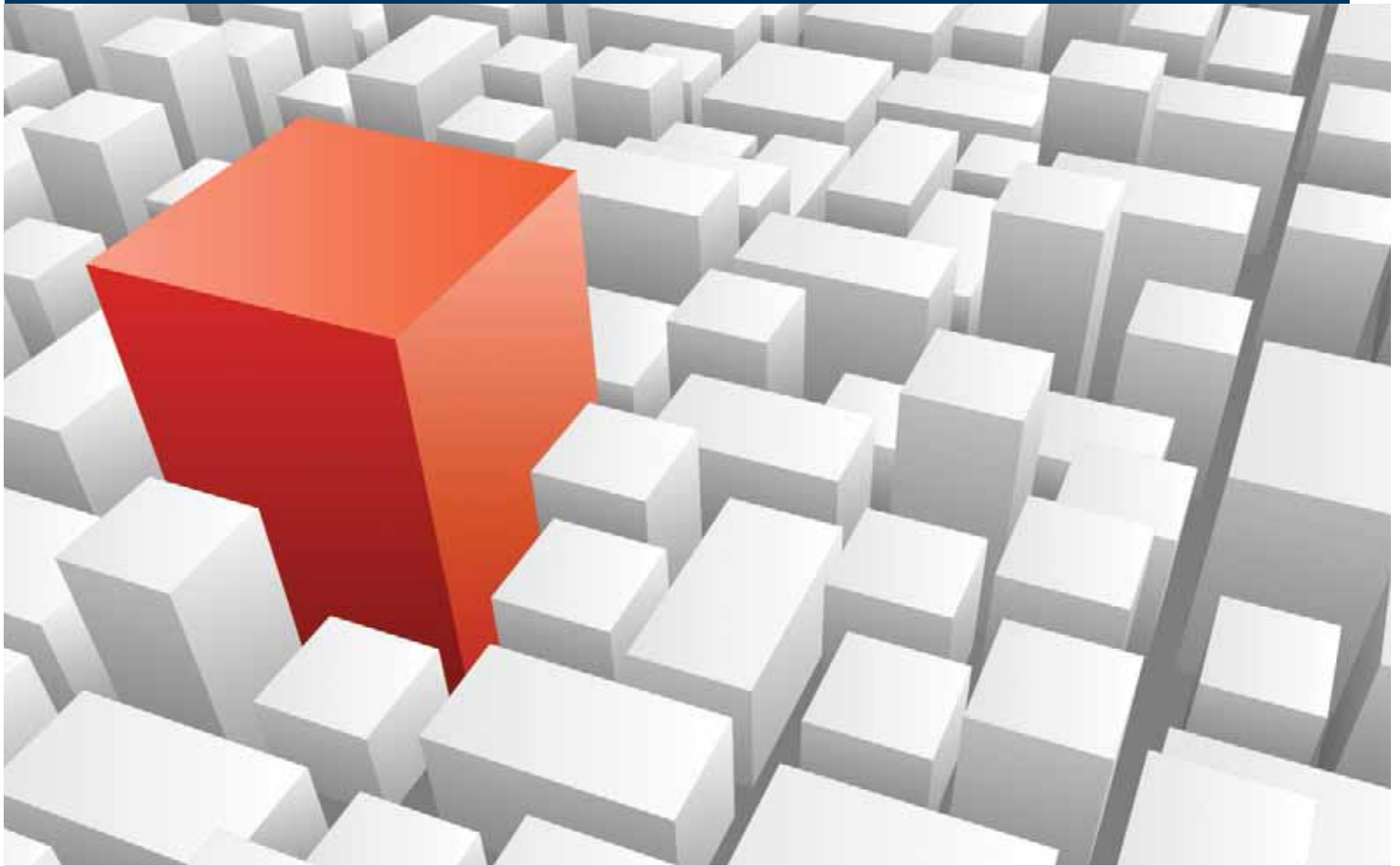# Enterprise Government Case Study

Collin County, Texas

Laserfiche®

Enterprise Government Case Study

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About Collin County

- **ORGANIZATION PROFILE**

  Collin County, TX, is home to the Dallas/Fort Worth area's fastest-growing northeast suburbs.

