

FORWARD THINKING MOVES WOOD COUNTY AHEAD USING FROM COURTS TO THE ENTERPRISE

Business Profile

Wood County

On September 28, 1817 Wood County was carved out of 14 counties as a result of the Lower Maumee Treaty. Perrysburg was the first county seat until 1868 when it was moved to Bowling Green.

Scope of Business

Wood County has 19 townships, 21 villages and 5 cities. The courts are responsible for all county filings, managing the business of the court and interacting with county residents and businesses.

Changing laws regarding record access, privacy issues and established procedures with incumbent officials have provided a unique challenge in addressing the business requirements of the court, in regards to document management. Legally, all court records are public property.

Established

Officially organized on February 12, 1820.

Benefits Summary

At the turn of the 21st Century the county had to find a solution to deal with the volume of paper accumulated since the county first began storing records. At the same time, consideration had to be paid to the future document management needs of the county. OnBase was initially implemented for the Clerk of Courts and the Probate Court. Later the Records Center, Board of Commissioners, Prosecutors and Judges were added.

Electronic scanning and access to documents has resulted in substantial time and space savings. Teaming with Results Engineering has resulted in a remarkably streamlined document imaging and archival system.

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The time savings are great; the space saving is wonderful and critical to the functioning of my office." - Clerk of Court, Becky Bhaer

THE CHALLENGE:

By 2000, 180 years of court proceedings such as marriages, births, deaths, legal suits, services to Wood County, etc. had been documented and filed on paper. The old court house was bulging at the seams and in the aging court house the roof began leaking, threatening old and closed case files. Something drastic had to be done. Immediately following the Y2K crunch, the county turned its attention to managing this burden of paper.

Initial interest in "imaging" began with a forward-thinking Clerk of Courts, Becky Bhaer, and was also shared by Jennifer Robeson in the Probate Court. The County Commissioners backed their approach. Bhaer took the first plunge. She began the investigation and initially selected Results Engineering to partner with her in this effort.

Many years before, a case management system had been implemented for the courts which helped manage the abstract details of cases. This system was running on a version of VMS Vax created just after the dawn of DOS 3.2 in the early 80's. A decision was made to attempt to implement a document management system that would interact effectively with this legacy case management system (WRITS) and could be leveraged with other departments as they adopted electronic filing methods.

THE SOLUTION:

Bhaer previously had the foresight to put in place a solid foundation from which to base her future plans. She had implemented a modern data center, insured that the buildings had appropriate data cabling and shared the use of fiber optic lines laid by the city of Bowling



Green. The county had a taste for modernization and the benefits it provided. Wood County was positioned to leverage an electronic document management system (EDMS). To finance the purchases this investment required, Bhaer tapped a technology grant offered by the state of Ohio.

After a long evaluation of many products, Wood County selected OnBase by Hyland Software as the document management system. Results Engineering was selected for its Case Matters Content application suite which runs in OnBase. Initial installation efforts began in January 2002. After the hardware was installed by Bhaer's IT organization, the servers were turned over to Results Engineering.

Initial design of the taxonomy and installation of PC's and scanners took only a few weeks. By mid-April the system was ready for initial testing but snagged when it became evident that it was inefficient to have a pool of clerks do "part-time" scanning. In June, one person was designated to "own" this task. Bhaer set October 1 as a "go live" deadline. This approach proved to be successful. Scanning and desktop document access began to be a day-to-day reality. Today, legal clerks say they cannot live without the system.



This implementation significantly slowed new paper accumulation but old documents still strained the limits of the courthouse. Bhaer recognized that asking her staff to address this "backfile" issue while performing their day-to-day duties was a recipe for failure. Instead, she contracted to have old files scanned and indexed by a company that specialized in backfile conversions. Results Engineering then "imported" the images and data into OnBase, allowing Bhaer to quickly bring years of documents on-line.

Results Engineering then successfully linked WRITS, the legacy court management system, to the imaging system using "Image Enabling," a unique feature of OnBase. This feature allows a user to retrieve case documents from within WRITS by simply clicking on the case number; a simple elegant solution for integrating a 20 year old application with state-of-the-art software. This, together with the backfile conversions, provided Bhaer immense value in coupling case management and document management.

News of these successes quickly spread to the commissioner's office, where an older, outmoded "Image Plus" imaging system was then converted to OnBase with Results Engineering's assistance. The commissioner's office then went on to COLD process the commission agenda from a Lotus Notes system.

Next, the records office, run by Brenda Ransom, used OnBase Workflow® and E-Forms® to create a "box and records storage system" for shelf records. This application allowed users to make on-line requests for archived files and routed these to the appropriate people to retrieve the records.

Results Engineering then assisted the records office to leverage the power of the scanned image. By tying in a Kodak Digital Archive Writer (DAW) and Archive Writer Command Center (AWCC), microfilm could be created from the images in the OnBase system. AWCC provides advanced capabilities to link microfilm information to OnBase records. It provides a seamless integration between the

document management system and the DAW. Next the Probate Court had OnBase integrated to Henschen & Associates court software.

Today, the OnBase system extends to the Prosecutor and Judges Offices, as well as Public Access terminals used by customers of the court. The core system is configured to be accessed by a thin client (web-based access). Recent implementation of a Web portal allows secure access via the Internet. Also a specialized module allowing web-base access to the legacy WRITS application has been installed.

Results Engineering provided hardware and software for an Internet/Intranet portal that securely shares documents and court management access to other county agencies.

When current legal challenges are resolved, the web-based access could eventually spread to people anywhere with Internet access. This will provide high quality service and reduced costs, providing savings and benefits to the people of Wood County.

The residents of Wood County have seen their tax dollars used

effectively to provide low-cost, high-performance access and secure information services that now electronically benefit them all.

Wood County next implemented the Children's Services agency to provide secure records and better workflow for case workers. The system was implemented in the first half of 2005 and is improving services to the families of Wood County.

Currently Wood County is implementing Maximus CourtView to replace their WRITS system. The integration between CourtView and OnBase was key to the decision to sunset WRITS.

THE RESULTS:

"When we started scanning documents into Results Engineering's Content product, everyone accepted the idea," said Bhaer.

"After scanning for a short time, we lost an employee and the staff asked if we could stop scanning for awhile. They were concerned about getting behind with their work. I felt we needed to keep moving forward. I knew we would save time in the long run. Then a few months later we lost another employee. At that time, I suggested maybe we should stop scanning for awhile. The staff begged me not to stop. They were enjoying not having to constantly leave their desks

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The incremental cost of adding a new department is the cost of a few licenses and a scanner. After realizing the immediate benefit of on-line document access, some departments have requested workflow applications be developed, continuing the trend to provide more public services without increasing the size of the staff.

All this because of a leaky roof, too much paper, and a clerk of courts with the foresight to recognize mature technology and how to leverage it to her constituents' advantage.

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