

eCOPY HELPS TORRANCE LEAVE A PAPERLESS TRAIL

CASE STUDY: The Torrance City Attorney's office uses eCopy technology to streamline its operations

By **Chris Gonsalves**

TORRANCE, CALIF., IS A BRIGHT SPOT in Los Angeles County's already-sunny South Bay. A short hop from surf-trendy Redondo Beach, the place is famous for many things, not the least of which is the sight of its unique high school facade on TV shows such as "Beverly Hills, 90210" and "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

Torrance is one of the last places you'd expect to find a black hole.

Yet that's exactly the term area residents and public officials had coined to describe the city attorney's office. Buried in a morass of disorganized files and inefficient, paper-based transactions, the agency charged with handling all the city's legal affairs had ground to a halt. The office had no effective way to retrieve documents, meaning legal work often had to be redone.

As a result, the municipality was outsourcing more than 75 percent of its legal work—at a cost of up to \$350 per hour—simply because it couldn't manage the records and workflow associated with its duties.

"We were in a position where we had no effective way of finding, saving and retrieving our legal documents," said Linda Santos, law office manager for the city of Torrance. "One attorney couldn't tell what another attorney was doing, even when they were working on the same case."

Worse than the spiraling cost was the growing reputation of the city attorney's

office as an easy target for frivolous lawsuits, as plaintiffs' attorneys discovered the overburdened agency was frequently unable to defend itself. Early in 2000, Torrance City Attorney John Fellows decided something needed to be done about his office's lack of cohesive information management strategy and paper-based workflow. Fellows' answer was to digitize the agency's records with a combination of eCopy's ShareScan and Desktop document imaging software with the city's Interwoven document management and RainMaker Summit legal systems.

To help organize and complete the project, the city attorney's office sought implementation and professional services help from document management solution provider Ikon Office Solutions, in Malvern, Pa.

"We had some basic guidelines when we started. We needed a way for the attorneys and the staff to access work product quickly," Santos said. "We wanted to implement some form of automated docketing so important court deadlines and dates wouldn't be missed. And we wanted a way to have full text search of our documents along with a reduction in our physical storage needs."

Scott Folcarelli, Ikon's regional director of professional services, said the offices in Torrance, like many municipal agencies, were facing both budgetary and regulatory pressure.

"A lot of similar departments are really after total document life-cycle

management to deliver speed to service," Folcarelli said. "At the same time, their budgets are being reduced, so they really need a cost-effective solution from someone who understands their particular business. We have the advantage of working with a lot of legal and public-sector clients. And Torrance has really become a great example of the ways document management technologies can revolutionize the way an organization works."

The Torrance agency spent more than \$100,000 to revolutionize the office, Santos said. "Once it was all up and running, life became very different for everyone here," she said. Today, the city attorney's office operates with a largely paperless workflow. Staffers scan documents to eCopy Desktop using either a desktop scanner or the eCopy ShareScan at an MFP (multifunction printer).

"For most jobs, the desktop client is sufficient," said Kevin Tran, the office's IT administrator. "But when we have heavy duty jobs with many pages, the staff uses the MFP." The electronic files are tagged with metadata and annotated. The files are then stored to Interwoven using a direct interface from the eCopy tools. Documents can also be faxed using eCopy's RightFax connector directly from the eCopy Desktop. The process creates an audit trail for all e-mailed, filed or faxed documents. Also, all text is made searchable in the process, Tran said.

The ultimate benefit is the ability for

all attorneys and support staff in the Torrance agency to retrieve files, share data and collaborate on cases with confidence, Santos said. With the Interwoven and RainMaker systems supporting all the department's files, the staff knows where to find everything, and it always knows it is working on the latest revision, she said.

Torrance is the sixth-largest city in Los Angeles County, with a population of 150,000. The city attorney's office employs 15 people in four locations, including eight attorneys, five legal secretaries, an IT analyst and a law office administrator. The heart of the organization's new document management system resides on Microsoft's SQL Server 2000, which supports both the Interwoven and RainMaker databases. The agency's infrastructure also includes 250GB of Dell PowerEdge storage, Tran said.

The beauty of a solution such as that chosen by Torrance officials is that it leverages much of the equipment already in place, Folcarelli said.

"A lot of offices need to move toward a paper-light environment," he said. "What we're able to show them is that

a lot of the equipment they own can be better used. Many offices have copiers that already work as scanning stations, but simply aren't being utilized. You put eCopy software in the mix and suddenly you have a whole new utility ... a new way of doing business."

Thus far, city officials have been able to eliminate some 300 cubic feet of hard-copy file storage. Support staff has been reduced from nine workers to five, saving taxpayers more than \$250,000 per year. Moreover, the city attorney's office now handles 95 percent of the municipality's legal work in-house, saving another \$200,000 per year, Santos said.


The technology implementation has also helped the city attorney's office put its "black hole" reputation behind it. Santos said the city is no longer a mark for plaintiffs' attorneys looking for quick and easy litigation.

The new system also helped Torrance meet strict new guidelines from Los Angeles County that call for 90 percent of court cases to go to trial within one year. The electronic records management implementation helped bring Torrance, which traditionally spent an

average of five years bringing cases to trial, into compliance, officials said.

The technology also speeds the process of delivering documents in public records requests, Santos said. Previously, documents had to be prepared by hand before being delivered to the media and the public, with each required redaction done by hand with marking pens and White-Out. "It was a long, slow process," she said. "Find the files, redact the necessary information, run each sheet through the copier."

With the eCopy client, documents can be compiled on screen with redactions done electronically. "A process that used to take weeks now takes hours," Santos said.

Going forward, Tran said his department is looking to add color printing with a new MFP. The new peripheral will default to black and white to ensure economical routine printing, but will give the office the option to produce color documents for court presentations, something the agency currently contracts out. "That's an additional savings and allows us greater control over an important function of the office staff," he said. 

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