- **SITUATION:**

  The County saw its population increase nearly 50%—from nearly 500,000 in 2000 to 725,000 by 2007—straining the county's infrastructure. As Records Manager Margaret Anderson puts it, "The exponential growth rate of our County is reflected in the increased demand for essential County services." The governing body of the County, the Commissioners' Court, then issued a strategic direction to improve efficiency and customer service. "This caused us to look at an enterprise solution for managing our records with emphasis on migrating to electronic records," Anderson explains. "We had to reduce our paper and microfilm records volume."

- **SOLUTION:**

  In 2007 a committee drawn from several County offices (District Clerk, County Clerk, Auditor, Sheriff, Tax Office, Juvenile Probation, Adult Probation, Purchasing, IT and Records) selected Laserfiche as the standard for document and records management for Collin County. Anderson looked to Laserfiche for three things: its scalability and extensibility; the Laserfiche Toolkit, for integrating Laserfiche with existing and planned software applications; and the Records Management Edition (RME), in order to manage retention for electronic documents. "What I like about Laserfiche is that I can manage electronic documents, paper, microfilm and audio and video files enterprise-wide," Anderson says.

  That enterprise-wide vision especially appealed to IT Director Caren Skipworth, who saw Laserfiche as a standard for information management. "Laserfiche fits into our enterprise approach in that every department could use it effectively, it could run in our environment—as opposed to the other way around—and we'd be able to support a single system ourselves with minimal staff," she says.

- **BENEFITS:**

  "We've definitely enjoyed faster response time when a customer or citizen requests a file. Even better, multiple users can access the same record from different locations simultaneously," says Anderson. "The internal audit staff is able to review case files and receipts as part of their auditing process—freeing records staff from pulling paper files for auditors to review."

  Benefits are most pronounced in the Auditor's Office:

  - 300 hours of staff time saved annually in the Auditor's accounts payable office.
  - Reduction in volume of file folders and labels formerly used to place each paper copy of a check and the backup into a separate folder on their departmental shelving.
  - Quicker payments processing, saving 10 days' worth of interest.
  - Elimination of 400 boxes and associated handling and storage costs.

Benefits for the IT Department:

- "We are able to support Laserfiche in our standard enterprise architecture environments, using blade servers with VMware and N Series storage and with existing server administrative staff—we did not have to increase any IT staff to support the environment," adds Skipworth. "Once we are completely off the legacy imaging system we will reduce our software maintenance cost by $18,000."

- IT staff requirements reduced from four-person legacy imaging system support staff serving just two departments to a three-person staff able to support Laserfiche enterprise-wide.

AT A GLANCE

GOVERNANCE:

- Auditing
- Business continuity
- Enterprise risk management
- Enterprise search and retrieval
- Information life cycle management
- Transparent records management

INTEGRATIONS:

- CMS
- GIS

PROCESSES:

- Accounts payable
- Accounts receivable
- Property tax processing

Overview

Since implementing Laserfiche in 2007, Collin County, TX, home to the Dallas/Fort Worth area's fastest-growing northeast suburbs, has enjoyed enterprise-wide success automating and integrating its business processes. But as Records Manager Margaret Anderson points out, it's been a direct result of enterprise-wide pre-planning working equally with the county's myriad departments.

Collin County saw its population increase nearly 50%—from approximately 500,000 in 2000 to 725,000 by 2007—straining the County's infrastructure. As Anderson puts it, "The exponential growth rate of our County is reflected in the increased demand for essential County services." The governing body of the County, the Commissioners' Court, then issued a strategic direction to improve efficiency and customer service. "This caused us to look at an enterprise solution for managing our records with emphasis on migrating to electronic records," she explains. "We had to reduce our paper and microfilm records volume."

