



## Case In Point

### Marin County District Attorney's Office Goes High Tech with RFID File Tracking System

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*—York Westgate, Senior Technology Support Analyst,  
Marin County (CA) District Attorney's Office*

#### The Marin County DA's Office

By California standards, Marin is a small county. Nevertheless, its District Attorney's Office is mighty. With a motto of Prevention, Prosecution, Protection, District Attorney Edward Berberian runs a lean, powerful organization. The safety of the community is a top priority, and the county's prosecutors are committed to building bridges to the public through new and revamped liaison programs. Marin County's DA office employs about 100 people: 40 attorneys, three IT staffers and more than 50 additional support professionals, investigators and victims' advocacy professionals.

#### The Need

Everyone realized that community programs and prosecutorial duties would start to suffer if so much manpower was consumed on non-productive activities like file retrieval. 2,000-3,000 man-hours per year were being spent tracking active or misplaced files, so the office's Senior Technology Support Analyst, York Westgate, volunteered his expertise.

"We knew we were losing files," says Westgate. "We'd have two or three e-mail blasts a day asking if we had seen a specific file. I knew there had to be a way technology could help and yet not be too costly or difficult to implement."

But the DA's office did not have carte blanche to find a solution. Anything it chose would have to be compatible with the County's Case

Management System – named Darwin – a complex database program used by many law enforcement organizations in Marin County.

#### The Solution

"We considered barcodes, but figured there had to be something better," says Westgate. Going on the Internet and searching for technology options yielded little on pure file tracking. When they learned about 3M's radio frequency identification (RFID) tracking system, they asked for a demonstration.

3M RFID Tracking Solutions offers a suite of products for county prosecutors and law firms based on RFID technology that locates and identifies individual files via a tiny microchip and antenna embedded in a 3M™ RFID Tracking Tag that is affixed to each file. As a file moves from central file rooms, divisions/bureaus, or individual offices, a complete file history is tracked and can be easily viewed on any network computer. 3M provides a comprehensive file tracking system either on its own or through integrating with existing information systems.

Westgate knew barcoding would be less expensive initially, but more costly over time, and that barcode reading was more physically demanding. "By the time you have the barcode scanner on the spine of the file, you can physically see the file's title. We also were worried about barcode/Darwin compatibility. With RFID it reads the tag from a greater distance, making file locating and inventorying faster and easier.



## The Results

"Before we installed the 3M system, every time a file was moved someone had to go into Darwin and type in the new location of the file – not a perfect system," says Westgate. "Now with a simple scan, we manage and track cases simultaneously. The biggest selling point is the 3M™ Tracking Pads. We put Tracking Pads at each of our eight file 'chokepoints.' We pass the file over the pad and, bingo, the file location and history are fully documented."

The system also helps keep file inventory current. Using 3M™ RFID Handheld Trackers, each office is scanned twice per week, so they know what files are where.

According to Westgate, the 3M™ RFID Tracking System interfaces beautifully with Darwin's Case Management System. "In effect, our attorneys don't know the 3M system resides on our computers. As far as they are concerned, this is all increased functionality through Darwin. The attorneys log onto Darwin, go to the case they want to review, and our application searches the 3M database and brings in the data. For most of our users, the 3M system functions as a file tracking system within our case management program."

As an added plus, the 3M RFID Tracking System was easy to get up and running. "The 3M team was very professional, and worked extremely well with the County's software programmers," says Westgate.

"Our benefits are primarily peace of mind, but there are definitely financial gains, including not having to dedicate personnel to file searching. Now I get one or two e-mails a week asking about a file's whereabouts, instead of several inquiries a day."

One of the biggest surprises for the Marin County DA's office was how easily and quickly all the attorneys adapted to the system. Because all the attorneys were familiar with Darwin, the transition was seamless. "The system is very intuitive and integrated well with Darwin. We were anticipating a great deal of resistance from the attorneys, but it never happened. Now we are fully implemented and they love it," said Westgate.

Although the 3M RFID Tracking System is currently used only in the DA's office, all of Marin County has expressed an interest in the technology. The ability for other county law enforcement departments to share powerful databases can yield tremendous flexibility and strength, adds Westgate.

"We are so happy with the system that we just ordered another 15,000 tags. We will be adding more pads, and expanding the tracking to more office locations," says Westgate.

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