

WHITE PAPER



Tech Truth — Time is Money

OCR Enhances Productivity for Law Firms — Large and Small

Summary

There aren't enough hours in the day to get all the work done — and, face it, shuffling paper eats up time like nothing else. The average legal practice is buried under an avalanche of paper. It's a necessary evil: documents provide vehicles of communication for important data, and are the wheels of any legal transaction. Probably, though, you spend way too much time managing the paper and searching for data — and it's probably eating into your law practice's billable hours in a big way.

Look around your office — the banker's boxes and filing cabinets overflowing with paper are taking up space and, worst case, creating a fire hazard. The stacks of files and folders are waiting to drag you into a maelstrom of wasted time spent searching for a specific piece of information. Paper is expensive to store and difficult to search.

Finding necessary paperwork, even in an office that has developed an elaborate filing or indexing system, still requires a human being to dig through the paper and find the right document. More time is wasted handling the paper — re-typing, copying, faxing or mailing — boosting costs even more. Finally, too often documents are not returned to the proper location, making them useless. Loss or destruction of documents is all too common.

However, a few simple changes to the way you deal with the deluge can eradicate the problem, streamline your workflow and give you unlimited power over your data. A desktop computer and a scanner or digital camera, along with some affordable Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, can transform those piles of paper into data that can be readily used, searched and stored. Take away the piles of paper — and you'll have more time and more money.

Here's how two law firms used OCR technology to revamp their businesses — to increase their efficiency, reduce their costs and make better use of their human resources.

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Case #1: Claiming the Benefits of Technology

Law firms should look for ways to extend the OCR solution to make the biggest impact possible. Once properly integrated, OCR technology streamlines the paper handling process and allows the firm to focus on what it does best.

As a small law firm taking on big insurance companies, agility is critical for Kantor & Kantor, as it represents clients in their disability, health, life and other liability insurance claims. Unfortunately, the law firm found itself mired in sheaves of paper, as it waded through the ponderous documentation associated with the claims.

“Typically, our cases involve reviewing insurance claim files that can be from 100 to 5,000 document claim pages,” said Alan Kassan, a partner in the Northridge, Calif.-based firm that specializes in helping people get their insurance claims paid for disability, long term care, health, and life insurance. “Normally, insurance companies produce files in a paper form and we have to go through them to find the information we need for our case.”

The law firm realized in order to serve its clients in a timely manner, remain productive and cut down on wasted time, it needed to utilize text-search technology to identify key elements of its files. Kantor & Kantor had a long-held philosophy of using technology to speed its business processes where it made sense, but its early efforts at using OCR were error-prone and slow.

Initially, the company used another OCR and PDF conversion product but eventually decided to extend its search for a speedier, more automated and more accurate solution. “It was painfully slow and not as accurate as we would have liked,” said Kassan. “We decided to evaluate several products on the market.”

The law firm launched a comprehensive look at available OCR products. Each day, Kantor & Kantor scans and processes 300 to 500 pages of documents, so it needed a workhorse product. “We developed a drill to put each software program through to determine which was easiest to use, fastest and most cost-effective,” said Kassan.

After evaluating a number of available options for speed, accuracy and usability, ABBYY Recognition Server was the clear winner, due to its ease of use and flexibility. “ABBYY’s technology was really attractive,” said Kassan. “We liked that the program let us split document processing off the single server to channel them to multiple servers.”

Facts

Company:

Kantor & Kantor, LLP

Documents Type:

Insurance claims and related legal documents

Processing Volume:

300 to 500 pages per day

Business Goal:

Reduce time spent visually searching documents to find specific pieces of information

Products Used:

ABBYY Recognition Server™

Results:

Reduced paralegal busy work by 10 to 15 hours per week; made staff more productive; ultimately saving the firm a lot of money

In addition to a simple-to-use administrator's interface, the Recognition Server provided comprehensive scheduling capabilities. "The scheduling function was extremely attractive because it let us automate our OCR activities to be handled after business hours," said Kassan. "Now, we put a bunch of stuff into an input folder and it is ready for us to deal with when we come in the door the next morning."

Although Recognition Server is customizable, Kantor & Kantor needed to make very few changes to seamlessly streamline its document processing systems. The firm created several workflow processes to manage various types of projects, Kassan said. "We set up Recognition Server to provide the option of processing the document immediately, prioritizing the document within the workflow or doing it as part of after-hours workflow if it isn't needed immediately," he added.

By automating the digitizing process, Kantor & Kantor made its employees significantly more productive. "ABBYY Recognition Server frees up staff and computer time," said Kassan. "Before, our secretaries and paralegals spent their time managing the OCR process. Often, there would be glitches and error messages and they would have to attend to those problems."