The County published its RFP in December 2006, and soon after a committee drawn from several county offices (District Clerk, County Clerk, Auditor, Sheriff, Tax Office, Juvenile Probation, Adult Probation, Purchasing, IT and Records) determined that Laserfiche was the best fit for Collin County.

Collin County by the Numbers

27: towns and cities in the County

50%: population growth in just seven years

15,000: reels of microfilm

18,450: boxes of paper stored in multiple locations

2 million: archived images in the District Clerk's system

4.3 million: images added by the Sheriff's Office annually

10: days (per payment) saved by eliminating paper payment processing in the Tax Assessor/Collector's Office

400: records storage boxes eliminated just in the Tax Assessor's Office

300: staff hours saved in the Auditor's Acounts Payable office

8,000: original marriage licenses dating back to the 1870s that have been scanned and will soon be available from the County's public Website for researchers

Deployment

Working with Laserfiche reseller MCCi, Collin County mapped out a five-year enterprise deployment plan to implement Laserfiche. MCCi Senior Project Manager Rigoberto Ruiz conducted gap analyses to assess the county's needs and develop a timeline for implementation. "My job was really to dissect the plan into smaller pieces to keep the project manageable and in-house as far as the County having adequate staffing for each part of the project." An advantage, he notes, was Anderson's IT-savvy background with databases and indexing. "Margaret was really empowered to grab the bull by the horns as far as moving things along."

Collin County IT Director Caren Skipworth's IT team began installing Laserfiche in mid-2007, followed by its first production implementation that November, starting with 100 user licenses and 500 WebLink retrieval licenses to accommodate cross-departmental use. Through ongoing deployment and integrations with existing line-of-business applications within departments, the County has since enjoyed continued and expanding enterprise-wide success automating and integrating its business processes with Laserfiche as the county-wide standard for document and records management.

But as Anderson points out, the resulting success of this ambitious initiative has been a direct result of enterprise-wide pre-planning that gave the initiative multi-departmental support from the start. "The success of the project is directly attributable to getting these larger user departments involved in both identifying the requirements for the RFP and making the selection," she says.

Key support has come from Skipworth's IT Department, which has ensured the value of the County's Laserfiche investment through a dedicated seven-member "Build Team" of programmers and support personnel to handle ongoing deployment, migrations and integrations. Joe Fierro, Applications Manager, immediately saw the potential reach of Laserfiche to accommodate the complex needs of the County. "I've been with the County 19 years and I had a lot of experience with developing our in-house records management system, so I was very aware of the demands of each department. I saw Laserfiche was flexible enough that we could do a lot with it."

The result has been a five-year deployment that is already more than half complete—and whose effect is being felt enterprise-wide. As Skipworth puts it, "When you're talking about establishing a standard that's being used by 700-800 users, that goes a long way toward establishing efficiency."

District Clerk's Office

The first offices to deploy were the District Clerk, County Clerk (which handles vital records, land recording, and county court at law records), District Attorney, Auditor and Records Department. As Skipworth explains, "We concentrated on moving the heavy paper-producing or handling departments to Laserfiche. Our goal is to reduce our square footage for paper storage and move toward electronic records management and manage retention with Laserfiche retention rules capability."

Upon Ruiz's recommendation, conversion from paper to digital files was done gradually. "My advice was to start with two or three document types—your easiest ones plus one of your harder ones—as pilot projects to keep it simple and get staff used to how the system works. That way you allow for a learning curve."

The County had to migrate records from its two legacy imaging system dating back to the '80s—including one that served only two departments but required four support personnel. "Records was actually already scanning for the DA and Auditor, so we switched this department to Laserfiche first," Anderson explains.

In the District Clerk's office, a massive backlog conversion of documents from 1846-2000 resulted in two million images added to the county's Laserfiche system. "While we eliminated some paper files, we did keep the 1800s paper files for their historical value," Anderson notes.

