Laserfiche ECM Blogs

Precise Processes

Written by Meghann Wooster

When manufacturing medical devices such as spinal fusion cages, knee replacements, hip replacements, bone screws and the like, precision is essential. Deviating from product specifications by even a miniscule amount can cause serious problems when a physician attempts to implant the device in a patient.

As a contract manufacturing company that specializes in medical device implants and surgical instruments, precision is a chief concern for RMS. For over forty years, the company has ensured the accuracy and quality of its products, spurring expansion and business growth. But as the organization grew, some of its processes failed to evolve along with it.

Quantifiable Benefits:

- Recouped initial investment within the first year.
- Saved $70,000 through the automatic generation of DHRs alone ($50,000 on outside service and $20,000 on labor/storage).
- Cut order processing time from 8–10 weeks down to just 72 hours.
- Converted storage space into manufacturing space.
- Saved over 200 hours of staff time annually by automating the AP process.
- Eased FDA audits with a comprehensive audit trail showing who has created, moved or approved any given document.

"As a contract manufacturer, we fulfill a substantial number of jobs every year," explains Michael Eklund, information systems coordinator at RMS. "We used to place all of the order information into a file folder and pass it around to multiple teams throughout our 155,000 square foot machine shop. As you can probably guess, files went missing and people spent a lot of time trying to track them down."

In order to improve the efficiency of its manufacturing processes, RMS began to look for a technology solution that would:

- Store information in a reliable, consistent form.
- Electronically route orders to multiple manufacturing teams.
- Increase employee accountability and decrease wasted time.
- Automate repetitive manual tasks.
- Guarantee that essential, job-related information could always be found.

After considering multiple technology vendors, RMS selected Laserfiche because of its comprehensive capture, search and workflow functionality, as well as the strength of Laserfiche reseller Crabtree Companies.

Leveraging Laserfiche Workflow for Business Process Management

RMS relies heavily on Workflow to accelerate shared business processes across its plants in Minnesota and Tennessee. "Our biggest accomplishment is our 'green folder system,'" says Eklund. "It's what we use to distribute the information that's necessary for creating every instrument and every device."

As the first step in constructing the green folder system, key RMS stakeholders came together to define and standardize the sequence of steps necessary to electronically distribute new order information to machinists and engineers.

"From a management perspective, developing the green folder system helped us to identify inefficiency and created consensus around the best way to eliminate it," says Eklund. "It was clear that using Laserfiche Workflow to electronically route information was the best way to accomplish our goals."

Using Workflow's graphical user interface, RMS configured the system to perform activities based on the newly defined steps and sequence. When a new product is requisitioned:

- Order information including POs, prints, quotes, and manufacturing data is scanned into Laserfiche.
- Order information is electronically—and automatically—delivered to the departments involved in the manufacturing process.
- Department heads digitally sign off on the information.
- Supervisors can log into Laserfiche and see which departments have acknowledged receipt of the information.

"In the past," says Eklund, "employees would physically walk hard copy folders between departments on the plant floor. It was hard to figure out which departments had seen what, and where exactly each order was in the manufacturing process. Thanks to Workflow, information now has a clear and consistent path around the factory floor. It never gets lost and it's easy to track exactly what's going on at any given time."

Today, RMS has eight major workflows in effect across the company. According to Eklund, it only took a matter of weeks to get the primary workflow written and running. "From an IT perspective," he says, "one of the best features is how easy it is to change and test the various workflows. Four of our major workflows could halt production if they stopped working properly. Because it's so easy to make adjustments, we never have to worry about downtime."

Ensuring Access and Saving Time with WebLink and Quick Fields

Aside from using Workflow to automate and streamline key business processes, RMS employs Laserfiche WebLink to provide employees with immediate access to job–critical information; it also leverages Quick Fields to cut down on manual data entry and save staff time.

WebLink is a secure Web publishing tool that distributes information to authorized users. Designed to protect the core content repository, WebLink prevents users from altering, deleting or tampering with digital data. At RMS, WebLink has made life much easier for machinists, who now have instant access to engineering blueprints and specs from virtually any computer on the factory floor.

"Prior to Laserfiche, our machinists had to wait for engineers to show them the prints and specs for the various parts they were responsible for producing," explains Eklund. "Today they can access that information directly. It saves a lot of time."

Quick Fields is another time–saving tool for the company, one that enables automated data capture and indexing. According to Eklund, the company uses Quick Fields for a variety of tasks, including:

- **Creating Device History Records (DHR).** Contract medical device manufacturers are mandated by the FDA to create and preserve DHRs indefinitely. Employees used to generate these records manually, and because RMS processes so many jobs each year, this meant hundreds of hours of employee time spent on data entry. Today, the company includes barcodes on job–related paperwork so that when a device is shipped, a DHR is automatically generated by scanning the barcode and ensuring that the record is properly named.

- **Electronically filing accounts payable paperwork**. RMS uses barcodes on accounts payable paperwork so that it is electronically filed after it is scanned into the system. This practice saves the accounting department two hours every Friday.

RMS also appreciates how much more quickly employees across the company can locate indexed information contained in the Laserfiche repository. "Nobody has to search through filing cabinets anymore," says Eklund. "With Laserfiche, it only takes 30 seconds to find exactly what you need."

Moving Forward

Although Eklund acknowledges that it is difficult to put a dollar amount on the savings RMS has experienced over the last four years as a result of implementing Laserfiche, he believes that the company recouped its initial investment within the first year.

To get the most out of the system, the company is currently in the process of upgrading to Laserfiche 8, which features:

- Greater interoperability with Microsoft Office applications.
- An enhanced system architecture that simplifies firewall configuration and improves performance over wide-area networks.
- A redesigned Workflow module that's built on the Windows Workflow Foundation engine and uses the .NET framework.

Eklund's parting advice to IT professionals who are interested in implementing Laserfiche is to "be patient. Users will follow your lead once they realize how good the system is. Laserfiche is the heartbeat of our company. It's a great system to administer, and a great system to use."

Meghann Wooster is a senior writer at Laserfiche, helping information management and IT professionals optimize their use of enterprise content management (ECM) software. Follow her on twitter at @LFMeghann