

Case Study

Adams County Auditor Provides Tax Relief with Advanced Imaging Solutions and Westbrook Document Management

BACKGROUND: Adams County, Indiana, with a county seat in Decatur, includes 12 Townships in the northeastern section of the state and serves a broad and diverse population of 33,000.

The County Auditor's office handle a wide range of duties, most of which include volumes of paper records and public documents. The Indiana state tax laws involve a number of tax exemption opportunities for individuals which impose documentation, certification, records keeping and public information duties on the county auditor, without, however, providing electronic tools to help in discharging those duties.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE. With the goal of improving their ability to record and make available public records, William Borne, the current County Auditor, identified document management as a valuable automation solution. The Auditor's office focused on one of their highest workload activities, the handling of exemption forms associated with the Indiana state tax deduction process, as the area that would most immediately benefit from an electronic document management solution. The State of Indiana offers a variety of annual tax deductions which the county auditor must certify for the individual to claim tax deduction. Each of these deductions revolves around forms; for example, the State Form 43709 Statement of Mortgage Deduction, State Form HC10 for Homestead Property Tax Deduction, the State Form SES/WPG for geothermal energy deductions and a range of other more specialized deductions, all of which must be processed by the county auditor on an annual or biannual basis in order for the individual citizen to receive their deductions. If the taxpayer misplaces these forms, he can request replacement copies from the Auditor's office.

In addition to the requirement for retrieval and refiling of these records on an ongoing basis, a variety of other issues make the process time-consuming to manage—including the need to recategorize and refile homestead and other exemption forms each time a name change occurs on a property (for example, in case of marriage or divorce). The yearly summer filing of these exemption records has been budgeted at approximately \$5,000 annually. Additional costs include the time-consuming task of finding and resolving lost forms. Auditor Borne and his staff were confronted on an ongoing basis with the increasing workload created by a forms-intensive process which was not supported by an electronic system on a statewide level.

The tax exemption forms alone contribute approximately 25,000 documents in the auditor's office.

WESTBROOK SOLUTION. The Adams County Auditor, working with their document automation consultant, Advanced Imaging Solutions, designed a straightforward, integrated solution which automates the creation of the tax exemption forms and stores and manages them in an electronic repository.

The property owner's name and assessment and tax information is loaded into an Excel application, which links the county tax and taxpayer database with the produced homestead, geothermal, and other deduction documents. This allows the automatic storage of documents, retrieval of information when requested by taxpayers or the state, and updating of information on name changes, tax assessment changes, and the like.

The system, which was begun on January 1, 2006, is still in the rollout phase. By next year, it is expected to save extensive time and money, including the \$5,000 dedicated yearly filing and refiling budget.

BENEFITS TO ADAMS COUNTY. Benefits of the solution include:

- Annual savings in the cost of creation, retrieval and filing of the deduction forms
- Increased speed and decreased effort in retrieving information based on citizen or state requests for information
- Improvement in administrative processes such as name changes and refiling
- Elimination of the lost document problem

NEXT STEPS. After the system has proved its value in ongoing production use, the County Auditor is looking to convert other document-intensive processes to the electronic system. The next application to address is likely to be the claims area, which incorporates areas such as payroll claims, vendor claims, highway claims, and audit claims. This is another records management area. In addition to improving the filing and management process, the ability to provide electronic access to these documents would provide improved access to a category of public information.

Advanced Imaging Solutions

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This case study was conducted by the Westbrook Technologies staff. It is featured at the Westbrook Technologies web site as part of their success stories series.
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