



## Case In Point

### One of the nation's largest corporate intellectual property law offices makes good use of its own company's invention

*"I lost count of how many we found out of order-- files that would have been lost had someone needed them. I estimate we located between 30 and 40 misplaced files that would never have been found with the old system."*

*—Dennis Deeb of 3M's OIPC,  
3M Office of Intellectual Property Counsel, St. Paul, MN*

### 3M's Office of Intellectual Property Counsel

3M is a Fortune 500 company with annual sales of over \$20 billion. Founded in 1902, 3M has 67,000 employees, 136 plants and nearly 200 sales offices around the world. Although most consumers know the company primarily for its myriad products for home and office, including the ubiquitous Scotch™ Tape and Post-it™ Notes, 3M is a diverse technology company widely recognized in the business and academic worlds for its technological innovations. Fiber optics, fuel cell components, pharmaceuticals, optical films, security devices, dental composites and radio frequency identification are just a few of the high-tech fields in which 3M has a strong and growing presence. Therefore, today more than ever, research and development is the key to 3M's success and future growth.

Enter 3M's Office of Intellectual Property Counsel (OIPC). Without intellectual property (IP) protection, competitors could quickly copy and market "me-too" products, imperiling 3M's market share and profiting unfairly from achievements that aren't their own. Because of its substantial investment in R&D (over \$1 billion in 2004 alone), 3M has one of the nation's largest corporate IP departments, with more than 60 corporate IP attorneys who help protect the company's patents, trademarks, copyrights and trade secrets.

### The Need

3M's OIPC receives more than 600 issued U.S. patents every year. For every single domestic patent application filed in the U.S., there are

from six to 50 corresponding overseas patent applications filed for each family of patents. Since applications can be pending for many years, a large volume of "older" files remain open and active cases for extended periods. Not surprisingly, the active file count in 3M's OIPC is about 45,000. Furthermore, complications, such as those arising from a patent's 20-year life span, foreign correspondence and differing global patent procedures, can add to the paper trail.

Under such conditions, it was not unusual for as many as 40 files to be lost at any given time. E-mail blasts begging for someone to find the "XYZ" file were common. Taking inventory of 45,000 files, when possible at all, was done manually, taking weeks and tying up precious personnel resources. There was no way to quickly track what files were in the East File Room, the West File Room or "on the floor" in the office of an attorney, paralegal or assistant. The scramble to locate files seemed to be a permanent fact of life.

To help track files, a barcode system was implemented in 1999. While barcode technology is satisfactory for identifying a file, this technology has its shortcomings, as 3M learned. Most significant is the fact that a direct line of sight is required to scan the barcode, which must be within inches of the scanner. Even with one or two barcode scanners in the main file rooms, it was still necessary to remove files from the shelves, carry them to the big scanners, physically scan and re-file them. This procedure was not much more efficient than conducting a pure manual inventory.



## The Solution

Even though barcodes are better than nothing, the OIPC team knew it was time to step up to the next level. It proved to be an easy step. The IP attorney who works with 3M's Safety, Security and Protection Services business knew that this group – which for years had been selling radio frequency identification (RFID) systems to libraries for tracking books and periodicals – had adapted this technology to help law firms, courts and legal prosecution departments locate, track, and manage legal files.

Melissa Buss of the 3M OIPC felt the company should adopt and use its own technology. "What better place to take advantage of your own company's products?" said Buss. "It creates the perfect place to showcase our capabilities and pilot new hardware and software." Potential clients can visit the 3M Center in St. Paul, meet the RFID team and see an actual demonstration of RFID file tracking in a real life IP situation. The 3M™ RFID Tracking System uses a 3M™ RFID Tracking Tag that holds a microchip and antenna. One tag is affixed to each file and allows the file to be easily tracked through its entire workflow. As a file moves from a file room or individual office, a complete file history is tracked and can be easily viewed on any network computer. 3M™ RFID Tracking System provides a comprehensive file tracking system either on its own or through integrating with existing information systems.

Once the decision was made to install the system in the winter of 2004, 3M management decided they wanted not only to keep costs to a minimum, they wanted those costs incurred by year's end. The dash was on! But how do you tag and program over 45,000 files in under three weeks and still keep labor costs low? 3M innovation (and spirit) to the rescue again! Teams of 3M's Safety Security & Protection Services (SS&PS) personnel volunteered to do the file tagging and programming.

Tracie Mortenson, 3M RFID Sales Representative, said it gave her hands-on experience and it was fun. "I sell these systems. Now I can tell prospects that 3M OIPC, one of the largest IP offices in the country, uses

it. I can also tell them I have done the tagging myself and it is not the daunting task one might think," said Mortenson. "We worked in four-hour shifts and had a buddy system. When someone new came in, one of us would spend a few minutes training the newcomer. It all worked very smoothly and we were able to complete the project in record time without having to outsource it. Actually, all of us from SS&PS were excited to be part of an actual installation. We learned a lot and had a good time."

## The Results

All 45,000 active OIPC files are now tagged and programmed. An inventory of 25,000 files took only 12 hours. Dennis Deeb of 3M OIPC solicited a list of missing file numbers from the attorneys and created a search list. According to Deeb, with only one pass of the files using the small 3M™ RFID Handheld Tracker, he was able to "check shelf order," complete a file room inventory and locate missing files.

"I lost count of how many we found out of order – files that would have been lost had someone needed them. I estimate we located between 30 and 40 misplaced files that would never have been found with the old system. Some files were a couple hundred numbers off, some were 10,000 off, and we found one in the West File Room that should have been in the East File Room. Even though 40 out of 25,000 is a low percentage, when a file is lost, it is the only file that matters," said Deeb, who adds:

"I found five of the seven missing files that were solicited from the users; the other two I expect to find out on the floor. That may not sound like a big deal, but two of our users have been looking for those files for six months! Without the 3M™ RFID Tracking System, the chance of ever finding the files would have been remote. Now we know with certainty where our files are. And that's worth a lot."

The Defense rests its case: Everyone in 3M's Office of Intellectual Property Counsel is completely satisfied.

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