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Case Study

Clerk of the Court

Montgomery County Replaces Bar Code Tracking With RFID

RFID Eliminates Manual Scanning of Bar Codes

Client Profile

Headquarters: Rockville, Maryland

Industry: Justice

FileTrail Implementation: 2008

FileTrail Products Implemented

- **FileTrail Professional** - Complete file tracking and records management automation with RFID technology.
- **FileTrail Calendar Management** - Automated calendar management with location-based Pull List and Delivery List reports.
- **RFEnterprise™** - Middleware that manages desktop and Ethernet-based RFID hardware performance
- **PassiveTracking™** - Automatic tracking of files as they move.
- **FTSynchronize™** - Scheduled synchronization of case and calendar data with the case management system.
- **RFMobile™** - A portable RFID reader that conducts fast audits and hunts for critical files with FileTrail's FileDetector™.
- **FTAuthenticate** - Single sign-on authentication using Windows, Active Directory, or 3rd-party authentication.

<http://www.FileTrail.com>

Introduction

If the value of replacing a bar code tracking system with RFID has ever been in question, the answer can be found in this Maryland Circuit Court.

In 2008, the court replaced their custom-developed case file tracking system with a FileTrail RFID Tracking solution. The results have been dramatic and court managers have a lot to say about the positive changes in every part of the court operation.

Background

The Circuit Court had used bar code technology for tracking case files since 1986. The system, called JackTrack for “jacket tracking”, utilized bar code scanners to track the locations of files.

After the initial implementation of JackTrack, a two-scan process of send-and-receive was adopted. This was needed to compensate for times when someone forgot to scan or accidentally missed a file.

In 2007, the Circuit Court selected FileTrail through an RFP process to implement an RFID Tracking Solution.

Passive Tracking Saves Time

The solution for the Circuit Court began with 153 RFID Passive Tracking locations. RFID sensors under desks or in the drop-ceilings cover each Chamber and each cubicle within Civil, Family, Criminal, and Juvenile. Two central file rooms, some doorways, and three exits are also covered.


As a case file moves among locations, it is automatically tracked by the RFID sensors without any specific user action. When files land in a clerk's cubicle, they are automatically checked out there. As that file is processed and moves to a work table, another clerk, a public counter, the file room or other location, the locations are automatically updated by RFID.

“The clerks now go about their normal work and don't have to scan bar codes anymore,” said the Clerk of the Court. “Staff can search for and locate files easily because the software is so easy to use.”

Calendar Management

Date: 8/24/2009		PULL FOR CALENDAR			
Location: In Criminal Clerks					
Filing Order	Item	Docket	Bar Code	Last Movement	Last Seen
1	CHA 210 112	00-112210 - CHANCE ROBIN Vol. 1	DUR	F-12210	11/7/2005 5:55:39 PM
2	JAC 204 112	00-112204 - JACOBSON BEV Vol. 1	DUR	F-12204	11/7/2005 5:55:38 PM
3	LAR 194 112	00-112194 - LARSON PAM Vol. 1	DUR	F-12194	11/7/2005 5:55:37 PM
4	TUM 207 112	00-112207 - TUMA RANDY Vol. 1	DUR	F-12207	11/7/2005 5:55:38 PM
Location: Out to Vincent Garcia (CRIM 03 B)					
Item	Docket	Bar Code	Last Movement	Last Seen	
1	00-112195 - Brynarski Laura Vol. 1	DUR	F-12195	6/2/2009 7:31:50 AM	
2	00-112205 - JOHNSON DAN Vol. 1	DUR	F-12205	6/2/2009 7:31:50 AM	
Location: Out to Zach Myren (JUV 01)					
Item	Docket	Bar Code	Last Movement	Last Seen	
1	00-112193 - BRODWINBERG SUMMER Vol. 1	DUR	F-12193	6/2/2009 7:23:32 AM	
Location: Out to Sue Herrera (JUV 23)					
Item	Docket	Bar Code	Last Movement	Last Seen	
1	00-112209 - GIBSON REHEE Vol. 1	DUR	F-12209	6/2/2009 7:29:39 AM	

The location-based Pull for Calendar report cuts the time required to assemble the docket. The location of each volume of multi-volume cases is listed.

Docket: CC		DELIVER CALENDAR	
Date: 8/24/2009			
Destination: Division 04			
Desk Location: 3rd Floor			
Date	Time	Item	Bar Code
1	8/24/2009 8:30:00 AM	00-112197 - WEAVER KEITH Vol. 1	F-12197
2	8/24/2009 9:30:00 AM	00-112199 - KUCERA PHILIP Vol. 1	F-12199
3	8/24/2009 11:30:00 AM	00-112208 - HACKNEY SKIP Vol. 1	F-12208
4	8/24/2009 2:30:00 PM	00-112203 - MICHAELSEN KAREN Vol. 1	F-12203
5	8/24/2009 2:30:00 PM	00-112203 - MICHAELSEN KAREN Vol. 2	F-000003
6	8/24/2009 2:30:00 PM	00-112203 - MICHAELSEN KAREN Vol. 3	F-000004
7	8/24/2009 2:30:00 PM	00-112203 - MICHAELSEN KAREN Vol. 4	F-000005
Docket: CC			
Date: 8/24/2009			
Destination: Division 06			
Desk Location: 4th Floor			
Date	Time	Item	Bar Code
1	8/24/2009 7:30:00 AM	00-112195 - SIRIANNI CHRIS Vol. 1	F-12195
2	8/24/2009 1:30:00 PM	00-112205 - DUNGAN CAROLYN Vol. 1	F-12205

The Deliver Calendar report helps organize case files, and acts as a manifest for courtroom clerks.

