

Laserfiche ECM Blogs

Aloha, Efficiency!

Written by Laserfiche Staff

The County of Hawaii's Office of the Corporation Counsel serves as the legal representative of all the county's officers and employees—a total of 2,300 clients. But with legal records dating back to 1905, and with a growing archive of legal briefs, motions, memos and letters to manage, the office struggled to keep track of its paper.

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[Lincoln Ashida](#)
Corporation Counsel

Corporation Counsel Lincoln Ashida recalls that the situation was “slightly embarrassing” when he assumed office several years ago. A 100-foot-long hallway was lined with bankers' boxes full of files, and additional boxes were housed in other county buildings—including the basement of an old hospital. Locating a legal opinion, letter or other document often involved asking a senior employee if they could remember where the item had been stored.

“We were practicing law in a vacuum,” Ashida says. “The closest thing we had to an ‘information repository’ was the collective memories of the employees who had served the most years in our office.” Ashida particularly remembers the negative impact such inefficiency had on both service delivery and the office's credibility. “Sometimes, our clients had to produce copies of legal records for us because our staff either could not locate them or, worse, said that no such records existed.”

Sensing the urgency of the situation, Ashida and his staff began researching digital document management. After reviewing several systems, they selected Laserfiche®, primarily because of its ease of use and powerful search tools.

Once the installation was complete, staff began to scan legal opinions and other documents into the Laserfiche repository. As part of the scanning process, optical character recognition (OCR) technology indexes every word in every document. Thanks to this technology, staff can now easily perform keyword searches across the hundreds of thousands of documents that reside in the repository—something that was impossible when the office relied on a paper-based system.

Martha Rodillas, secretary to the corporation counsel, explains that keyword searches are particularly valuable when attorneys need to determine whether the office has addressed a particular issue in the past. “Prior to issuing a new opinion, our attorneys need to know whether our office has opined on this issue before and, if so, whether the opinion needs to be updated,” she says. “If there is nothing on point, there may be opinions on similar issues that can aid the attorneys in drafting their opinion. Finding these documents is critical for attorneys to do their jobs effectively.”

In addition to its comprehensive search capabilities, Laserfiche includes a number of other features that help the office’s staff to do their jobs more effectively. For example, customized template fields enable staff to record key document metadata, such as the date on which a document was approved for release and the name of the person who approved it. Electronic redaction tools enable staff to obscure sensitive information prior to releasing a document, while the ability to e-mail documents to clients from within the Laserfiche repository saves staff time and reduces photocopying costs. Publishing documents to CD has proved particularly valuable in speeding up the discovery process, because the office can provide opposing counsel with trial exhibits on a single disc, rather than having to ship multiple boxes of paper files.

Deputy Corporation Counsel Katherine Garson believes that one case in particular illustrates the ways Laserfiche has helped the office better serve its constituents. The case, which had been pending for more than two years, was scheduled to go to trial in August 2007. In mid-May, one of the attorneys assigned to the case decided to retire, while the other left to head another county department. This meant that the office had to get two new attorneys up to speed on the case and ready for trial—in less than 90 days.

Depositions were scheduled for June and July, and there was no way the attorneys would be able to read through the seventeen boxes of documents associated with the case prior to deposing the witnesses. Without missing a beat, staff immediately set to work scanning these documents into the Laserfiche repository so that the attorneys could quickly search through them to locate vital information. As part of the scanning process, staff also applied a special template to the most important documents, in which they recorded the document’s date. This metadata later proved critical when the attorneys needed to reconstruct the timeline in which certain events in the case occurred.

Watch Martha describe her Laserfiche success in her own words.

Garson recalls that during the depositions, the county's attorneys were just as prepared as the other side's, even though they'd only been working on the case for a matter of weeks. Thanks to Laserfiche, the county's attorneys could also quickly call up exhibits on their computer screens, rather than having to rummage through boxes or file folders. "Perhaps the most memorable part of these depositions," she says, "was intimidating the other attorneys with our organization."

The week before the trial was set to begin, the county received a settlement offer from the other side. "It was a great deal for the county, and we're glad we were able to settle the case without going to trial," Garson says. "But it's important to note that, thanks to Laserfiche, our attorneys were ready for the trial, despite the fact that they'd just been assigned to the case."

The office is currently in the process of installing Web Access™ so that attorneys can access the Laserfiche repository while they're in court or attending meetings away from the office. Ashida and his staff also have plans to implement the Audit Trail™ module to track user activity and the Quick Fields™ Bates Numbering utility to automatically assign an identifier to each scanned document. And Rodillas definitely plans to attend the 2008 Laserfiche Institute Conference to build on everything she learned last year.

Whatever the future holds, Ashida is confident that Laserfiche will continue to help his office provide exemplary service. "Our office vision statement is, 'We are the answer.'" Laserfiche has furthered this vision by helping us readily answer our clients' questions, whether by producing an organized history of all the documents associated with a certain case or controversy, locating legal opinions concerning any subject matter, or organizing the large numbers of documents in our litigation files," he says. "Ultimately, no software, program or other tool has been as valuable to our office as Laserfiche."



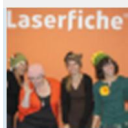
"The Office of the Corporation Counsel shows how digital document management can streamline every aspect of the municipal attorney's workflow, from conducting research to exchanging information with opposing counsel to preparing exhibits for trial."

Nien-Ling Wacker
Laserfiche CEO
(Shown with Martha Rodillas)

Laserfiche President and CEO Nien-Ling Wacker discussed the office during her recent keynote address at Hawaii's Fifth Annual Statewide Municipal Attorney's Training Conference. "The Office of the Corporation Counsel shows how digital document management can streamline every aspect of the municipal attorney's workflow, from conducting research to exchanging information with opposing counsel to preparing exhibits for trial," she says. "I congratulate the office on the efficiency gains and cost savings they've realized, and I invite other municipal attorneys to look to the County of Hawaii to see how digital document management fits the rhythm of the way attorneys work."

Rodillas agrees with this assessment: "We would definitely recommend Laserfiche to other municipal attorneys and government offices, and we invite other municipal attorneys who are considering Laserfiche or who are just getting started with Laserfiche to contact us." In fact, the office has been so successful that the county plans to install Laserfiche in seven additional departments in 2008. These departments, like the Office of the Corporation Counsel, will receive technical support from ECS Imaging, a Laserfiche reseller based in Riverside, CA.

Rodillas thinks back to the days before Laserfiche, when finding a critical document involved searching through the hundreds of bankers' boxes lining the hallway. "Laserfiche has certainly taken us to a higher level," she says.



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