

Paper Trail Goes Electronic: Enterprise Content Management System Improves Access, Saves Time for Village of Arlington Heights Police Department



On the streets, they fight crime, but in their headquarters, they fight an enemy familiar to any organization: a backlog of paper.

Police departments nationwide handle hundreds of calls daily; each case must be carefully documented. The sheer volume of reports, coupled with formal record-keeping requirements, is contributing to growing interest in automated methods for accessing and storing information.

Don Catalano, Records Supervisor at Chicago's suburban Village of Arlington Heights (VAH) Police Department, acted on the opportunity to improve how case reports were stored and accessed. VAH processes 100 to 150 police reports per day, and the staff must retrieve 300 to 400 accident reports weekly for insurance claims. The Village's 111 officers might be on duty 24 hours per day, seven days per week, but their access to case records was limited to the regular hours of the Record Department. Access was further complicated because case files were kept in paper form for two years in traditional filing cabinets and then moved onto microfilm for an additional five years – meeting the required seven years of storage for each report.

This separation of paper and microfilm records broke the cohesive link needed for long-term case file access. "If a case re-opened after two years, the officer could not keep all the records together," Catalano explains. Further, the possibility that paperwork could be misfiled after retrieval was an ongoing concern.

With approximately 36,000 case numbers being assigned each year, Catalano saw the impracticality of handling so much paper. As a former police officer, he understood the frustration of records not being available after certain hours, and the time required to research needed case materials. Catalano set out to create a new system that would permit every officer and the VAH's 37 civilian employees full access to files anytime, day or night.

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- Don Catalano, Records Supervisor
Village of Arlington Heights
Police Department

He knew that automating case information represented a significant investment for the Village. But, "If we could eliminate or reduce paper handling, the system would be worth its weight in gold," he notes.

Search for a Solution

Catalano first learned about enterprise content management technologies through a records management class held at the police-affiliated North East Multi-Regional Training (NEMRT), which provides in-service training to law enforcement and corrections personnel throughout the Chicagoland area. Then, in mid-1999, Catalano and a VAH Information Technology officer attended a seminar on the topic, and, visited with another local municipality that was successfully using an automated system. It was at that point that the two decided to pursue a system for the VAH Police Department that could serve as a pilot for the township's other municipal departments.

The first step for Catalano was to identify manufacturers of content management products that capture paperwork electronically and then manage those images in an interconnected system. He also began outlining the requirements for the VAH system, and issued a Request for Proposals (RFP). System requirements included instant document access, secure storage, the ability to distribute from a central server to client stations and to provide updates from the server to the IT Department, and finally, scalability for the future.

After seeing several solutions demonstrated, the choice of products became a process of elimination. Some of the technologies were too expensive for the Village's budget; others were based on closed or proprietary architecture. The VAH team also felt that compatibility with its Microsoft platform was important. "The line of software from Stellent was alone in meeting all our requirements," notes Catalano. Stellent, Inc., Eden Prairie, Minn., is a global provider of content management software solutions that drive rapid success for customers by enabling fast implementations and generating quick, broad user adoption.

Beyond individual products, the Village realized the value of having a local content management expert to execute and service the police department's system long-term. The RFP Process led the Village to Itasca, Ill.-based Integrated Document Technologies, Inc. (IDT), a full-service system consultant, designer and integrator of enterprise content management solutions and other business technologies. An added plus was IDT's proficiency with the Stellent family of products – the company is one of the top Stellent channel partners in the U.S., achieving Platinum Partner status in 2000.

The decision to rely on the Stellent Imaging & Business Process Management (IBPM) solution was further solidified when Catalano and IDT representatives visited a working system in a municipal setting in Colorado.

IDT continued work with the VAH team to develop a complete enterprise content management system, including all the necessary hardware and additional software

elements. To design the finished system, IDT's Operations Manager Michael Ciabattari drew on the company's extensive knowledge of available technologies, and its experience designing systems for organizations of all types and sizes. After evaluating several options, IDT selected several components from various manufacturers to best meet the Village's requirements (see Toolbox, right).

The VAH team appreciated IDT's attention to its specific requests, Catalano says, noting, "IDT did not sell us more technology than we needed."

For example, it was clear that the VAH wanted to maximize its IT investment. That meant a low initial system cost and minimal maintenance, says Ciabattari. "To accomplish this, IDT's design takes advantage features within Stellent and Kofax Image Products that make operating and maintaining their system as efficient as possible."

In August 2000, the new system was ready to make a difference in how VAH's Police Department filed and accessed their records.

TOOLBOX:

Village of Arlington Heights Police Department

Enterprise Content Management System

Software

Kofax Ascent Capture

Stellent IBPM

Hardware

2 HP work stations

Kodak Digital Science Scanner 2500D

20 Slot Optical Jukebox (Plasmon M20J)

2 HP Servers

Technology at Work

By early Fall 2000, IDT installed, integrated and tested the new content management system, and conducted training sessions for the system users.

Today, instead of filing paper, documents are scanned using the Kodak Digital Science Scanner 2500D. VAH also utilizes Ascent Capture software by Kofax, which allows the department to capture, index and verify the scanned document. Then, the software seamlessly sends the images and indexes to the retrieval software. There, Stellent's IBPM software takes over, providing storage, retrieval and many other functions, giving users access to documents in-house or over the Internet in a secure environment, even before being uploaded into the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority's Police Information Management System (PIMS) master database. This makes case information available to everyone faster than ever before, says Catalano.

"The VAH Police Department can now scan, index, store and retrieve information in an organized and efficient manner," explains Ciabattari. "The need for storage is greatly reduced, access to critical documents has improved, and microfilming has been completely eliminated."

Feedback from the officers and other VAH staff has been positive, says Catalano. "The biggest benefit of the new system is that there is round-the-clock access to files. Plus,

everyone thinks it's great to be able to sit at their desks and access any file. Needless to say, the new system has made all of us a good deal more efficient."

Technology for the Future

With the success of the new content management system for archival and retrieval, VAH's Police Department is already anticipating expanding its functionality. At the top of the list of new uses are the ability to:

- Process police reports by electronically inputting them into system CAD files direct from police cars
- Initiate a workflow organization of documents to police chiefs and captains
- Further automate image capture by developing an automated faxing solution that integrates with the current image and data capture software applications

Another option being considered is to further automate information flow with another Stellent software element, which would further streamline and simplify sharing case files.

The new system is also attracting the interest of several other VAH departments, including fire, building, public works, human resource, finance, legal, health services and planning.

After being so closely involved in the project, Catalano offers this advice to other police or municipal departments interested in exploring an automated enterprise content management system: "Number one, understand what you plan to do with the system. Then, do your research and cover all the bases. Don't be convinced to buy a system that is bigger than you need – but, make sure it is scalable for future expansion."

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