

Digital Records Management Saves Tompkins County \$5.5 Million

Organization Profile:

Tompkins County, NY, has a population of more than 100,000. Ithaca, its county seat, is home to Cornell University, an Ivy League school.

Industry:

Government

Challenge:

Tompkins County had 200 years' worth of criminal and court records stored in file cabinets and more than 9,000 storage boxes. To house the records, the county was considering building a multimillion dollar warehouse.

Solution:

Tompkins County converted paper records to digital content and streamlined workflows, trimmed costs and built an efficient information environment for the county and 19 of its municipalities.

Results:

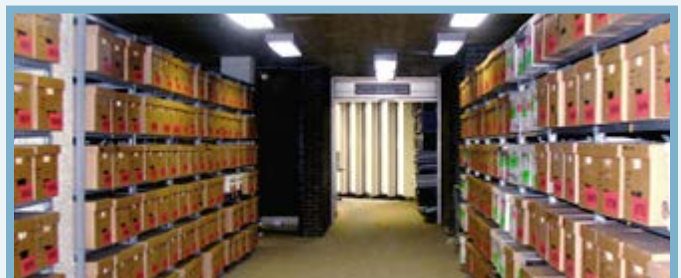
- ▶ Received \$450,000 in state grant money to implement a shared service repository to host all electronic records of participating villages, towns and cities within Tompkins County.
- ▶ Eliminated the need to build a new Records Center, saving \$5.5 million.
- ▶ Won Robert Arnold Award for Distinguished Service from NY Association of Local Government Record Officers for extending its electronic document management system to the towns in Tompkins County.
- ▶ Won Laserfiche Run Smarter® Award for its shared service initiative.

Two centuries' worth of county records ranging from birth and death certificates, to environmental health maps, to court and criminal files packed into 9,000 boxes takes up a lot of space—enough to (almost) justify building a \$3.5 million storage warehouse.

Before moving forward with the new warehouse, the Tompkins County Clerk's Office was tasked with cataloging the millions of archived documents and examining storage alternatives. Laserfiche quickly entered the conversation for its ability to track records in a digital database.

“Our original plan had been to put barcodes on the boxes of records to keep better track of them and then to either build a new records center or renovate the existing one,” says Maureen Reynolds, Deputy County Clerk. “However, we quickly realized that we could extend the value of the system by scanning all 9,000 boxes of files into a Laserfiche system.”

“Our analysis showed that with an investment of \$400,000 to \$500,000 for scanning, software upgrades and IT infrastructure updates, using Laserfiche could save us as much as \$5.5 million dollars,” says Deputy IT Director Loren Cottrell. The majority of that \$5.5 million would have gone into building the new warehouse.



Former Records Center

Changing Minds—and Old Habits

With a new records repository, the Clerk's Office envisioned a digital records system that would dramatically reduce the need for paper records. "We wanted to bring greater efficiency and cost savings to the county by implementing, maintaining and instructing all county departments on the best practices of using a digital records center enterprise system," says Reynolds.

Unfortunately, this vision hit an impasse as the county staff reverted to old paper habits.

"We looked around the county and realized everyone was still making paper," says Reynolds. "They're creating records on the computer, printing them, storing them in boxes and then three or four years later would bring the records to us and ask us to put them away and track them."



Maureen Reynolds presenting at the Laserfiche Empower Conference

Reynolds and her team went from department to department to prove the ease and value of digital records. Her team:

1. Examined departmental files and records.
2. Interviewed department staff to understand the use and flow of documents.
3. Scanned documents into Laserfiche.
4. Destroyed the physical documents.
5. Created a digital folder structure within Laserfiche that mimicked the organization of physical folders.
6. Integrated Laserfiche into other systems used by the department.

The Laserfiche repository provides a more sophisticated indexing and retrieval system that improves how the departments use and process their information. More importantly, the repository is integrated with the applications employees are already using.

"Records are available through a web browser either on the desktop or via a mobile device," says Cottrell. "The mobile feature makes key documents and records available to engineers, inspectors and other employees working in the field."

"You can have the best software in the world, but if your end user isn't comfortable with it, they will not use it," notes Reynolds.

This approach worked, and end users started to become fans of paperless processes.

For example, the sheriff's department previously used an archaic index card system to track arrest reports crammed into a records room that overflowed into a garage. After scanning the arrest reports, the department was able to reclaim office and parking space.

Court officials are also supporters of digital processes. The county court handles approximately 1,400 civil cases and 4,500 criminal cases a year. Automatic routing and processing of these case files has improved efficiency and lowered printing costs by allowing judges and employees to use iPads to easily access court documents while in court. Before Laserfiche, it could take hours for law clerks and legal secretaries to find and retrieve pertinent records.



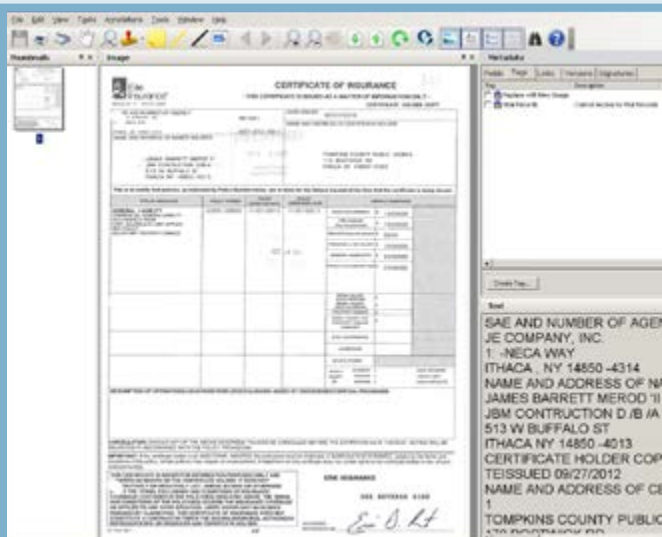
Tompkins County Courthouse

Laserfiche as a Shared Service

Laserfiche has been so successful for the county's records program that Reynolds decided to expand the repository to the county's municipalities. After receiving \$450,000 in state archiving grant money, the county formed the Tompkins Shared Services Electronic Records Repository (TSSERR), a Laserfiche-powered digital archive that is hosted by the county and serves 19 municipalities including the City of Ithaca.

This shared service approach has been especially cost effective for the county's taxpayers. Rather than having the different municipalities owning and supporting their own content management systems, each municipality could use the Laserfiche system managed by the County Clerk's Office. This has reduced support maintenance costs and allowed participating municipalities to focus their resources elsewhere.

Because the County Clerk's Office uses Laserfiche Rio, which offers unlimited content servers and repositories, each TSSERR member is given its own dedicated repository and has complete control over its content with various levels of security. This also means the Laserfiche system can continue to grow and accommodate with every new TSSERR member.



A document scanned into Laserfiche

“We have established a user group, bylaws, a governance structure and are establishing policies and procedures,” says Reynolds. “Our user group has also worked on eliminating redundancies between the local governments.”

Laserfiche's indexable repository combined with its shared service capability has given Tompkins County the means to create a public portal that allows citizens to search for public records. In addition to saving taxpayer money at all levels of government, TSSERR ensures that records across the county are compatible and easily accessible.

“We wanted to be transparent for years and years,” says Reynolds. “People always say the government is hiding information. It wasn't that we were hiding anything—before Laserfiche, we just couldn't find it!”

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Contact Us

info@laserfiche.com

(800) 985-8533

3545 Long Beach Blvd.

Long Beach, CA 90807

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