Tax Office

By September 2008, Laserfiche implementation began in the Tax Office, immediately focusing on integration to optimize business processes. "We added a property tax receipts interface with our RT Lawrence receipt processing system to capture them directly into Laserfiche without an extra step," explains Anderson. County IT staff were—excuse the pun—taxed with other projects, so they left the development of the custom application to MCCi. The integration takes the receipt information the system exports as an ASCII file, uses it to populate Laserfiche files and folders and then imports the images associated with the files.

One small step for receipts processing, one giant leap for process efficiency: Because the tax assessor/collector relied on paper documents, the 10 days it took to process mail resulted in over $1 million lost each day in interest. "Now we process payments much more quickly—up to 10 days faster," Anderson says. "In fact, we eliminated almost 400 records storage boxes just with this one Laserfiche implementation."

The County was able to get the Assessor's Office up and running by the end of the year to coincide with the heaviest period of property tax receipts.

Anderson adds that another 400-500 records storage boxes will be eliminated in 2010 when the Tax Office Motor Vehicle division begins scanning state receipts into the system. "These receipts are currently available only in paper format and require an average of 30 minutes of staff time to retrieve. According to ROI projections, the County will be able to purchase two large scanners and still break even within eight months."

Next year Anderson also foresees an integration with new property tax processing software. It's not a question of if it will integrate since, as Anderson explains, "Everything we get now, we have right in the requirements that it needs to be able to integrate with Laserfiche. That way, we're managing one system instead of different imaging systems. From an IT perspective, it's one system. We're not increasing our overhead burden for any one system, and it's flexible and scalable enough to add on pieces over time. Although," she laughs, "we're adding to it pretty quickly."

County Clerk's Office

The County Clerk's Office uses Laserfiche RME as the back end for the court's Odyssey case management system, where it provides records retention for closed and inactive case files. Before implementing Laserfiche, staff in the County's courts had difficulty finding information due to disparate filing and legacy imaging systems used in the Sheriff's and other departments.

"We also had over 15,000 reels of microfilm and 18,450 boxes of paper stored throughout the County," Anderson explains. "Files were everywhere and we couldn't keep up with the demand. We had to ensure that staff did not unintentionally destroy records that needed to be retained, and we wanted to implement a case management system (CMS). But we also had to manage all the paper. The records management system (RMS) we chose needed to interface with this system and provide records management control for closed and disposed case files, as well as support documents."

> "The Texas Local Government Records Act basically says you either follow state-mandated retention schedules or you hold on to everything. Having Records Management Edition and making sure audit trails are in place allows us to manage risk. My view and Caren's is that whether a document is paper or electronic, you still have to manage both, and that's part of the functionality we look to Laserfiche RME for."
>
> Margaret Anderson

The Odyssey system had its own scanning interface, which meant it was perfect for getting information into the system. But owing to everything from server space to risk management, data governance and compliance standards, Anderson knew the CMS needed a robust records management back-end to complete the picture. "RME provides a standard methodology for administering the state mandated retention requirements for all records as well as providing an audit trail for dispositions. And all of this occurs in the background, so it's transparent to the user," she says.

Currently, Fierro and the County's "Build Team" are in the process of finalizing an integration between its Odyssey CMS and Laserfiche RME. The integration is an important one: "67% of the County's business is the courts and jails," explains Skipworth. "The biggest percentage of that 67% was handling paper."

And, thankfully, the integration has also been a relatively easy one. As Fierro notes, "Due to the way the Laserfiche Toolkit sets up the APIs, about all we've done is create DLLs [Dynamic Link Libraries] to pass the HTML metadata from Odyssey over to Laserfiche—it just makes the handshake more efficient. We haven't actually done that much programming. I have to credit Margaret [Anderson] with being so thorough in setting up the folders and retention information."

Fierro adds that for his staff, a benefit of working with Laserfiche is actually not having to work with it. "We have so many other projects going on," he says, "I don't have time to spend all day working on integrations. But that's the thing about the APIs and the Toolkit, it's so rich, once you do one integration, it's follow the yellow brick road."

