



Buncombe County Shares Information, Reduces Paper Usage, and Improves Efficiencies Using OpenText Enterprise Content Management, eDOCS Edition

Document Management and Records Management allow Buncombe County to control documents and open silos

Industry

Local Government

Customer



Business Challenges

- Manage and secure paper records
- Reduce storage costs
- Improve productivity and efficiency

Business Solutions

- OpenText Document Management, eDOCS Edition
- OpenText Records Management, eDOCS Edition

Business Benefits

- Secured records
- Improved productivity and efficiency
- Enhanced customer service
- Increased savings of time and costs

Buncombe County, a local level of government in North Carolina, needed to enhance information sharing and reduce the amount of paper created and stored. With over 1,900 employees in almost two dozen different areas, the County workers were spending a lot of time looking for lost or misfiled documents, filling out the same information in triplicate or more, and stepping around a multitude of filing cabinets. With each different department working within its own silo, Buncombe County realized that it was no longer as efficient as it could be and wanted to find a way to streamline administrative processes and improve customer service.

The departments at Buncombe County use many different software applications, so when the County began to look at document management (DM) vendors, versatility was a major factor. Juliana Austin, Information Technology, Document Management at Buncombe County, explains, "We looked at several vendors, and we chose OpenText because they offer an open application programming interface (API). We knew that in order to get buy-in, the DM application would have to work with the existing applications. OpenText Document Management, eDOCS Edition and OpenText Records Management, eDOCS Edition has an open API, which allows us to integrate with all of our different applications, and that is specifically why we chose them."

In addition, the products are user friendly and intuitive. "That's the key to getting people's buy-in," says Austin. "Everyone uses Word®; everyone uses Excel®; everyone uses Outlook®. All of it is very easy to use. There's no learning curve because everyone is used to file menus and being in Outlook all day."

Protecting and accessing records anywhere

Implementation began in 2002, beginning with the City-County Bureau of Identification (CCBI), which was a grant project written to get a document imaging system. After this deployment, the priority list was established based upon need. Austin explains, "We evaluated the departments by determining which had the most duplication and shared files and also the ones that worked with public records, which eventually need to be accessible on the Internet by our constituents."

The CCBI had the most pressing document management challenges. Employees had to literally carry jail records across the street to the courthouse every time someone went to court. Austin says, "They would check them out and check them in. But these are physical files, and they could have been lost, stolen, damaged, or possibly never returned. There were no back-up copies of these files, and that was a huge issue. Our main concern was getting the records to the courthouse electronically, and we also wanted to have a backup."





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Juliana Austin,
Information Technology, Document Management at Buncombe County.

In addition, the County wanted to better enable their police officers in the field who use laptops for accessing mug shots and arrest records. “The images were generated by the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) application, and staff would print the files out and store them in the file room. Now that the CJIS application is integrated with the OpenText system (using a custom connector), the mug shots, for example, are sent electronically, so we do not have to print them and keep physical jackets [arrest records] any longer. Soon, we’ll get to the point where there will be no more files in the file room.”

No more copies

The next department to be implemented was Finance. Since the processes were paper based, there were almost always several copies of each file located in several departments. Austin says, “When an invoice was sent to Finance to be paid, the department that sent it kept a copy, Finance kept a copy, and the auditors kept a copy. No one would purge their personal copy, so there were a lot of duplicate records taking up valuable space. Now all the accounts payable documents (checks, purchase orders, invoices, etc.) are accessible through the OpenText system. It’s all done electronically, and there’s only one copy.”

Checks and purchase orders are generated by the County’s ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) application, Lawson™, and fed electronically into the OpenText Document Management system. These two systems are integrated using UIMPORT® and Uconnect® from 5280 Solutions®. Once the Finance records are scanned, if someone gets a request to find out if a check was cut for a vendor, they can easily search for it in Document Management and email a copy in a matter of minutes without needing to maintain a separate copy. “If anyone in the County needs to see what check number paid for a particular invoice or how many invoices and checks were cut for a specific vendor in a month’s time or even determine which checks are tied to an asset, they can. They can quickly and easily do all of those kinds of queries within Document Management,” says Austin. “Before, the departments had to call Finance and ask them about a particular invoice and payment, and then Finance would send a physical copy of it via interoffice mail. It took a while, and it was all paper.”