Prior to installing Recognition Server, the law firm had five assistants managing the OCR task. "During that time, they were virtually non-productive," said Kassan. "Now, I have one clerical person who scans documents and puts them in the electronic folder. No one has to attend to it — we are saving a huge number of hours of employee time."

The law firm estimates the automated OCR process eliminates 10 to 15 hours per week of busy-work for its paralegals and other staff, makes staff much more productive, and probably saves hundreds, or even thousands of dollars each month. "Now, instead of doing the clerical task of monitoring OCR, these employees can focus on substantial and productive work," said Kassan. "More than saving us money, it increases our productivity. Our people can focus on the projects they should be doing."

Kantor & Kantor is leading the game compared with other law firms — and technology gives them an edge. "Few law firms have an understanding of OCR technology, but the ability to search text easily is vital for what we do," Kassan said. "I think we are ahead of the curve."

Case #2: Finding the Right Fit

The biggest key to successful implementation is finding a solution that provides the functionality and accuracy to meet the needs of the organization. The Merit Law Group, a civil litigation law firm based in the Silicon Valley, represents businesses in California and overseas in practice areas that include commercial business law, family law and civil litigation. The firm was forward thinking and knew that it wanted to abandon its manual paper handling.

However, it had made forays into using OCR — but hadn't discovered a solution that provided high accuracy and was easy to use. "With other programs we tried, the text got trapped in text boxes, or at times, went off the page. It was a formatting nightmare," said Roy Ching, an attorney at the firm.

In many ways, bad technology was almost as bad as no technology at all. "With all the errors from other OCR software we previously used, we had to spend inordinate amounts of time proofreading scanned documents," said Ching. "It wasn't practical for us to switch from the conventional method of having a secretary re-type documents."

Ching discovered ABBYY FineReader, though, and reconsidered his options. "I didn't encounter these same problems with FineReader, which made it a big timesaver for our office," he said.

Now, the firm uses ABBYY FineReader to convert discovery, motions, and pleadings to word processing documents, which can then be "cut and pasted", revised, reformatted, or incorporated into discovery responses, communications with clients or other parties, pleadings or other documents.

The Merit Law Group also uses its OCR technology to serve customers better. Now, the firm provides clients with electronic copies of the documents that have been digitized using FineReader. The firm can transmit documents to clients faster, and clients can store and access documents more easily.

OCR programs like ABBYY FineReader also allow law firms to create an electronic storage system for files. Electronically archived documents offer a number of substantial benefits, Ching said. Now, the firm doesn't have to pay rent on space used to store unused files, and all files are readily accessible as part of a library of past work-products. "It is much more practical to retrieve a document with a few clicks of the mouse, rather than to rummage through mountains of boxes in some dusty storage room."

Facts

Company:

Merit Law Group, P.C.

Document Type:

Diverse range of legal documents

Business Goal:

To leverage OCR technology to increase document handling efficiency

Product Used:

ABBYY FineReader®

Results:

Increased customer satisfaction and efficiency of the firm

Seven Ways to Use OCR Strategically in a Legal Setting

1 - Cutting through information clutter.

During litigation, it is common for the defense to flood the opposing counsel with paper documents during the discovery phase. Rather than sift through tens of thousands pages of documents to find relevant information. It is much more efficient to OCR to convert paper to electronic files that can then be full text searched to locate information.

Rather than having a secretary retype and reformat responses, use scanning and OCR to convert discovery motions and pleadings to word processing documents. Document formatting will be retained, and the process takes mere seconds. Because OCR introduces far fewer errors than retyping, you'll also save time on proofreading. This approach allows you to provide electronic copies of documents to clients faster and helps clients store and access documents easily. In addition, you'll be able to readily create an electronic storage system for files and improve accessibility to past work products.

2 - Cut outside copying costs.

Rather than paying outrageous copying costs (sometimes as much as 50 cents per page) to replicate documents while away from the office, you may want to take a digital camera with you to photograph them. When choosing a camera for OCR tasks, look for one that includes an image stabilizer. Without it, a tripod is necessary, which makes the process much more cumbersome. Also choose a camera that offers resolutions of at least four megapixels or, more preferably, five megapixels. Other features to look for include a flash disable mode, manual aperture control, manual focusing, anti-shake and optical zoom.

3 - Pick the perfect OCR tools.

Invest in an optical character recognition (OCR) product that will convert your digitally photographed images into text that can be edited or searched. ABBYY FineReader 8.0, for example, takes a JPEG file (commonly used graphics format for photos) and converts it into a searchable PDF and/or an editable Microsoft Office document. The software allows for accurate translation even in the face of a variety of photo mishaps (such as mis-focusing or lens distortion). It also corrects some environmental factors, such as the curve created in a page when it is part of a very thick book.

