

A paper-based, manual filing system for employee records gives way to an automated solution from Lexmark that keeps confidential employee information secure, speeds up information retrieval and simplifies document archival.

Government retirement agency cuts response time from days to a “New York Minute” with Lexmark

The Organization

Established by the New York State Legislature in 1920, the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS) today serves more than 200,000 active members and 120,000 retirees and beneficiaries.

The Challenge

If medals were given for best manual filing system, NYCERS would take the gold. Maintaining complete paper-based personnel files for current and past employees is crucial, requiring superior organization. But even for NYCERS, that was no longer enough.

Each employee's master folder, which can often be hundreds of pages, contains sub-folders for beneficiary, benefit, absence, background check, medical history, performance evaluation, and original hiring information, according to Felita Ramsami, NYCERS's Director of Human Resources. The filing structure is mandated by the City.

“This file is the only evidence the City of New York has that you worked for the City, so maintaining its integrity is critical,” said Ramsami. “With a paper-based system, we had no easy way to retrieve information, to prevent misfiling of information or to keep sensitive information truly confidential.”

Various mandated process steps keep paper volumes growing. For example, backup copies of every file need to be maintained off-site after the employee is no longer a NYCERS employee due to retirement, termination or voluntary leave, necessitating manual copying and updating.

City employees transferring to different agencies require forwarding of their original file to the new agency and creation of a new duplicate set for storage by NYCERS, doubling the amount of paper. Typical

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—Felita Ramsami
Director of Human Resources
New York City Employees' Retirement System
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employee requests such as changing health benefits, changing a tax exemption or taking vacation further add to the paper burden.

Information security was also a concern. All paper files can be viewed by anyone with physical access to the storage area, a potential privacy risk.



But most cumbersome was the process required to respond to an employee inquiry. On the initial call, NYCERS would commit to a five-day response. Files would be retrieved, the information found, then a return call would be made and the file would be returned. Inactive files, stored off-site, must first be retrieved, creating additional delays.

Following an audit that pointed out potential limitations in its existing document-archiving processes, NYCERS set out to dramatically improve service levels, minimize physical filing, avoid hiring additional staff, and guard against potential privacy concerns.

NYCERS implemented a document scanning and image-capture solution based around a Lexmark monochrome multifunction printer (MFP) and Lexmark's Document Distributor (LDD) software. The entire project, from concept to software development to full deployment, was completed in a span of less than three months.

Like all public-sector agencies operating within severe budget constraints, NYCERS required a solution that was flexible and self-explanatory to its diverse staff, yet one whose capital cost could be easily justified.

The Solution

Working with a team of Lexmark public-sector industry consultants, NYCERS decided to move its paper-based employee files into a powerful electronic system. The new system would speed up information retrieval, manage access to employee information so that confidential information stayed that way and ease document archival.

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With a high-quality monochrome laser printer at its core, Lexmark's MFP technology seamlessly integrates a high-speed, business-class, auto-feed document scanner; copier; and network fax into a single, space-saving unit.

Lexmark engineers built a system that very closely mimics NYCERS' physical, paper-based system that contains seven sections and one sealed envelope for medical information. The new electronic system has eight e-folders that contain the same information. This approach minimized training requirements.

Now, as staffers bundle the documents from each employee's eight sub-folders for scanning, a bar-coded sheet is placed in front of the batch for each section. The bar code identifies in which of the eight sub-folders the document batch belongs. Through this method, misfiling is impossible.

NYCERS staffers operate the MFP through a large, touch-sensitive, color LCD panel, customized for NYCERS with pictorial icons representing each step of the document-scanning process.

"It's just so simple," said Ramsami. "We follow the on-screen prompt, touch the icon, scan the documents, and they're in the system."

Once scanned through the MFP, LDD continues the fully automated process. A flexible server-based document-routing application, LDD automates manual processes by giving users the power to scan, fax, copy, print, e-mail, or archive, all from the touch of an operator-panel icon. As LDD inspects each document in the batch, it aligns skewed images and flips upside-down scans. As each scan is accepted, LDD routes the image to NYCERS' online document management system, Microsoft® SharePoint® Portal Server.

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Each staff member in HR at NYCERS has desktop access to the system so that information retrieval is instantaneous. Inquiry calls can be handled immediately, eliminating all the time previously spent retrieving the folder, finding the information and re-filing the folder.

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Access to the various employee folders is now controlled, ensuring that only those staffers with authorized access to confidential sections have it. Ramsami can even run reports to see what information is being viewed and by whom.

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With scanning completed, NYCERS now has the opportunity to relocate members' document portfolios from on-premises storage to a long-term, climate-controlled offsite records-management location.

Ramsami did look into solutions from other printing vendors but didn't find what she was looking for. “Other vendors couldn't give me what I wanted,” said Ramsami. “They wanted to sell me what they had, not give me the solution I needed. Lexmark listened and created a simple solution that directly addressed what we needed.”

The Results

Following deployment of the Lexmark solution, productivity at NYCERS increased almost overnight. “My staff can now call up and view any necessary document from their desks, eliminating trips to the filing

room and missed calls,” said Ramsami. With electronic viewing, physical folders stay put, and the entire archive room remains locked, eliminating the possibility of lost documents or misfiling. Service levels improved dramatically, and compliments rolled in as the standard five-day waiting period dropped to just minutes.

Despite the availability of competing solutions, NYCERS found that a key advantage afforded by Lexmark was its responsiveness and willingness to adapt its products and services to fit NYCERS' unique public-sector operating constraints and fiscal structure.

“When we asked a question, the Lexmark team would research the issue and come back to us with answers,” said Ramsami. “Promises that were made to us were kept.”

Key to completing the entire project in just a few short months, said Ramsami, was Lexmark's deep understanding of public-sector issues and its ability to replicate NYCERS' manual filing methods with a modern, networked solution.

“Other vendors wanted our business to fit their way of doing things; Lexmark was the exception,” said Ramsami. “The system that Lexmark built, including the custom icons on the control panel, followed the exact structure of our member folders. Lexmark tailored its solution to fit our business – not the other way around.”

For the New York City Employees' Retirement System, Lexmark was the right solution at the right time.