

eGov And Transformation – The Pillars Of Document Capture

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Historically, government service delivery and processes have been manually intensive and relied heavily on paper documents and forms. Over the past 10 years, government agencies have looked to information technology to speed service delivery, automate manual processes, and save costs. These initiatives often are referred to as transformation or eGovernment.

A number of federal projects have applied the goals of eGovernment and transformation — improved efficiency, convenience, and better access to public services through information and communication technology. These federal projects include: the Social Security Administration’s Electronic Disability System (eDIB), the IRS’s Correspondence Imaging System (CIS), and EPA’s eRulemaking. These projects, which yielded a number of document capture insights, led to the development of the three pillars of document capture, which help government agencies in their efforts to establish eGovernment-friendly programs.

Specifically, the three pillars illustrate how automated document capture (i.e. the process of digitizing paper documents and extracting content) can accelerate eGovernment and transformation initiative success, help avoid common project launch and operations pitfalls, and deliver real savings of both time and money.

State Of Affairs

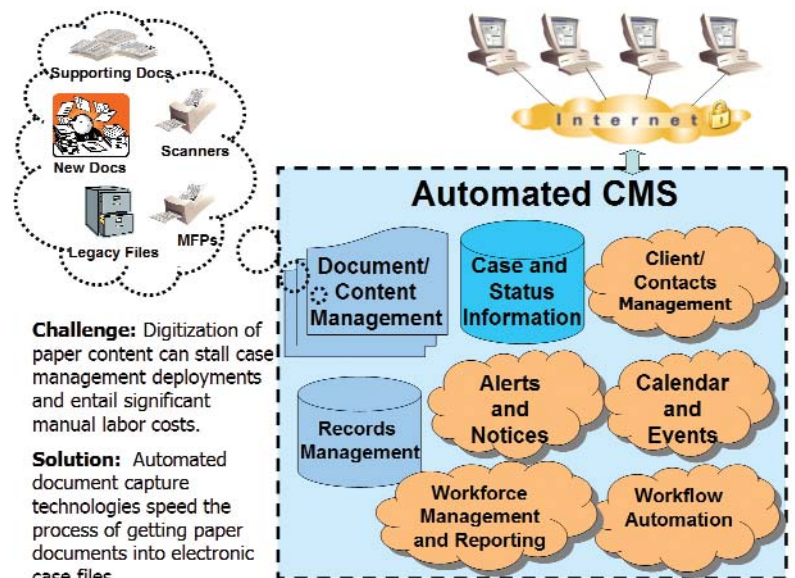
The President’s Management Agenda (PMA), launched in August 2001 by President Bush to improve the management and performance of the federal government, places a strong emphasis on eGovernment. Despite the goals set by the PMA, federal agencies are having trouble making progress. According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), some agencies are showing results, but many are having unsatisfactory performance in the area of electronic government objectives. All of these agencies could benefit from easy-to-deploy, easy-to-operate, cost-effective IT solutions.

Too often, proponents of eGovernment and government transformation initiatives focus on the electronic “vision” and overlook the practical aspects of using

technology to automate paper document capture or document scanning. In many situations, this bias is conveyed and fostered by the large enterprise content management system vendors.

Scanning and the creation of digital image files may sound sufficient and simple, however; system designers don’t consider the effort needed to sort and separate documents before scanning, adjust scanner settings for each document to achieve acceptable image quality, manually upload image files, and key index data by hand. The scanning process can become too tedious or time consuming. The last thing agency managers in charge of an eGovernment initiative want to hear is workers proclaiming they won’t use a new system because it’s too cumbersome to get their paper documents into the system.

Automated case management system (CMS) initiatives illustrate document capture challenges. Traditional case management processes are paper-intensive. An automated CMS addresses some of the problems inherent in any paper-based process by using electronic case files. Ideally, all case documents originate within the CMS, or they are captured and digitized upon receipt. In an ideal

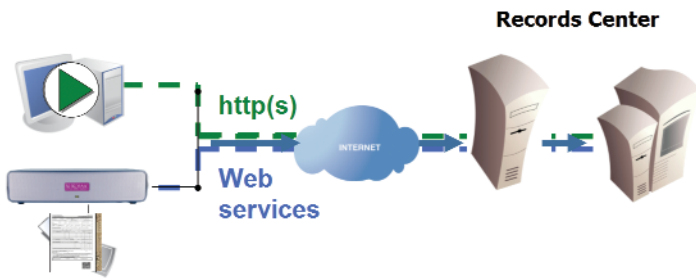


Challenge: Digitization of paper content can stall case management deployments and entail significant manual labor costs.

Solution: Automated document capture technologies speed the process of getting paper documents into electronic case files.

