

Don't Suffer From Silo Syndrome

▲ Having abandoned its disparate legacy systems, financial services provider CIT now gets 99.9% uptime from a centralized imaging solution.

by Tom von Gunden



CIT's Heath Blount has seen an outsourced imaging solution take control of the 3.5 million scanned pages the company archives each year.

Contrary to the common meaning of the phrase, locating a particular corporate document does not have to be “like finding a needle in a haystack.” By using automated tools for managing electronic images of documents, users can keep file retrieval from being labor-intensive, time-consuming, or unpredictable. However, even automated tools won't prevent delays and disappointments if users can't identify or don't have access to the right haystack. At CIT, a commercial and consumer lending and leasing company, there were, until recently, a lot of haystacks. As the company grew by geographic expansion and by acquisition, it added or inherited disparate document management systems scattered across its corporate countryside. That meant important documents were hidden behind, if not completely locked within, separate systems in particular departments and business units. “Each business group went out and bought its own imaging solution, and we picked up some additional systems through acquisitions,” says Heath Blount, CIT's VP of application development. “We ended up with multiple copies of various vendors' systems, as well as a few home-grown solutions. It was virtually impossible to share information among all of those systems.”

As the application infrastructure became increasingly fragmented and expensive to support, CIT became determined to tear down its document management silos and move over to a centralized system. In fact, it decided not only to clear the landscape but also to keep it cleared. “CIT's core competency is providing financial services. That's our business,” Blount says. “But, because we were maintaining the hardware, the scanning applications, and the data centers, CIT was fast becoming something it doesn't want to be — an imaging company.” So, CIT now outsources almost all activities involved in receiving, scanning, and storing documents from imaging solutions provider Archive Systems, Inc.

Photos by Ed Sewell



Multiple Systems Multiply The Mess

Given the recent past of its document management efforts, CIT's disinclination about managing its own documents is understandable. Blount recalls the not-so-distant days when CIT was still stuffing cabinet after cabinet with paper. In response to customer requests or in preparation for litigation, employees often needed to retrieve archived contracts, titles, loan applications, credit approvals, and so on. "We had file rooms in every facility, and we were constantly copying, faxing, and mailing documents related to deals that had been booked or were going to be booked," says Blount. "Tracking the original copy of a document was difficult. Sometimes, the chance of retrieving originals of all relevant documents was slim to none."

Version control remained a problem even after CIT brought in document imaging systems. With multiple systems yet no common archive for those systems, documents were still getting copied to various places — this time, electronically. For example, when corporate realignment led to altered responsibilities for particular business units, documents might be migrated from one department's system to that in another department. During the transition, documents might reside in — and be accessed and revised within — two different systems. Furthermore, users often had to have access to more than one system to retrieve all pertinent documents. "After a round of realignments, users might end up having desktop icons for three different imaging systems that were now installed on their machines," Blount says.

Don't Get Swamped By On-Site Storage

When CIT went on the market for a centralized system, it didn't have to look far. One of the companies it acquired had already been using Archive Systems' Archive DocuLogic imaging and archiving solution. "The key selection criterion was the ability to provide a full spectrum of services," says Blount. "The Archive DocuLogic system offers document scanning, and it manages both electronic and hard copy documents stored at Archive Systems' facility."

CIT is currently in the process of migrating various business units over to the Archive DocuLogic system. For each business unit that needs to convert its paper and electronic documents, Archive Systems develops a prototype system based on what the unit needs to do with documents. In some cases, internal CIT IT staff write the data extraction

Installation Profile

Technology User: A commercial and consumer finance company with nearly \$50 billion in assets under management, CIT (Livingston, NJ) provides lending and leasing services for a global customer base. In securing, servicing, and selling customer contracts, CIT receives more than 3.5 million pages of loan- and lease-related documents each year.

Problem: CIT maintained hard copy file storage in several of its facilities. When CIT did purchase electronic imaging technologies, it did so department by department, acquisition by acquisition. The resulting "silos" of document management solutions forced users to learn and navigate multiple systems.

Solution: CIT decided to roll out an enterprise-wide document imaging solution, Archive DocuLogic from Archive Systems, Inc. (Fairfield, NJ), which hosts the solution and maintains both the electronic and hard copy archives. In addition to making it possible to quickly bring new business units onto a centralized imaging platform, the Archive DocuLogic solution has helped CIT to increase its document management systems' uptime from 85% to 99.9%.

programs for converting the documents. In situations where the CIT unit does not have in-house expertise, technical support staff from Archive Systems handle the full conversion process.

After a business unit has gone live on the system, the process of getting new documents into the system occurs in one of two ways. For operations in the United States, all documents are sent directly to Archive Systems' facility. Because of issues related to time delays and shipping regulations, CIT facilities in Canada and Europe typically scan their own documents before forwarding the electronic images to the Archive DocuLogic system. Users can then access the scanned documents via Archive DocuLogic's browser-based user interface.

Once document images have been entered into the system, they are stored online — in Archive Systems' primary and remote disaster recovery sites — on large EMC Symmetrix boxes. "Document images have traditionally been stored on optical jukeboxes," says Blount. "But, the EMC units are capable of storing large capacities of images on very reliable magnetic media." Currently, CIT is putting 3.5 million pages of scanned images per year on the Archive DocuLogic system.

Keep Users And Systems Up And Running

As for benefits of using the Archive DocuLogic system, Blount notes several. Training has become much less time-consuming because users don't have to learn multiple systems. "In the past, many users ended up not even using the systems that were in place," Blount admits. "Now, users can be up and running on Archive DocuLogic after only one and a half hours of training." Customer service has also improved with the addition of functionality that had been missing from CIT's legacy systems. "With Web access, customer service representatives don't have to leave their workstations to locate requested documents," says Blount. "And, now that they can simply fax or e-mail electronic documents from within the system, they can keep the customer captive while they provide service." Finally, Blount notes that the availability of the document management system has vastly improved. "By replacing our existing systems, we have moved from 85% uptime to 99.9% uptime." □

For More Info. On Archive Systems, Inc.

Go To www.archive systems.com