

### Oh Say Can You See Efficiency to Match the Transparency?

#### The Pennsylvania State Ethics Commission uses Laserfiche to do more with 20% less staff

The Pennsylvania State Ethics Commission is a small agency with a big mandate: “To strengthen the faith and confidence of the people of this Commonwealth in their government.” The Commission’s staff of two dozen, working between its headquarters in Harrisburg and a regional office in Pittsburgh, does this by issuing advisory opinions that fill in the gray areas between public office and personal gain, as well as by making the finances of state officials public. “We’re kind of an anomaly,” explains Executive Director John Contino. “Our goals are to respond to complaints and answer advisory opinion requests, along with meeting public demand to see officials’ financial statements. Overall, our mission is pretty reactive.”

But in terms of automating its paper-based processes, the Commission has become progressively more proactive in its procedures and practices since implementing Laserfiche in 2002. Utilizing the powerful automated capture and search capabilities of Laserfiche as well as the WebLink public portal, the Commission began by revolutionizing its internal and external “e-discovery” processes while increasing online transparency via its e-Library. The launch of the e-Library fulfilled a long-standing desire to offer the public a searchable online repository of every Commission ruling dating back to 1979. In addition, phase two of the e-Library implementation was to provide, via its Website, all of the financial disclosure statements required to be filed with the Commission by public officials and public employees.

#### The Need to Accelerate e-Discovery

In 2002, faced with the daunting and time intensive task of assembling case files to prepare for an upcoming trial, Commission staff knew there had to be a better, more

efficient way to prepare exhibits. Contino had a case that had over 35,000 pages of discovery documents. Long-standing manual processes would have involved hiring a temporary employee to hand-number each page and then copy all 35,000 pages for opposing counsel.

“That could easily take two weeks,” Contino says. “We had to generate some kind of numbering system so I could take a 35,000-page case file and refer to something on page 15,231 without going through every page to find it.”

With that goal in mind, the Commission issued a Request for Proposals for a document management solution. “We went through a pretty long and thorough vetting process with the Commonwealth’s list of preferred vendors, which included Laserfiche,” says Cynthia Lynch, the Commission’s director for administration. “A lot of the solutions we were shown were proprietary and costly. Laserfiche was an out-of-the box solution for all intents and purposes. It was a lot more economical and a lot more user-friendly.”

The Commission ultimately purchased Laserfiche with Quick Fields advanced capture, including Bates numbering functionality, which immediately enhanced the Commission’s case preparation processes. Commission staff were able to scan in the thousands (and sometimes tens of thousands) of pages, which were then automatically electronically numbered. Then Commission attorneys could pick and choose the exhibits necessary and make them available to opposing counsel on read-only CDs with appropriate redactions applied. Commission attorneys could then simply drag and drop specific pages into their own sub-folders, which Quick Fields could re-process and re-number for easier reference in the courtroom.

## Improved Case Management Internally, a Transparent e-Library Externally

Contino immediately saw how Laserfiche's capture and search functionality could be applied to managing the Commission's history of rulings and opinions that dated back to its inception in 1979. "One thing I had been trying to do since the early '90s was move away from depending on institutional memory to find information in our rulings," says Contino. "We realized that if we could use the search function to aid in our case management of investigative files, we could use it to let the public search available rulings [via Laserfiche WebLink]. That became our e-Library." A year later, in 2004, the Commission added the Statements of Financial Interest that officials are required by state law to file annually, adding convenience to the transparency. "We were always big on transparency and making things available to the public," Contino says. "The e-Library made this more convenient for everyone."

The challenge, explains IT Director Sean Firestine, was making information filed according to the Commission's internal filing system available for public use. The solution, once again, was Quick Fields. "We found that Quick Fields could look through our database for first and last name, and sort files in alphabetical order so the public could use an 'A-Z' list to look up information. Internally, the original paper documents continue to be filed according to our specific naming convention."

## Ensuring Continuity and Maximizing Resources with a Brief Bank

Contino says the ongoing benefit of using Laserfiche is the convenience it brings to the Commission's day-to-day operations. "The fact that I can access any investigative file from my desk—evidence, reports, everything—saves a lot of time," he says. As such, staff has been proactive in applying Laserfiche's use to other business processes. "We keep thinking of ways we can utilize the system," Contino says. Or as Firestine puts it, "John says, 'Hey, can we do this?' And we usually can."

For instance, the Commission has used Laserfiche to establish its own "brief bank." "Over the course of 30 years, we've written thousands of legal briefs, which are now cataloged in Laserfiche," Contino explains. "Brief-writing is very time-consuming. You're given 30 days, but it can take the first two weeks just to do your research. Now we can potentially save a week's worth of researching if it's something we've already written about."

Lynch adds that the Commission's Laserfiche system is also an integral part of the agency's overall Continuity of Government Plan. "Anything that used to be solely on paper is scanned into Laserfiche and is now part of our daily and nightly back-up," she says.

## The Value of Upgrading to Avante ECM

The latest chapter in the Commission's evolving use of Laserfiche is its recent upgrade to a Laserfiche Avante ECM system, which includes Workflow business process management, Web Access and Audit Trail. "For us, the benefit of upgrading to Avante is that we were able to get Web Access and Workflow reasonably inexpensively," says Contino.

Since upgrading to Laserfiche Avante with Web Access at the end of 2009, the Commission has continued to find even more ways to utilize and maximize its use of Laserfiche. This includes providing the Pittsburgh office with the ability to input information into Laserfiche directly—saving paper, labor and overnight delivery fees. This improvement has already proved to be a significant cost-saver, giving the Pittsburgh office the ability to scan its documents directly into the Laserfiche repository, instead of duplicating efforts by overnighting the paper files to the Harrisburg office for scanning and processing.

"We keep thinking of new ways we can use the Laserfiche system," Contino says. The Commission's proactive thinking is paying off: greater efficiency plays a significant role in the agency's ability to fulfill its mandate—despite operating with 20% less staff.

Firestine has begun working with the agency's reseller, Full Circle Solutions Group, to set up a Workflow to automate proofreading and editing opinions between investigators and supervisors. Contino says the actual cost savings have not been compiled, but that the addition of Web Access—like the e-Discovery, e-Library transparency, internal brief bank, and Continuity of Government plan—provides an example of the agency fulfilling a mandate to maximize its resources in an era of decreased operating revenues.

"We're in a situation where doing more with less is key right now," says Contino. "We've been operating with 20% less staff this year, but we still have a mandate to fill. Anything that allows us to utilize existing systems instead of hiring more individuals, and that allows us to pursue our mandate and be compliant, helps us continue our operations and serve the interests of the Commonwealth more effectively."

## Your Next Step

Please call **(800) 985-8533** or e-mail [info@laserfiche.com](mailto:info@laserfiche.com) for more information.

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