AUTOMATED CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (CMSs) ADDRESS SOME OF THE PROBLEMS INHERENT IN ANY PAPER-BASED PROCESS BY USING ELECTRONIC CASE FILES.

world, all CMS users would have online access to the system and could find everything they need to do their jobs.



Los Angeles Field Office

AFTER AN AGENCY SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTS AN AUTOMATED CMS, A CASE WORKER IN A FIELD OFFICE CAN ACCESS ELECTRONIC CASE FILES LOCATED AT THE CENTRAL RECORD CENTER.

The Three Pillars Of Document Capture

Experience with multiple projects has demonstrated that only a comprehensive document capture solution can provide the foundation of a well-designed eGovernment initiative. The entire capture process must be thought through and the needs of all stakeholders considered. Agencies need to consider the three pillars of document capture:

◆ **Legacy File Digitization** - The first pillar is to transition legacy files to a digital format as quickly as possible. While it's conceivable to run traditional and automated processes in parallel, doing so can delay eGovernment objectives for years.

◆ **Transactional Or Day-Forward Capture** - The second pillar is to set, and stick to, a date after which all documents will be captured at the point of creation or submission.

◆ **eForms Transition** - The third pillar is to maintain flexibility with eForm rollouts. Not all remote locations will have robust network connectivity. Locations may continue to rely on faxes, dial-up Internet, and hard-copy mail for years.

Legacy file digitization is a costly undertaking in eGovernment and transformation initiatives. But, if done in an efficient and timely manner, it is a key criterion for the success of any project. Traditional document scanning approaches rely on extensive up front manual preparation of legacy files. Workers identify the start and stop points of individual documents and then insert a separator sheet that must be removed after scanning. This requires an army of staff, long processing timelines, and multiple quality checkpoints. Workers also must manually enter data to index documents so they can be found later. Shipping the work out of the United States is often considered the only way to contain costs at an acceptable level. Whether done within the United States or outsourced, plenty of things can, and do, go wrong.

The automated process does not require the insertion of separator pages, and it only routes documents to human reviewers when it has low confidence in its decisions — a confidence level users can adjust depending on the importance of the document — or when the process encounters an excep-

tion document. While operators in the manual process labor to identify document types and type index information, operators in the automated process can work two to three times faster. For example, one agency initiative realized a 50% reduction in costs after implementing an automated solution that eliminated separator sheets.

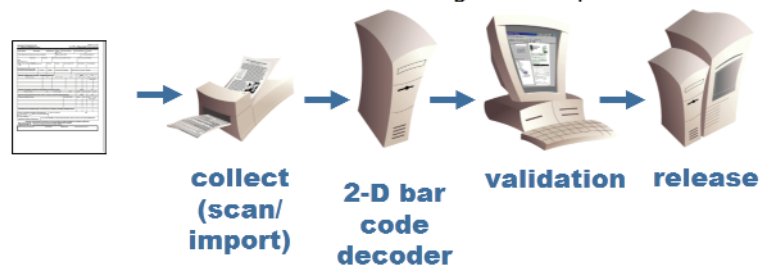
Automating tedious manual tasks also minimizes variability caused by the human subjective judgment. Automated document separation and indexing is governed by a consistent set of rules that delivers consistent results. Agencies not only can stretch their IT budgets further by embracing such a solution, but also can better manage consistency and accuracy.

The second pillar, setting a date for when all documents will be captured upon creation or receipt, provides several immediate advantages. Information will be available earlier and dispersed sooner. Lost or misfiled documents will be a thing of the past. And agencies will be able to establish clear audit trails to help maintain compliance with all relevant statutes.

The third pillar supports the transition to eForms. The ideal eForm solution allows a user to go online and complete, digitally sign, and submit a form. In other words, it's a start-to-finish process that does

• **2-D Bar Code Capture Capabilities**

- Identifies eForms with 2-D bar codes
- Reads & decodes data extracted from 2-D bar codes
- DECODING = bar code decoding & decompression



TYPICALLY, MORE THAN 95% OF EFORMS WITH 2-D BAR CODES CAN PASS STRAIGHT THROUGH THE DOCUMENT CAPTURE SYSTEM WITHOUT HUMAN INTERVENTION.

not produce a single sheet of paper. Experience has shown that eForm rollouts require flexibility and must proceed cautiously to ensure interoperability with the existing IT infrastructure and accommodate the needs of stakeholders. Many potential users lack the training, skills, or even access to a computer that is required to complete an eForm.

Document capture solutions that accommodate a transition to eForms will permit hard-copy submission of the forms for scanning and actual signatures. In these scenarios, the use of 2-D bar-coded forms will yield cost savings and improvements in accuracy and processing speed, while permitting “offline” completion and submission via snail mail or fax. ●