Anderson realized the value of the County's Laserfiche system when a flood in May 2007 damaged nearly 1,000 boxes of records—many of them with no backup. "It's clear how important Laserfiche is for business continuity," she says. "Had those files been stored in Laserfiche, we wouldn't have needed to worry when the flood waters started rising. People worry about computers crashing, but in reality, paper documents are much more likely to be destroyed than digital ones."

After upgrading to Laserfiche 8 this year, Anderson has been particularly satisfied with its expanded functionality that allows storage of multiple values in a single template field. "Court cases often include multiple entries for a single field, so we can add multiple names/parties to a court case field. Civil cases, for instance, often have more than one plaintiff and/or more than one defendant," she explains.

The Future

Skipworth's Build Team has also integrated Laserfiche with its existing GIS application using GeoDocs to manage septic system records. "The vision is that most county records will be stored in Laserfiche and will be viewable over the internet—which offers better service and uses less paper," notes Skipworth.

More departments have been added to the system every year, with projects planned through 2012:

Collin County Deployment Timeline

June 2007 – Laserfiche reseller MCCi awarded bid to install Laserfiche in Collin County.

Sept. 2007 – Laserfiche installed in most paper-heavy departments.

Nov. 2007 – Laserfiche goes live.

Dec. 2007 – District Clerk and County Court at Law implementation.

May 2008 – Justice of the Peace implementation.

Aug. 2008 – Integration with property tax RT Lawrence system.

Feb. 2009 – Development Services begins using Laserfiche for septic tank permits.

April 2009 – Laserfiche 8.0 upgrade, implement Workflow, add GeoDocs GIS integration.

May 2009 – County Clerk Vitals implementation.

July 2009 – Sheriff's Office training and policy manuals stored in Laserfiche.

Oct. 2009 – DA staff to begin scanning or importing new documents directly into Laserfiche.

Nov. - Dec. 2009 – Tax Motor Vehicle and Auditor's office to begin scanning own documents.

Jan. 2010 – Web Access to be installed; Human Resources and Elections planned implementation; County Clerk public access for marriage licenses, foreclosures, and board/commission meeting minutes.

Spring 2010 – Property tax interface integration upgrade.

May 2010 – Engineering bond planning documentation implementation.

2011 – Sheriff's Office expanded implementation, CSCD (Adult Probation) implementation.

2011 - 2012 – Health Care Services to deploy Laserfiche to meet new EMR Medicare requirements.

"The way it's been, once the County departments initially see the product they find an immediate need for their office to automate current manual work processes," Skipworth explains. "Fortunately, Laserfiche is extremely user-friendly, which allows for a short start up time and requires minimal training for the end user."

With an implementation this extensive, there were understandably some hiccups along the way. "One of the mistakes we made was only purchasing one license each for Quick Fields, Zone OCR and Real-Time Lookup," Anderson admits. But with the approval of the FY2009 budget, the County is implementing additional licenses as part of upgrading to Laserfiche 8.

The biggest hurdle, however, hasn't been what functionality to implement. "I'd say one of our biggest initial challenges was helping departments understand their business processes so we could develop a records series plan tied to record management and retention," Anderson says. "It's really an educational process." Anderson and her team of what she calls "Customer Department Advocates" employ business plan questionnaires, user guides and demos of successful intra-county implementations, and even help departments choose the right scanners.

These Advocates identify training needs, review business processes, records series structure and templates, and scan sample boxes of files into Laserfiche so departmental staff can see how their records series and template structures will work in the new environment.

It's a forward-thinking approach, one that Skipworth terms, "planning for the people-side of change." But with an ambitious deployment and integration schedule carrying Skipworth's IT Department right through 2012, Collin County is proving, department by department, process by process, empowered user by empowered user, that the results are worth the wait—and the planning time.

Collin County's Steps for Success

- Get customers involved very early in the decision making process.

- Learn to manage change and project scope creep.

- Distributing roadmaps and project plans is as essential as communication with departmental users. "We use an internal SharePoint site to share information about the project, planning and implementation documents, and training materials," Anderson says.