Donna Clark, Finance Director at Buncombe County, adds, “Document imaging has assisted our staff and auditors to quickly access the invoices needed. Using OpenText Document Management, the auditors are able to retrieve copies of files without interrupting valuable staff time. Then for their records, they export the files electronically—all without printing paper. Furthermore, since we started scanning, the auditors have successfully located all audited files. It has also been valuable in reclaiming space. When we removed the filing cabinets after scanning our records, we were able to place two staff in the reclaimed office space.”

Improving efficiencies

The next big initiative for the County was in the Human Resources (HR) Department. “In HR, all of the processes were paper based, and each department had their own copies of their employee files; payroll had copies, and personnel had the official employee record. There was a tremendous amount of paper that required not only duplicated file storage but also file maintenance,” says Austin. “Because the file was current, the first area the County focused on was consolidating cross-departmental files to create an official personnel record to store within Document Management. By granting department rights to these files after scanning the official record, we were able to create a lot of space not only in HR but in the external departments as well.”

By replacing the paper personnel file with an electronic file, the County has created a comprehensive electronic personnel data storehouse that spans the lifecycle of the employee. “The conversion of paper files eliminates paper forms and replaces the jumble of ‘the way it has always been’ with a streamlined digital process,” says Personnel Director Rob Thornberry. “It frees up much-needed and costly floor storage space. Efficiencies are immediately realized by creating a centralized repository and eliminating paper folders. It eliminates the cost of manual delivery of records, reduces copying and mailing costs, and protects from paper damage. The County is also provided with a complete audit trail of all transactions and personnel who have access to the official personnel record.”

Thornberry adds, “To my knowledge we are the only local or city government in the state that has this cost-saving capability. This



project could not have been made possible without the direction of Kim Pruett, our Information Technology Director, and under the daily leadership of Juliana Austin.”

Thornberry points to a recent article in USA Today where the national Human Services Secretary is quoted as saying, “Hurricane Katrina destroyed or left inaccessible the medical records of thousands of people. There may not have been an experience that demonstrates more powerfully the need for electronic health records.”

“By replacing the paper personnel file with an electronic record, managers have a timesaving tool that will make their jobs more efficient and less costly to the citizens they serve,” states Thornberry.

Automating HR processes

The next project for the HR Department was automating the paper workflows, starting with the application process, so it could reduce the amount of physical paper being generated. At the time, the County outsourced the printing of the three-part application forms, and the blank forms were stored in the office, which took up valuable storage space. Applicants had to physically go to the office to pick up the form, and most would go back home to fill it out, and then return with the completed application and their résumé. It was subsequently photocopied several times and mailed (via courier) to the hiring manager within each County department. If a group was hiring, they would make more copies at that office for each person in the group. The jobs closed on Wednesday at 5:00 pm, but the hiring managers wouldn’t receive the applications until the following Monday or Tuesday.

Now applicants can apply online and attach their résumé and cover letter. “The HR department was already working with the Webmaster to make job applications available online, and we were able to integrate with his application process to automatically save the documents in the OpenText Document Management system. The hiring managers now receive applications on Thursday, the day following closure. This improves efficiencies since we shortened the turnaround time by three working days. The applications are secured to HR and electronically routed to the hiring supervisor, who can access the documents via the eDOCS Web top,” explains Austin.

The County did a study in 2008 on the benefits of the Document Management system and found that, since initiation, 16,439 online applications, at a minimum of four pages each, had been entered online. This saved the County approximately 19 boxes of paper and the associated costs. Other benefits to the County include reduced expenses for ink, equipment, and staples; storage savings related to filing cabinets, file folders, and labels; reduced and/or eliminated costs for transport, postage, copies, filing, re-filing, and lost files; reduction in disposal costs related to shredding and landfill; and a more environmentally-conscious County.

