The Next Generation of Content Management

How Skagit County, Wash., is utilizing ECM technology to streamline processes, increase transparency and improve services

Like many local governments, at one time, employees in Skagit County, Wash., managed the overwhelming number of documents and records they process through shared folders, fax and email. The practice was inefficient, cumbersome and fraught with potential for human error.

"Some documents were recorded by hand," says Mike Almvig, the county's director of information services, remembering the painful process. "If we didn't have the paper copy, I would handwrite records and then scan them and transfer them through e-mail."

That reality is hard to imagine since the county implemented its ECM system with Laserfiche, which now holds more than 4 million files, 22 million images and 3 terabytes of data. In addition to providing a centralized platform for departments to store and access records, the ECM system has helped Skagit County streamline processes, better utilize staff time, increase transparency and improve services.

More than 20 county departments use the system — following are just a few of the efficiencies they've realized.

Skagit County's Laserfiche ECM

22 million *images*

3 terabytes *of data*

4 million *files*

used by more than **20 departments**

Clearing Dockets with Digital Documents

Before implementing the Laserfiche ECM, staff from external agencies would drive approximately 30 minutes each direction to deliver police reports, statements and other documents to the county prosecutor's office, where they would be photocopied and filed for later review. With the Laserfiche ECM system, this process is automatic — or "automagic" as Skagit County staff like to call it.

The ECM system is also used to support Skagit County courts during hearings. Pulling and manually filing documents was previously an issue as district court judges oversee up to 60 cases each day. Now that the majority of the district court files are electronic, staff no longer have to haul unwieldy files to the bench for the judge to review, only to refile them at the end of the hearing.

"Nobody's pulling them around; they can actually put the documents right in the file in court, so they're not having to go back and forth to the filing cabinet to pull it, file it, re-file it," says Cori Russell, the county's records manager. While paper has not been eliminated from this process entirely, Skagit County hopes to head in that direction.

This automation streamlines workflows between the police department and the court system as well. Police agencies upload discovery information through a secure FTP server, which is then picked up by the ECM system and automatically distributed to the prosecuting attorney's office.

"This is fairly sophisticated automation between agencies that's been working for us for a while now," says Almvig.

Combining Documents with the Power of GIS

As Skagit County updates its websites to meet the demands of its increasingly mobile citizenry, the ECM system allows the county to upload contracts, legal documents and other public records online to increase transparency and improve citizen access. The county is now taking this process one step further
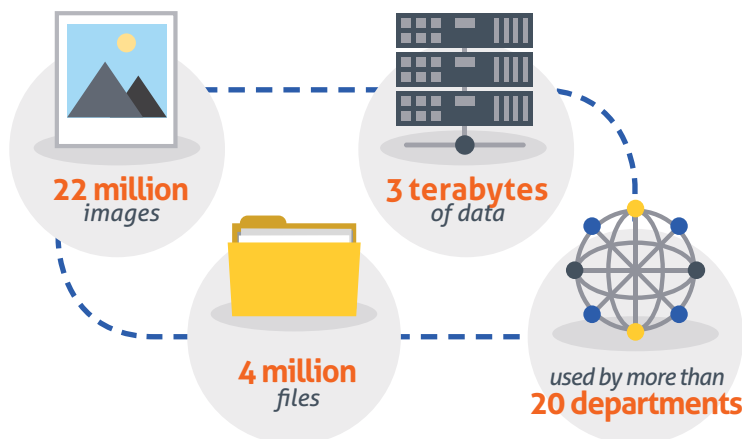
and tying documents to geographic information system (GIS) data, which allows citizens to access information on their mobile devices based on their location.

For example, if a resident wants to find information about a nearby property, the county mapping system will generate documents associated with that property. "With our mapping system, you can access all of the documents that are in the same township, section or range in the mapped area," says Almvig. "You can see all the deeds of all the houses in that area."

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>
> **Mike Almvig**
> *Director of Information Services, Skagit County, Wash.*

County leaders also plan to incorporate "pin mapping," into their ECM system, which is already used for the county's crime mapping application. With pin mapping, data is linked to GIS information and assigned a color, which helps users quickly glean information about the location. For example, deeds could be yellow and excise tax affidavits might be blue.

The county's code enforcement is using GIS similarly to help officers find content and documents associated with their location while in the field. This improves the officers' workflow and access to information, without traveling to the office or making a variety of phone calls to retrieve the correct documents.

Streamlining Business Processes

Citizens increasingly expect government services to operate as quickly and seamlessly as their private sector counterparts, but government agencies can be hindered by legacy technology and outdated processes. ECM is helping Skagit County provide better customer service.

After implementing the ECM system, county leaders immediately noticed a reduction in the number of in-person office visits from citizens. "Before we had documents available online, we used to have lines at our assessor's office, treasurer's office and auditor's office," says Almvig. "Those lines are gone — and if you walk up to the assessor's office, you're likely to be the only one there."

Allowing citizens to conduct business online streamlines business processes — a win for everyone involved. For example, the county has an ordinance that requires septic tanks be inspected every three years. Before the county made the application available online, inspectors would start their day with a visit to the county office, pull the septic tank drawings, then visit the site of each septic tank — now that's all available via the ECM system.

Moving Forward

As governments increasingly rely on technology to streamline processes and manage information, Russell notes that it's important to stay flexible. "Nothing is set in stone," she says. "Any time we're doing a project and we think we understand it, and the department thinks this is how it should be set up, we can change it. This software has to work for our customers, and even though multiple departments use it, I don't think anybody uses it exactly same way."

From the court system to the county assessor's office to a local business owner, Skagit County is collecting, storing and sharing relevant data. It could be easy for this data to become siloed or lost in the daily paper-pushing shuffle, but Skagit County continues to explore the Laserfiche ECM system and identify areas where they can achieve more efficiencies, streamline processes and bridge information.

"It's been a really good experience and it's not over; we're continuing to bring different departments on board," says Russell.