Case Study: Probate Office
Shelby County, Alabama

Industry: Government, Probate Office

Location: Shelby County, Alabama

Challenges:

- Costly and labor-intensive two-step document capture process
- Retrieval problems when related documents not on same roll of film
- More than 300 types of documents to be archived

Solutions:

- Eastman Park Micrographics: Digital Archive Writer, microfilm and service
- Land Information Capture Software

Results:

- Single pass document capture for digital and analog
- Microfilm images – humanly intelligible
- Highly secure archival system not subject to hacking
- Vital public records maintained for future generations

"Since we began using the Kodak Imagelink Archive Writer in 2002, we have filmed more than 600,000 documents – plus our taxpayers can find them instantaneously online."

– Deputy Clerk, Shelby County Probate Office

The Shelby County Probate Office is committed to preserving public records well into the future. Unlike many county offices, Shelby County now offers its citizens free online access to deeds, mortgages, liens and other property documents. For both security and reliability, Shelby archives its vital documents on microfilm using a fast, streamlined process. But it wasn't always like this.

Challenges: Labor-intensive workflow, difficult retrieval

In 2001, Shelby County had a document imaging system in place, but it found itself with inadequate equipment that was hard to support. Office workers digitized documents onto PCs, then microfilmed them for backup – a labor-intensive, two-step process. When documents needed to be refilmed - typically those that were skewed, upside-down, or of poor quality – the workload only increased.

"We had been digitizing from paper since the early '90s, but we knew it was time to come up with a new strategy for dealing with all of our county records, not just those in the Probate Office," says the Deputy Clerk.

Solution: Digital Archive Writer and Land Information Capture Software

Shelby County needed both a new way of digitizing and organizing records, and a new way of archiving them for permanent storage. The solution was found in two products.

Shelby County's Land records software has automated all aspects of document management, from managing the document scanning and indexing workflow thru making documents available online. To handle the document archiving to microfilm, Shelby chose the Imagelink Archive Writer from Eastman Park Micrographics (formerly a part of Eastman Kodak Company).

"The Imagelink Archive Writer functions as efficiently today as the day we purchased it. The simplicity of the software and operation of the machine make a huge difference in the time it now takes to film our daily workload".
– Deputy Clerk, Shelby County

Why continue to use microfilm?

- Microfilm is ISO/ANSI-certified for a life expectancy of 500 years.
- Microfilm can restore documents to 100% of original size.
- Microfilm images are locked in sequence on the film roll insuring complete file integrity.
- Digital data is machine readable and subject to loss through technology changes and migration error.

Eastman Park Micrographics (EPM) was formed in April 2011 with the purchase of the micrographics business from Eastman Kodak Company. Our customer service, product manufacturing and distribution facilities are located in the former Kodak Park in Rochester, New York, with administrative headquarters in Dallas, Texas. EPM employees bring extensive experience in all aspects of document imaging, from a variety of industry leading companies, to provide unique expertise in micrographics products and solutions.

EPM is the leading supplier of supplier of microfilm products globally, with on-going expansion of its portfolio of Reference Archive Solutions. Our equipment is maintained worldwide in conjunction with Kodak Service, renowned for its outstanding customer service.

The entire document workflow has improved with the new products. After documents are scanned, data-entered, and verified, the images are organized and microfilmed for backup once daily. Using the Imagelink Archive Writer software, daily recorded documents are filmed in numerical order by instrument number, making retrieval much easier down the road. After films are developed, two copies are maintained – one on-site in the Public Room and the other in a secure, offsite facility.

Results: Productivity, reliability, speed

The new system has resulted in substantial improvements for Shelby County. Workflow changes mean no more duplication of effort and a more efficient document management operation. The new document scanning equipment is more reliable than the former microfilm camera equipment, resulting in fewer misfed or overlapping documents, better image quality, and a noticeable drop in document confusion issues. Creating the microfilm using the Imagelink Archive Writer provides better image quality by leveraging the improved image processing technology available from today's document scanners.

"The Document Archive Writer does a beautiful job of logically ordering and indexing our documents," says the Deputy Clerk. "We can now group images in an intelligent manner. This whole system has made it so much easier for us to record, verify and safeguard all our documents."

While the number of pages filmed continues to increase year by year, the staff required to handle the workload stays steady. Although there hasn't been any emergency that required document restoration, the Deputy Clerk is confident that it could be done reliably, due to the exceptional film quality reported by the state offices, where archived film is stored.

Conclusion

Shelby County employees pride themselves on their service to the community and in maintaining a living history of the region. Secure, reliable record archiving isn't always something highly valued – until you don't have (or can't find) the documents you need. Being able to provide access to such documents in online and fully reproducible form is Shelby's way of securing data for future generations.

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