

STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Canon Records Management Team Helps Eliminate a Backlog of Thousands of Legal Documents

A leading law firm engaged Canon Business Process Services to provide office services and handle the firm's day-to-day records management needs including indexing, scanning and filing documents such as pleadings and legal correspondence. Day one into their relationship, however, the firm needed for Canon to turn its attention to an important project. The goal was to eliminate a backlog of thousands of files that had accumulated under the tenure of a former records management services provider. Most importantly, the firm needed for Canon to implement a solution without incurring additional costs or staff. The Canon team stepped up to the challenge.



THE CHALLENGE

The firm's backlog—consisting of indexing, imaging, entering data into the firm's records management system and filing the documents—was significant. It totaled approximately 117,000 pages and over 7,000 documents that included pleadings and legal correspondence.

When the Canon team assumed responsibility for managing the firm's records from the previous vendor, there weren't enough resources to address the inherited backlog while simultaneously handling current work. At the time, between one and three

Canon staff members were assigned to work with specific practice groups. Each team member managed the entire life cycle of records entrusted to them. This life cycle spanned indexing and imaging physical records, entering the data into the records management system, and then returning the records to the appropriate folders and storing them in the file room.

The challenge for Canon was to find a solution, within current staffing and budget levels, for reducing and eventually eliminating the backlog while supporting the daily records management requirements of the firm. The firm had also transitioned to a new records management platform. This required the Canon team to master new application tools and features. Without the option of adding new staff dedicated to managing the backlog, Canon set its sights on crafting a solution for increasing the productivity of the current records team.

THE SOLUTION

Canon devised a new workflow designed to reduce the time it takes to receive, process and store all physical and electronic records. The workflow, based on production line methodologies, divided the backlog into a series of tasks that were managed by one or two Canon team members while others handled the daily needs of the practice groups.



The backlog tasks included:

- **File retrieval.** Retrieving files from attorney and paralegal desks and delivering them to the records room for processing.
- **Indexing.** Prioritizing the entry of metadata into the new records management system with a goal of indexing 480 documents a day.
- **Scan preparation.** Prepping documents that were to be scanned into the firm's records management system with a goal of prepping 390 documents a day.
- **Scanning.** Scanning the documents into the records management system at a rate of 10,000 pages a day, with a team supervisor providing daily quality control checks of a random sampling of scanned documents.
- **Interfiling.** Taking scanned documents, returning them to file folders and then storing them in Redwelds in the file room.

With specific records staff focused on designated, repeatable tasks, there were fewer delays caused, by the need to shift staff between tasks. Tasks were assigned according to skill level; for example records personnel who were adept at typing focused on indexing, while others possessing good communication skills interacted directly with the attorneys, paralegals and assistants. To reduce the monotony of performing the same task each day, staff members were periodically given the opportunity to tackle different functions.

A key advantage of the production line approach was ensuring that team members weren't sidetracked from the backlog project by the need to handle new records-related requests. Previously, records staff assigned to a specific practice group would have to address requests as they were made. This often meant stepping away from other tasks such as the backlog project. With the new production line workflow, one person was responsible for addressing all new requests so that the other team members could focus on managing the backlog.

RESULTS

The new production workflow enabled the team to improve productivity by as much as 50%, significantly reducing the time needed to update files. With this increased efficiency, the records staff only needed six months to eliminate the backlog. Canon also was able to adjust the staffing model, which created significant cost savings for the firm.

When the project was completed, the firm experienced additional benefits by tapping the Canon team to utilize the production line workflow approach for day-forward filing, indexing and scanning. These advantages include:

- **Improved accessibility.** Because the new records process includes procedures that are more clearly defined, streamlined and monitored, it is easier for the firm to locate and retrieve records. Attorneys can more quickly locate documents because records staff can easily determine where a particular document is in the scheduled prepping/scanning/filing process.
- **Increased transparency.** Records staff and firm members have better insight into the status of tasks within the records management life cycle. Because staff members have assigned roles, the overall process is more transparent with better ability to track where documents are, what phase of the process they are in and which staff members are working on them.
- **Better staff utilization.** Before instituting the new production line approach, there was minimal planning and staff accountability. The previous records staff managed tasks based on who was available. This made it difficult to clarify who was responsible for a given activity; it also took longer to determine the status of tasks and to locate documents. The new system, with staff assigned to specific functions but also cross-trained to fill other roles when needed, has greatly enhanced staff utilization and flexibility.
- **Enhanced client interaction.** Attorneys can now spend more time focused on the practice of law, including working directly with clients, and less time searching for misplaced or lost files.

Perhaps the most important benefit of the firm's new records management workflow is that attorneys and clients have greater confidence in the records team. Attorneys know that the files they give to the team can be quickly retrieved, streamlining access to vital case-related information. With the backlog eliminated and new procedures in place to prevent it from happening again, the law firm has the records management support it needs to continue to grow and succeed in the days ahead.

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