4 - Pick the perfect scanning tools.

Although a simple scanner can do the job, choosing a model that offers some more advanced features can further boost your productivity. Duplex scanners, for example, automatically scan both sides of the document simultaneously to speed scanning time. These models also intelligently discard blank pages so that you may keep it in duplex mode. Most duplex scanners also incorporate an Automatic Document Feeder (ADF), which automatically feeds stacked pages into the scanner one at a time, rather than requiring each page to be manually inserted. A hot button scan feature will let you scan a document simply by pressing a button on the scanner.

5 - Keep up with the news.

When scanning the latest legal periodicals or newspapers, there's no need to read every word. Instead, scan them with your OCR program and use the Hot Folder feature available in many OCR programs, including ABBYY FineReader, to automatically create a special in-box directory of items you want to peruse later. Then, you can visit that folder to read whatever you've saved or even do keyword searches for specific articles. Another option is to convert it as a tagged PDF document to read on your PDA while you are on the move.

6 - Create good email habits.

As more people trade their fax machines for digital copiers and scanners, your email box is likely to be flooded with important briefs, articles, letters and other documents that are sent as email attachments. These image-only PDFs can be opened and viewed but are not searchable so they can get lost in the shuffle. When you receive these, immediately use your OCR software to translate them into a searchable PDF. A searchable PDF file maintains the layout and formatting of the original PDF but allows the documents to be managed and searched electronically.

7 - Throw out the fax machine.

A dedicated fax line can be a costly proposition when one considers the cost of equipment, phone charges, paper and time spent in upkeep. An electronic fax service (or, in a large law office, a fax server) provides a practical alternative. Electronic faxing allows your office to send and receive faxes as electronic documents, so that they can be viewed or shared readily. Faxes are delivered to the inbox as TIFF graphics files — which can be read but not readily used in any other way. To further enhance usability of these documents, use OCR to transform them into editable text or searchable PDFs.

ABBYY, a technology leader in document recognition and conversion, provides a full-line of intelligent OCR solutions to meet your business needs. From server to desktop, each ABBYY product delivers superior accuracy and recognized results, ideal for legal professionals and law firms to improve efficiency in accessing information and facilitate collaboration.

ABBYY Recognition Server

ABBYY Recognition Server, a robust, server-based solution, automates document recognition and PDF conversion processes across the enterprise. This scalable, reliable and rapidly deployable solution offers high-performance delivery of accurate OCR functions in a service-oriented environment. Recognition Server is designed for easy deployment either as a complete stand-alone solution or as an integral part of an external system that responds readily to changing business needs.

ABBYY FineReader

ABBYY FineReader is a desktop OCR and document conversion application ideal for business professionals. This productivity application allows users to effortlessly turn PDF files, scanned images and digital photographs into truly editable and searchable formats. Fully integrated with Microsoft Office, FineReader helps easily export results to applications with a single click of the mouse. The Corporate Edition features robust network capabilities and a concurrent license pack that provides a cost-effective solution to allow multiple users to access and share OCR process on a network. FineReader's intuitive interface makes conversion easier, faster and more accurate than ever before.

ABBYY PDF Transformer

ABBYY PDF Transformer, a two-in-one utility, features both PDF conversion and PDF creation capabilities. This easy-to-use tool instantly converts any type of PDF file into editable formats, such as Microsoft Word and Excel. It also creates searchable PDF documents directly from Microsoft Office applications with a single mouse click. PDF Transformer is the only conversion software in its class to offer one-click conversion from scanned PDFs to searchable PDFs. PDF Transformer gives you the power to work with PDF documents quickly and accurately.

About ABBYY

ABBYY, a world leader in document recognition and linguistic technologies. ABBYY specializes in the development of software for optical character recognition (OCR), intelligent character recognition (ICR), linguistics, semantics, and electronic lexicography. Leading products from ABBYY include the FineReader line of recognition software and development tools and FlexiCapture line of dynamic data capture solutions. Companies that license ABBYY's recognition technologies include Anoto, Cardiff, Banctec, BenQ, DICOM/Kofax, EMC, EPSON, Freedom Scientific, Fujitsu, Kurzweil, Microtek, NewSoft, Notable Solutions, Stellent, Panasonic, ReadSoft, Samsung Electronics, Saperion, Siemens Nixdorf, Sumitomo Electric Systems and Toshiba.

ABBYY is headquartered in Moscow, Russia with offices in Ukraine, the United States, the UK, Japan and Germany. For more information, visit www.ABBYY.com.

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