



Case In Point

Major County Attorney's Office Saves \$200,000 Annually with RFID File Tracking System

"If you are a county prosecutor or larger law office, you know how missing files can create stress as well as unnecessary expense. You need a system with the best technology and longest lifecycle, and that's RFID."

*—Al Lucas, Division Chief Information Technology,
Maricopa County Attorney's Office, Phoenix, AZ*

The County Attorney's Office

Maricopa County in Arizona is home of the fourth largest county attorney's office in the United States. Located in Phoenix, this office opens approximately 100,000 case files and prosecutes 45,000-50,000 cases per year. That translates to opening almost 400 cases and 200 filings per workday. This DA's office has 405 lawyers and 600 operations employees who include paralegal, legal secretarial, records, clerical and other support and administrative staff. They have multiple divisions and bureaus located in several different buildings and sites in the Phoenix area. Richard Romley, Maricopa County Attorney, has always been a strong supporter of the right technology in the work place.

The Need

Opening that many files daily creates volumes of paper evidence, notes, photos and other documentation being handled by dozens of individuals who travel from office to court to other offices, to conference rooms and records facilities. With this many files being touched by so many people, it was no surprise to Al Lucas, Division Chief Information Technology, Maricopa County Attorney's Office, that 10-40 percent of all files were temporarily or permanently lost during their life cycle. "Missing files were becoming a dilemma," said Lucas. "Recreating files

is a major problem. Not only is it very labor intensive, but you end up with two files in circulation. They aren't exact duplicates of the original file, so you can have significant version-control issues." With the waste of resources increasing, Lucas knew the situation needed a solution.

"For a private prosecutor, missing files can mean lost billable hours. For a county practitioner, missing files can mean missing deadlines. And, a missed deadline could mean that somebody who shouldn't gets a 'Get Out of Jail Free Card,'" said Lucas. "It's not just about economics." After pre-selling the management and getting preliminary funding, Lucas and his team explored their options for implementing a records and files tracking, inventory and archiving system. When one staff member wanted a barcoding system in one area of files management, Lucas and his team realized they needed a system that could work for the whole operation, not just individual departments. As a government entity, they needed to do proper research, calculate return on investment, analyze current installations and issue requests for proposals before being able to purchase a system. Lucas immediately ruled out barcodes. "The technology just didn't fit, even for just one area. To identify files, you need to take them off the shelf and have the barcode close to your scanner. We have 50,000-100,000 files in the Records Archives. Can you imagine crawling up on all those shelves just to see what files are there?!"



The Solution

After reading about radio frequency identification (RFID) use for file tracking, Lucas checked out a library installation at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The 3M RFID System, originally designed for identifying, tracking and securing materials in libraries, has since been adapted to other markets. "We looked at dozens of different combinations of hardware, software, gadgets, labeling, color coding and barcoding. None was as good as RFID technology for what we wanted to accomplish," stated Mr. Lucas.

3M™ RFID Tracking Solutions offers a suite of products for the legal and court system community based on RFID technology that locates and identifies individual files via a tiny microchip and antenna. The microchip and antenna are inside a 3M RFID Tracking Tag that is affixed to each file and allows it to be easily tracked through the entire workflow. As a file moves from central file rooms, divisions/bureaus, or individual offices, a complete history is tracked and can be easily viewed on any network computer. 3M™ RFID Tracking System works on its own or through integrating with existing information systems. "There was a lot of tracking software available, too, but for most companies, the technology is an add-on," said Lucas. "After doing our research on trends, various partnership possibilities, budgeting and timetables, we issued requests for proposals and selected 3M."

The Results

To start, Maricopa County Records Managers will tag only the Adult Criminal prosecution cases. File tagging will ultimately expand to other types of filings, other divisions and other buildings at the facility. "My initial calculation of the savings to Maricopa County was \$125,000 per year, but now I believe that figure is too conservative. My guess now is that it is closer to \$200,000 per year," said Lucas. The system has already dramatically cut down on the time all personnel spend looking for and inventorying files, according to Lucas. As an added bonus, the tracking system will be a tremendous aid in auditing files, workflow, and retention scheduling as well as off-site file management. "We are reaping a lot of benefits that we did not anticipate, and we did not factor this into our return on investment calculations. Improvements in workflow have already been implemented and these changes have made for more consistent policies and procedures on many levels beyond records management."

According to Shauna Sandersfeld, the Records Manager at Maricopa County, the system has made everyone more diligent about file handling. Staff members are asking about the tracking system and processes. "People who weren't scheduled to receive pads and scanners until next year are asking for them now," said Sandersfeld. "They see the value and want to get on board." Lucas' conclusion: "If you are a county prosecutor or larger law office, you know how missing files can create stress as well as unnecessary expense. You need a system with the best technology and longest lifecycle and that's RFID."

April 2005



3M Track and Trace Solutions

3M Center Building 225-4N-14

St. Paul, MN 55144-1000

USA

1-800-944-3512

www.3M.com/RFID

Please recycle. Printed in U.S.A.

© 3M 2008. All rights reserved.

75-0500-8229-8