time to destroy them. A Web interface lets off-site agents request files through their Web browser.

As part of the total-solution service, DHS also customizes reports and provides online help. Recently, when APEX Managers needed a one-time report, Miller says DHS “walked me through it step by step. They were very helpful.”

Miller calls on DHS whenever Apex Managers acquires new client companies too. “When we need programming for new companies, they are always right there for us,” said Miller. “Their technical support is excellent.”

Miller also gives DHS a top rating for the program’s ease of use. “The WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) program set up was very user friendly and that is what we were looking for.” She put together a manual for new employees to help them learn the system. “They use it as a guideline. I work with them teaching them how to use the scanners. It usually takes no more than a half-hour to learn to use it. The basic upload from the scanners to the system is done

by the employees and they can follow those directions in the manual,” said Miller.

“It is very user friendly. I have a lot of people with no experience with a computer and they can pick it up in a couple of days. It makes it very easy for them.”

Another advantage of the new system was the cost saved from not having to purchase the requisition forms. But most important was the increased productivity in these file rooms—60%. Eighteen

people were needed to process file room requests before the automated data management system was installed. Now, despite increased business, only nine people are needed for a heavier workload.

Miller is very happy with the decision to use the total document management solution from Compsee’s VAR, DHS. “I am very impressed with the system,” says Miller. “It does everything we need and more than what we ever need to do.”

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