

ABBYY FormReader Aces California School District's Tests

Summary:

A large California public school district needed to input student responses from the 50-question tests taken by all children in grades 1 through 11 four times a school year. The district, which has 30,000 students in 40 schools, wanted a time-effective, accurate computerized system to speed the process, which is used to help determine students' educational improvements and school funding. When a vendor partner suggested ABBYY FormReader, the school district slashed the time spent processing tests by two-thirds and dramatically improved ease-of-use and accuracy.

Markets:

K-12 Education; Public Education; Testing

Organization: Public School District

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Location: California

Number of Schools: 40

Number of Students: 30,000

Problem:

Needed to scan assessment tests conducted each quarter on all students in grades 1 through 11

Solution: ABBYY FormReader

Solution Provider: Formtran

Hardware: Canon scanner

Results:

12,000 test-response sheets scanned by two test coordinators in 1.5 days, a 70-percent reduction in processing time vs. the prior method

IT Staff Relies on Technology to Quickly and Accurately Process Students' Quarterly Assessments

When a large California public school district began assessing students each quarter, the organization's information technology staff quickly began studying the IT answers it would need to process students' test responses.

The district created the 50-question tests, along with matching bubble-in answer forms, but needed an efficient and accurate way to process students' answers. School administrators needed to monitor and track students' educational improvements in order to both assure themselves of funding as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation and to ensure children were receiving the best, most appropriate schooling available.

Although the district already was using Instructional Data Management Systems (IDMS) for its test-scoring, the school organization wanted a scanning solution that was based on open, not proprietary, standards, as well as efficient, cost-effective and accurate, said a member of district's IT department, who requested anonymity. Proprietary solutions lock a customer into a particular vendor's products, whereas programs built using open systems can easily be integrated with popular applications such as Microsoft Office, she said. At IDMS' recommendation, the IT team reached out to ABBYY USA and its longtime partner Formtran to solve its scanning woes.

Lake Forest, Calif.-based Formtran visited the school district and demonstrated sample forms and ABBYY FormReader 6.5 Desktop's capabilities, said Mike Stuhley, president. "We have a lot of experience with ABBYY, as well as testing and the education market," he said. "The software and technology they had used before ABBYY was proprietary, so they were locked into that system. ABBYY is non-proprietary, making it more cost-effective and easier to manage and maintain."

Testing in Progress

Having compared ABBYY's solution to two other possibilities, the district's choice was clear: ABBYY FormReader was not only accurate and fast, but it was priced within the district's budget, the IT executive said.

Students in certain grade levels must take tests each quarter, during 'finals' week, which usually falls between two and three days prior to the last day of the semester, the IT executive said. "The assessment tests need to be factored into their semester grades, so the teachers need the results ASAP," the district's employee noted. "Using the ABBYY software, two district test coordinators can scan, verify and import the results from about 12,000 tests in one and a half days."

This slashed the time needed to process tests by about 70 percent, according to the school district employee. In addition to ABBYY's accuracy and speed, the prior system did not scan answers in consecutively; rather, it relied on identification numbers to compiled scanned pages, meaning coordinators would spend days making sure the correct answer sheets were together and in order, she noted. "The sheets were always getting mixed up," the user said.

"ABBYY gave us the flexibility we needed with the response documents at a good price," said the IT professional. "Today, we use the solution for bubbled-in responses but plan to evolve the system to include handwritten responses. ABBYY's software is already capable of providing this function when we need it. We're happy with ABBYY's product and Formtran's support."