Speed Constituent Service by Automating Workflow

Digitizing document management can help government agencies dramatically improve their information processing lead time.

The federal government runs on data, processing ever-increasing amounts of structured and unstructured information from a growing array of sources. A March 2012 survey from MeriTalk, a government IT research group, revealed that federal agencies expect to add a petabyte of data over the next two years.

That makes the U.S. government one of the most data-intensive organizations in the world. Much of that data is contained in text documents, which are harder to store, search and manage than the kind of structured, columnar data that's typically stored in a database.

Much of the federal government's information is still processed manually and stored in disparate systems. This problem has led to legendary backlogs in serving citizens. The Office of Personnel Management, for example, has had difficulty processing retirement claims, and many agencies are having trouble keeping pace with the number of requests for government records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Some reports put the level of backlogged FOIA requests as high as 20 percent.

Joey Hutcherson, deputy director of Open Government at the U.S. Department of Commerce, summed up the problem in a February 2012 white paper. "The status quo has proven that responses to requests are inefficient and untimely," he wrote. "While all FOIA professionals are working to achieve a rapid turnaround on each request and wish to release the maximum amount of information, they are not given the tools and resources to respond appropriately."

Digital Workflow Speeds Response

Executive orders signed by President Barack Obama task government agencies with being more open, participatory and collaborative in an effort to improve accountability and communication. To keep up with the growth of and demand for information, agencies need to improve their information workflows. Doing so will allow them to better serve constituents, save money, reduce reliance on paper and comply with government requirements.

Respond to Constituents Quickly

An efficient workflow simplifies the collection of information and streamlines the management of response documents and communications. It also improves staff efficiency, advances decision making and facilitates faster processing and constituent response.

Take the example of an agency division that is responsible for handling constituent inquiries. With a manual process, an employee receives a request for information via email and prints out a copy of the email to start a new file. If the employee receives a request via phone, that information must be typed into a document, and then printed out to start a new file.

Once printed, the employee makes a copy of the request and mails the original to the appropriate field office contact or subject matter expert. Response time varies between one and four weeks. Once the request is filled, it is mailed back to the

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original employee, who makes a copy for the file, then mails or emails the response to the original requester.

But that's not the end of the process. To facilitate records management, the employee files the paper copies in a filing cabinet. Eventually, those paper files are taken to a long-term storage facility. The entire process can take several months and requires many physical resources from start to finish.

> ### "Federal agencies expect to add a peta-byte of data over the next two years."
>
> —"The Big Data Gap," MeriTalk, 2012

The Payoff: Improvements All Around

A more intuitive, electronic, integrated workflow improves the process significantly. With multifunction printers and solutions such as Lexmark Distributed Capture, constituent requests are automatically captured and imported into a digital workflow system, while paper requests are captured by scanning. Requests are then electronically routed to the appropriate field office contact or subject matter expert. Multiple agencies and staff members can collaborate without the need to search for, copy, share or wait for the retrieval and distribution of paper files.

Solutions such as Lexmark's that offer built-in redaction features (an electronic method of blocking out sensitive details) provide permanent and tamper-proof masking of sensitive, confidential or legally significant information. Both original and redacted responses are linked to the requester's electronic file.

The workflow solution then routes the completed request packets to accelerate review and approval. Finally, outbound communications are linked in one electronic file. The entire process can take as little as a few days.

Ensuring a Successful Solution

Replacing manual, paper-driven workflows without undergoing a great deal of disruption requires securing the right approvals and gaining buy-in from technology, management and support teams. The first step is to secure the support of the top-ranking technology executive in the organization, whether that is the CIO or the IT manager. Without that support, projects have more difficulty succeeding.

The next step is choosing the appropriate technology. First, outline the specific weaknesses in current processes, then develop a list of the most important features in a workflow solution. Talk to other agencies and departments that have

undergone this process, and create a short list of solutions to evaluate. Find a consultant or systems integrator with experience in implementing government workflow solutions.

Taking these steps is critical to implementing a workflow solution that will help agencies keep up with exponential growth in data volume, as well as increasing pressure to improve constituent service, reduce costs and meet open government mandates. ■

To learn more about how you can achieve efficient workflows in your government organization, visit www.lexmark.com.

▸▸ HOW TO CHOOSE A WORKFLOW SOLUTION

While it's never easy to change business processes or technologies, there are ways to make the shift as painless, cost-efficient and productive as possible — and then reap the benefits of enabling workers to access any information, from any system, any time they need it. When considering a new workflow solution, make sure it can help:

- ✓ Reduce the time it takes to fulfill a request for a document
- ✓ Manage deadlines better
- ✓ Track requests in case files
- ✓ Eliminate any remaining manual tasks in the workflow
- ✓ Manage information requests digitally, whether received via phone call, fax, letter, email or electronic form
- ✓ Route requests to the right employee easily and quickly
- ✓ Improve the management of outbound response processes with automated communications
- ✓ Integrate the document management system with existing business applications
- ✓ Provide access to files anytime, from anywhere
- ✓ Ensure that the entire workflow is fully compliant with all relevant mandates

ABOUT LEXMARK

Lexmark International, Inc. (NYSE: LXK) is uniquely focused on connecting unstructured print and digital information across your enterprise with the processes, applications and people that need it most.

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