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Case Study:

Vanderbilt University Makes the Grade with Electronic Content Management (ECM)

In 1873, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt gave one million dollars to build and endow a university, with the wish that it would, "contribute to strengthening the ties, which should exist between all sections of our common country."

Today, that dream is realized in Vanderbilt University, a comprehensive research university in Nashville, Tennessee, providing innovative programs and state-of-the art facilities.

The University includes 10 schools, a public policy institute, a distinguished medical center, and The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center. Vanderbilt enrolls almost 10,500 students, offering undergraduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences, engineering, music, education, and human development, as well as a full range of graduate and professional degrees.

Within Vanderbilt University, The Office of Accounting supports the University's overall mission by providing professional business and financial services for students, faculty, staff, other service providers, and additional stakeholders.

Besides processing financial transactions, including necessary financial safeguards through efficient and cost-effective internal controls, The Office of Accounting provides varied and extensive accounting and financial management reporting services to a broad constituency.

The department actively promotes the highest standards for all University business activities, including the application of innovative technology and improved procedures.

Background

Vanderbilt University's Office of Accounting is required by law to keep specific original documents in a media that is acceptable to the federal government. Examples of these documents include accounts payable invoices, timesheets, refunds,

reimbursements and payments for services, journal entries, and cashier receipts. For many years, Vanderbilt abided with the federal requirements by having these original documents put on microfilm. This process was outsourced to another company.

The administration soon began to realize that this archaic process was costing the University a great deal of time and money.

In addition, the quality of the microfilm copies was very poor and access to this information was limited to a small number of accounting staff that experienced a great loss of productivity due to the time involved in retrieving this information.

Easy-to-Use ECM

After carefully examining the issues they were having with the microfilm, a decision was made to look for an electronic content management (ECM) system to solve these problems.

Mary Hayes, Manager of Computing and Technology, was charged with the task of recommending and implementing an imaging system that would meet all of the department's needs. Vanderbilt University chose DocFinity for its document management needs.

At that point, the project team began redesigning work processes and the new document management system was implemented.

The solution included a document imaging module, hierarchical storage management module (HSM), and an optical character recognition (OCR) module. The new system was up and running in no time at all.

"DocFinity requires minimal user training time because it is intuitive and very user-friendly," comments Kim Smith, Senior Accountant and Manager of Operations for Document Imaging at Vanderbilt University. "I only wish all other software implementations went as smoothly as DocFinity's."

"We were pleased that we were able to help Vanderbilt increase the quality of their business processes," explains DocFinity's President, Scott Buchart. "They have always strived to change along with technology and implement the most innovative applications and DocFinity was the perfect solution."

Results & Benefits

Information is every organization's most valuable asset. Unfortunately, no matter how much data an organization stores, it has no business value unless users can readily find, retrieve and apply its content as needed.

Since implementing the ECM system, Vanderbilt University's Accounting department has experienced far-reaching benefits.

"We've noticed vast improvements in system efficiency and productivity," comments Hayes. "And, we're overjoyed with the reductions in cost that we've achieved by eliminating the need to outsource microfilm creation and increasing each person's productivity by migrating from paper files and microfilm to DocFinity's imaging technology."

All of the information can be scanned directly into the document management system within the department itself. This has proved to be a sizeable cost saver for the University.

The implemented system provides instant access to vital documents for the Accounting staff.

Currently, 30 people in the department can regularly answer questions for other departments by quickly retrieving the images of needed documents. They can then fax or email a copy of those images quickly and easily. According to Hayes, the overall time savings within the University have been astronomical!

"I love the ease of retrieval, no 'digging' – put in the request ID, and viola!" explains Suzanne Odum, Vanderbilt University's Supervisor of Data Entry.

Expanding Efficiency Across the Campus

The Accounting area is so pleased with the success of this project that the University is reviewing the possibility of taking advantage of using more applications for the system. This includes expansion into additional modules and enhanced integration with the department's other programs, allowing for a seamless interface between all aspects of the processes.

"The system is very easy to use," emphasizes Hayes. "Having a system that is easy to deploy and use is of utmost importance to our overall strategy; and as we continue to move forward, we find this is definitely the case with DocFinity."

The benefits have been so great in the Accounting Department that when the Payroll Office discovered the benefits of accessing timesheets via the imaging system, other areas began exploring ways to improve productivity using this technology.

The Human Resources department has implemented DocFinity to use during open enrollment and plans are in place to improve other processes.

Currently they are using COLD, Imaging, Archive, and Browser Access modules, and are already experiencing great results.

"We are committed to helping Vanderbilt University expand its efficiency throughout the University," remarks Buchart. "Together we feel that this is just the beginning at Vanderbilt, the integration and system benefit possibilities are infinite."

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