Personnel Action Forms are also now created electronically through another custom application designed by the Webmaster. “The



forms are pre-populated, completed, and uploaded into the Document Management system using the applicant data accumulated during the application process and stored in the Lawson system,” says Austin. The County set up retention rules on the back end. Retention is set for only one year if the applicant is not hired, but if the applicant is hired, the file is automatically updated to an employee file and the County is required to keep it for the length of the employment plus 30 years.

The County’s development staff created another custom application for the HR department to improve efficiencies for new employee processing. With every permanent new hire, more than 14 documents (some multi-page) need to be completed. These documents include the State and Federal Tax forms and County specific forms. Previously, an HR associate would repetitively enter the basic information (such as name, address, social security number, date of birth, etc.) manually on all documents before the new hire arrived. This manual process could take up to 30 minutes. When the new employee arrived at the office, they would then manually enter the remaining data into the prefilled forms.

“The main concerns with this process were inefficiencies and incomplete documents; documents may be redundantly created because the originals were lost or misfiled, and the information provided may be inconsistent with information already stored in the database,” explains Austin.

Using the new custom application, all redundant information is auto-populated from the database. “The County built PDF forms with data and signature fields, so when the HR associate types in the employee number, the form pre-populates all of the information that is stored in Lawson. Now it takes less than five seconds to fill out the forms, where it used to take 30 minutes. The new employee now signs electronically, so the forms are never printed and never have to be scanned,” states Austin. All documents are saved directly to the OpenText Document Management repository.

“In hindsight, when we looked at the HR department, we realized they had scanned over 350,000 pieces of paper in personnel



alone. So not only did we reduce the storage space in personnel (seven filing cabinets were removed) but also in payroll and the originating department. By scanning and giving the correct people access to the documents, we've reduced that much more filing space," adds Austin. "Now HR is confident that they are the only office with the official record."

Sharing the latest versions

"The Permits and Inspections department had a lot of forms and a lot of shared files—maps, plans, and blueprints. They needed to be able to share them with other departments involved with the permitting process. We call it 'One-Stop,' but it involves Permits and Inspections, Planning (Erosion, Subdivisions, etc.), and Environmental Health (Well and Septic). We wanted each of those five or more divisions that we call One-Stop to be able to access each other's documents," explains Austin.

"The OpenText system offers us an essential repository where people in different departments can go to find information and be sure it's the right information. We don't want it departmentalized. We want it all together in one place so that we're all using the same information, the same maps, and the same plans. Document Management is kind of a data warehouse for documents," says Austin. In fact, Austin recommends integrating the solution as an overarching business process rather than thinking only of what it can do to improve each department separately.

Matt Stone, Permits & Inspections Director at Buncombe County, adds, "I am very pleased with Document Management's overall convenience of accessing and sharing our documents as well as the quality and clarity of these documents, especially the inspection tickets and blueprints."

A familiar environment

According to Austin, the integration with the different pieces of software across the County has been key to gaining end-user acceptance. "If you can build the system so it's integrated with applications they work in, there is a better chance for buy-in. For the Lawson system in HR and Finance, we created a hot key using the Uconnect software so that users can work on someone's file in Lawson, use a quick key combination, and pull back all their records stored in Document Management. We used this same integration in One-Stop, as well as creating many other custom-integrated programs.

"The main benefit has been reducing the workflow of paper and even getting rid of the actual paper. People often want to image the documents, but they forget that you are never going to catch up unless you alter workflows to eliminate paper production. Buncombe County has a great group of developers who have been essential to help modify workflows in all imaged departments. This project would not be as widely accepted without their initiative," says Austin.

The future

The County has lined up four more departments for integration, beginning with the Department of Social Services. "Now that we have so many success stories within the County, it's much easier to get buy-in," says Austin.

Using the OpenText DM and RM systems, Buncombe County shares information between departments, has reduced storage requirements, and has greatly improved efficiencies. "It's just tremendous," says Austin. "There is no more duplication, the amount of work has been greatly reduced, and we no longer miss documents. As a rule, documents don't get lost and departments have the right information. We can't imagine not having an electronic document management system now."

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