



Case In Point

Law Firm Restores Order To Its File Tracking

“People in my department would be sending out e-mails left and right asking, ‘Where’s this file? Where’s that file?’ A great deal of time was wasted.”

*—Karen O’Connell, docket administrator,
Webb, Ziesenheim, Logsdon, Orkin & Hanson, P.C.*

The Law Firm

For nearly 160 years, the Pittsburgh-based law firm of Webb, Ziesenheim, Logsdon, Orkin & Hanson, P.C. has specialized in patents, trademarks, copyrights and trade secrets – all of which fit neatly under the legal umbrella of intellectual property. In fact, William Bakewell, the firm’s founder, was the first attorney to practice patent law west of the Allegheny Mountains. At first, the firm primarily provided legal services for companies competing in the region’s once-booming glass and steel industries. It then diversified its client base to include technology companies, as well as a large number of plant breeders and horticultural organizations. In 2002, Webb ranked third out of more than 350 firms nationwide in the number of patents it procured for genetically engineered plant varieties.

The Need

Although Webb has consistently managed its operations to meet its ever-changing needs, one area of operations had become antiquated – its filing system. The problem was twofold. First, the central file room was too small to accommodate all of the firm’s 12,000 to 15,000 active files, and so about a third of the files were stored in cabinets in hallways and outside offices. In fact, a separate file room was maintained for one of the larger clients. “It was always an issue trying to determine where files were,” says firm administrator Dave Wittig. Second, employees often neglected to manually sign files in and out of the file room and to keep track of fast-moving files when

they changed hands within the office. Says Karen O’Connell, the firm’s docket administrator: “People in my department would be sending out e-mails left and right asking, ‘Where’s this file? Where’s that file?’ We wasted a lot of time hunting for things.” So Webb leadership decided to correct this organizational deficiency and increase staff productivity by investing in an automated filing system.

The Solution

In 2003, Webb investigated an RFID tracking product created by a local company for medical-equipment applications. But the company was small and the technology had yet to be employed in a legal setting. “We would have been the test site,” Wittig admits. Meanwhile, the firm discovered the 3M™ RFID File Tracking System in an industry trade publication. Not only was the technology proven, Wittig says, but “3M is a stable company – we know they’d been around. And once their people came in to work with us, it was clear they know what they’re doing. They were all very knowledgeable, accommodating and easy to work with. They walked in here with many good ideas.”

In April 2004, Webb purchased the 3M™ RFID File Tracking System, including six 3M™ RFID Tracking Pads, a 3M™ RFID Handheld Tracker and 3M™ RFID Tracking Tags for each of their files. Over the course of two weekends, the firm transferred its client records, including each file’s six-digit identification number, to the database, then affixed a coded tracking tag to each file. When the tags are scanned across a tracking pad – whether the pad’s situated in the firm’s central file room



or on a docketing person's desk – the database is instantly updated on the whereabouts of the file that's in motion. Like the tracking pads, the handheld tracker instantly updates the status of the files being worked on. The firm's computer staff uses the handheld tracker to do daily inventory sweeps in designated areas of the office, which is spread out over two and a half floors.

"We do half a floor every day. The goal is that at the end of the week the entire office will be scanned," Wittig says. "The way the system is set up," he continues, "virtually anyone here in the firm can sit at his or her computer, pull up the program, key in the number of a file, and the program will tell that person where that particular file was last seen."

The Results

Because of space constraints, Webb still must maintain a decentralized filing arrangement. Even so, since the firm installed the 3M™ RFID File Tracking System, filing efficiency has markedly improved and missing files problems have been all but totally eliminated. The number of e-mails looking for files dropped to virtually zero, almost immediately," Wittig says. The 3M system, he adds, "does everything we wanted it to do. It was the answer to our prayers."

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