

Electronic Document Management

IHS Helps the Military Convert One Million Pages a Year into a Functional Electronic Library



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Case Study

For the military, preserving the documentation on the weapons it builds and maintains can be just as important as the weapons themselves. But for one military base charged with this duty, this meant managing an extensive paper-based library of product specifications, drawings, revisions, and forms. Each document was vital, yet difficult to find. In addition, the library had outgrown its available space.

The library was time-consuming to manage — it took a team of three people working full time to maintain the files and respond to requests for particular documents. Each time the team received such a request, a team member would have to look up the specific document, copy it, and mail it out. The team was also responsible for creating files for new specifications and filing any incoming deviation waiver requests and notices of revision. It was a labor-intensive job.

Recognizing the inefficiencies of this paper-based system, the team knew it needed to make a change. But the team was truly spurred into action when it was told that the space where it stored the library would need to be emptied to make way for additional workers. The paper had to go, but the team still needed a way to store and find the documents. That's when the base's IT department asked IHS for help.

Meeting the Challenge

As a subscriber to several IHS database products, the IT department was already familiar with the experience of IHS in providing information products. Yet this would be the first time it would have IHS build a custom information management solution for the base. The department had several requirements — it needed a complete solution that would be capable of creating PDF versions of the paper documents and that would be able to store and index the documents at a rate of one million a year. Finally, the system had to be easy to use, so that end users could easily find the documents they needed on their own.

IHS quickly responded. The company started the process by creating a requirements study that described its system recommendations. The study also detailed all the components of the recommended system, including suggested data capture and database software, along with the hardware necessary to support the system.

Once the study was complete, the base then commissioned IHS to implement the proposed system. During this phase, IHS also provided four days of training to six system users, each of whom was a new employee. The goal of the training was to get the users comfortable enough with the system so that they could operate it on their own.

An Effective and Efficient Document Management System

After the rollout of the system, the library team began the process of scanning and indexing its extensive collection of documents. The scanning process was carefully designed to ensure document integrity, since once the documents were scanned in, they would then be destroyed. The team still follows the same process:

- First, a member of the team scans in a header document, which lets the data capture software know what type of document it will be processing and which fields it needs to capture information from for indexing purposes.
- Next, the document is scanned in. The software captures the information in the appropriate fields and converts it to text using optical character recognition (OCR) technology. The software also creates a PDF version of the scanned document.
- Once the entire document has been scanned in, the system operator reviews each page of the PDF to ensure that it is legible and makes any necessary changes to the OCR-rendered indexing text.
- The files are then sent for verification by a senior manager.

Since implementing the new system, productivity has dramatically increased. The electronic library has been made available to users over the base's secure intranet — users can simply log on to the password-protected site through any PC on the base. Using a Web browser, they can search for documents in ways not possible before — not just by document number, but also by keyword. The system uses the indexed text captured during the scanning process to search the database and return all documents associated with the keyword. The user can then view a PDF of the document — and unlike before, any number of users can view the same document at the same time.

Rather than spending time filing paperwork and making copies of specifications to send out, the members of the library management team are now able to focus on transferring newly created paper-based documents into the electronic system. In addition, upgrades to the system will soon mean that new specifications that are created for weapons manufactured on the base will no longer have to first be printed out and then scanned in. Instead, they'll be automatically converted into PDF format and indexed for the electronic library, saving the team even more time.

The system has proven to be so successful that another base that sends revisions to be incorporated in the library is now working with IHS to look for ways it can connect to the system as well.



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