

ViewWise Enables Paperless Title Insurance

By Greg Rapport

Case Study Subject:

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When it comes to residential, commercial and industrial Title Insurance, Cortes & Hay offers the necessary combination of experience and expertise across the entire range of professional services. Since 1971, their business has been defined by customer-centered relationships that are as personal as they are professional.

To properly serve their customers, Cortes & Hay must create files of documents that need to be distributed to appropriate parties. The documents that comprise a title insurance binder come from two places. There are documents generated internally, and documents that come from external sources.

Early adapters of technology, Cortes & Hay's first computers used DOS to automate internally generated documents. In 1997, they switched from DOS to a software program specific to the title insurance industry, called WinTitle, which is compatible with the Windows operating system.

WinTitle files must be printed and combined with external hard copy files generated from deed copies, mortgage copies and easement copies to make a complete binder. The combined package of computer-generated paper and hard copy files (typically 25-100 pages) is distributed to the attorneys, lenders and borrowers. Cortes & Hay retains a hard copy file for their archive. The final package can be from one-to seven-inches thick. Cortes & Hay produces 120-180 packages per month. Given the recent frenzy to take advantage of low interest rates, they can produce over 2,000 packages per year.

The Paper Monster

For 30 years, Cortes & Hay stored files in filing cabinets in the 1,500 sq. ft. basement of their original office. As their business grew, so did their mountain of paper. The basement was transformed into rows and rows of filing cabinets. When there was no more space, they rented additional storage space offsite under a bank building. Their backfile grew until it totaled hundreds of thousands of files. During that period, they not only needed to keep those files, they needed to have access to the information contained in them.

“Keeping all that paper can be critical for many reasons,” says Michele Newhouse, Vice President Operations of Cortes & Hay, “We have to keep everything for seven years, but it can be a great benefit to keep everything forever. We often have to search back through 60 years of clear title. If we save the

back titles, we can search in a couple of hours what might have taken two weeks. We've accumulated a lot of back titles. Whenever we do a search, there is no point in throwing out what we learn."

Along with Newhouse, company President David Hay wanted a more efficient alternative to the growing mountain of paper. The two envisioned a paperless office. Together, they began researching electronic alternatives to paper in January 2001 with an eye towards a completely electronic archive. Hay and Newhouse went to technology shows and called other title agencies to learn anything that would offer a solution. It wasn't easy.

Finding an Acceptable Strategy

"We had a lot of people come to the office and do product demos," recalls Newhouse, "...but they all wanted to promote a scan-to-jukebox strategy that seemed as inadequate as a file cabinet, only smaller. The scanning technology we were shown couldn't read handwritten documentation and we had to do a lot of abstracting. Also, the scanners had trouble with odd-sized paper. We just wanted a simple, efficient storage, search and retrieval mechanism and couldn't seem to find one."

Meanwhile, Cortes & Hay's business skyrocketed. They had so much production work that researching new technology solutions had to be put on the back burner while the Company concentrated on meeting customer demands. During this period, however, the increase in paper files caused by the upturn in business underscored the need to act.

In mid-2002, Cortes & Hay hired Pathfinder Consulting Group, LLC to host their web site and serve as IT consultants. After extensive research, Pathfinder recommended Computhink's ViewWise as the central software application of the paperless office.

According to Newhouse, "We were so busy that Pathfinder people would come in at 6:30 AM for meetings and were gone by 9:00AM so we could start our day! We knew we wanted to go paperless but, once we went paperless, we didn't want to have to figure out where everything was. We needed everyone to be able to make queries from their desktop to find any file."

It's Never Been Done Before and We Need an Upgrade

Says Charlie Levin, President of Pathfinder Consulting, "We were hired to deal with an overwhelming amount of paper documents and find the best solution. We surveyed the market of available products and found that no product had ever successfully integrated with WinTitle. After many product demonstrations from numerous companies, only Computhink had an appropriate solution. Computhink demonstrated how ViewWise could provide a seamless integration with WinTitle, and the decision to recommend ViewWise to Cortes & Hay became easy."

For Pathfinder and Computhink, the final piece of the solution puzzle involved scalability. Cortes & Hay needed to deliver service to their headquarters and one additional branch office immediately. Additionally, they were considering adding more branch offices. Their existing server couldn't handle the load and Levin was hesitant to ask them to spend a fortune for server muscle that they might not fully utilize. Levin suggested remote hosting, which required Computhink to upgrade ViewWise to make it compatible to Microsoft's Terminal Server.

Computhink promised they would have ViewWise updated to work with the terminal server by early 2003. "The waiting was the hardest part," remembers Newhouse, "I heard horror stories of software companies taking forever to release upgrades, but I have to say Computhink was true to their word."

By February 2003, ViewWise was up and running and making an immediate impact in the Cortes & Hay offices. Now, Cortes & Hay has one scanner station that works on new files as well as the backfile. Hard copy is indexed and scanned into the electronic file, where it combines with documents generated by WinTitle. Additionally, Cortes & Hay can email and fax through ViewWise. All desktops have immediate access to the resulting files, searching via a variety of index factors.

Return on Investment

“It’s easy to see how ViewWise has transformed our office into a modern marvel of efficiency,” says Newhouse. “It’s given us the time to write more business and be more responsive to the increase in demand for our services.

The most direct return on investment comes in the cost savings of time and storage space. It used to take a minimum of 15 minutes to find, copy and replace a file. Now, it takes two minutes to do the same job (and you don’t have to leave your desk). Plus, you can email or fax the entire file with a few keystrokes. Before ViewWise, if a file was stored offsite, you might not be able to get it until later in the day. Now, everything is at our fingertips.”

As the backfile is converted to ViewWise, Cortes & Hay is paying less and less for storage space. Eventually, they won’t have the need for paper storage. This represents a savings of many thousands of dollars over time.

Conclusion

“We are very satisfied with the results,” concludes Newhouse. “Computhink has worked very well with Pathfinder to ensure our satisfaction. Our cost savings is dramatic, we are in an efficient position to take advantage of higher profit potential, and we have a happier work environment. When all is said and done, ViewWise is spectacular.”

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