- Ask business process questions to help departments understand their current processes and how they can take advantage of Laserfiche functionality to enhance them.

- Plan to respond to demand. "You have to learn to say no nicely."

- Design a plan to manage your electronic records.

- Think about your budget cycle.

- Work with your IT department. "Support from your IT Developer is critical."

Collin County IT Director Caren Skipworth was named Texas CIO of the Year in 2009 in recognition of her efforts promoting intergovernmental collaboration and providing innovative leadership to prove the value of IT initiatives both to departmental users and business managers alike. Not least of these has been the decision to implement Laserfiche as the enterprise-standard integrative middleware for document and records management used throughout Collin County.

"One of the visions I have from being here 19 years is that when we invest in something, I don't want to run the costs of the County up with different vendors selling different products to different departments. I want something that has the ability to apply to every department—whether that be the Sheriff's or the Auditor's Department—and be able to implement it in all these areas so that users of all levels of expertise can use it," Skipworth says.

She was drawn to Laserfiche not only for its ease of use for the end user, but also because a standardized system would make support more manageable and cost-effective.

"The benefit is that I have one standardized, enterprise document management and records management system, not three or four or six vendors all doing the same thing. I have standard, supported processes so my staff doesn't have to learn six different products. We had a legacy imaging system that was used by just two departments that required four staff members to support it. The Laserfiche system only requires a support staff of two—and that's serving the whole County."

She acknowledges that one of the challenges of deploying anything enterprise-wide means satisfying departmental concerns, but notes that Laserfiche deployment hasn't met much push-back. "We've really had a relatively easy time getting buy-in from different departments. We follow a change management methodology that encourages the front-end user to have a level of accountability. Laserfiche really lends itself to that desktop user because it's easy to use. I think it also helps that as county employees move around between departments, they're used to the look and feel of Laserfiche."

As an IT Director, Laserfiche deployment has helped Skipworth provide better service as well as ease of management, owing to its unique way of balancing her need for central control with departments' needs for—and the efficiency that comes with—exercising local flexibility.

"Laserfiche has a really nice way of letting me establish rules centrally that can then be administered locally," Skipworth says. "Being able to set the rules for records retention allows me to manage hard drive space. And once the rules are set, administration is done by the department heads—they can take control. It keeps my expenses down. The server team has repeatable, standardized processes so they're more efficient."

She sees this flexibility as most evident in the need to set different retention schedules for the court records that account for two-thirds of Collin County's day-to-day business.

"Instead of different management of different systems according to different departmental needs, Laserfiche can handle automated, repeatable processes in every department. For instance, retention schedules are different for DWI and Divorce records, but Laserfiche can handle that because of its flexibility."

It's this harmony that maximizes County resources across the spectrum—from managing servers and ensuring end-user and departmental buy-in, to evolving processes and procedures in a way that proves once and for all that legacy systems and their legacy attitudes are truly obsolete when a technologically-empowered future looks this bright already. "I believe technology is the catalyst for change," says Skipworth. "Laserfiche benefits the County and our taxpayers by lowering the overall support cost of an enterprise-wide records management system."

Laserfiche®
Institute®

The Laserfiche Institute teaches staff, resellers, and current and prospective clients how to use Laserfiche most effectively. As part of this mission, the Institute conducts more than 500 Webinars each year, covering a variety of topics. The Institute also hosts an annual conference where members of the Laserfiche community attend presentations and network to share ideas and learn best practices. Additionally, the Institute conducts a number of regional training sessions and provides resellers with content for more than 100 user conferences each year.

The Institute also develops and distributes educational material through the Laserfiche Support Site. On this Website, clients can access training videos, participate in online forums and download technical papers and presentations that help them become savvier ECM users.

For more information, contact:
info@laserfiche.com

Laserfiche
3545 Long Beach Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90807
United States

Phone: 562-988-1688
Toll-free: 800-985-8533 (within the U.S.)
Fax: 562-988-1886
Web: www.laserfiche.com

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