Benefitting From Other Changes

While all that sounds easy, it is a big jump to go from explicit scanning to trusting a system you cannot see.

“We had a difficult time making the jump to passive tracking,” said the Chief of Technical Services. “We were so conditioned by our bar code scanning that we resisted trusting an invisible tracking mechanism. But, in the end, we had to realize that the reason we initially pursued RFID was to eliminate the manual tracking of case files, thus reducing work.”

After the initial implementation, the Circuit Court moved quickly to expand the system. With a real understanding of what RFID could do, there were 16 more RFID sensors added to the system to cover new locations.

“After implementation, it became obvious that we needed to expand our RFID tracking capabilities in other locations within the court,” said the Chief of Technical Services. “The ability to see so much in the software interface gives us access to, and control of the case files that we never had before and with a lot less effort.”

The results for the Circuit Court have been dramatic. The double bar code scanning has been eliminated, so staff can focus on doing real work. In addition, fewer court-wide searches for files are done, and searches are much shorter because of the tracking information in the system. The former process of broadcasting all court staff emails about a missing file has been almost eliminated.

“One important change with the new system has been in data quality,” said the Chief of Technical Services. “In our old system a lot of data was entered as free-format text, but in the new system all locations, case numbers, and other relevant data is validated making tracking information much more reliable. The browser interface is so much easier to use, thus reducing time required to train staff.”

The Circuit Court has used the flexible tools to automate other processes, as well. For example, retrieving files for interfiling of loose papers has been streamlined to save time. First, a list of case files with loose papers is generated from the Court's Case Management System. The list is pasted into FileTrail's Batch Search tool and a location-based Pull List is printed for retrieval.

Part of the flexibility that has helped the Circuit Court is the ability to use RFID and bar code technologies interchangeably. There are about 60 locations in the court where it was better or more economical to use bar code scanners that the court already owned.

Streamlined Calendar Management

The Calendar Management module has changed the way files are pulled for calendar. The FileTrail approach saves time and ensures timely retrieval. The location-based Pull List report eliminates the guesswork in retrieving files. A Delivery List report helps organize the files for a courtroom and acts as a manifest for the courtroom clerk.

“The RFID calendar management tools have reduced the time required to pull for calendar,” said the Supervisor in the Assignment Office.

The fulfillment process checks files out to the courtroom with one-click – a much faster process than bar code scanning. About half the courts using FileTrail chose not to cover the courtrooms with RFID because of the predictability of the file being there on a hearing date.

“Our old process was based on a printed court calendar and staff would spend hours locating files, which could be anywhere,” said the Supervisor in the Assignment Office. “With the RFID system we get a location-by-location list. The files located in the file room are in one section, followed by a section of files that are with Mary Jones, and so on.”

System Requirements

FileTrail is browser-based, requiring no installation at the desktop for normal use. Some desktop installation is required for functions that use peripherals, such as printing labels or downloading portable scanners.

Web Server:

- OS: Windows Server 2000/2003/2008
- MS .Net Framework 3.5

Database Server:

- SQL Server 2000/2005/2008
- Oracle 9i/10g

Workstations:

- IE 6/7 or FireFox 2/3/3.5
- For Label Printing:
Java Runtime Environment 6
- For Portable Download:
MS Active Synch 4.8
MS .Net Framework 3.5

Multiple Volumes



The Related Volumes popup provides quick access to all folder volumes for a case and where each is located.

Preventing Removal of Case Files

The Circuit Court had always had concerns about case files being removed from the building. While a case file can be re-created from other sources, the time and cost is pretty high. Adding to the problem, some members of the public still believe that if they can get their file and destroy it that the charges will go away as if there were no other record.

The system leverages the power of RFID to control exits using any combination of siren, lights and email notification. Also, intelligent business logic allows discretion as to what sets off the alarm. Alarm events are also recorded in the history of the individual items, and in an Alarm Event log.

“With the old system, we had no way of knowing if case files were leaving the courthouse,” said the Chief of Technical Services. “However, the new system now gives us that ability.”

Complete Case Management Integration

Adding new cases to the FileTrail inventory without additional data entry is a critical capability. And, FileTrail avoids redundant data entry with a configurable tool for loading new case data and updates to case data. The FileTrail team worked with County Court technicians to get the data exchange in place.

“Data is fed to the RFID system from our case management system on an HP mainframe system in near real-time,” said the Senior Systems Analyst. “Our clerks enter new cases, pull the jackets, and by the time they turn around the data is in the RFID system and ready for them to do the RFID Tagging process.”

Managing Multi-Volume Cases

FileTrail manages multi-volume cases with a set of tools that make it easy.

- The Next Volume tool creates and numbers the next volume of a case file with one click, and drops you at the Creation screen to assign an RFID tag to the new file.
- The Related Volume tool pops open a new window that displays all the volumes of a case and where each is located.
- The Calendar Management module includes all volumes in the Pull List and Delivery List reports.

“Since each volume is independently tracked, we don’t need to worry about keeping them together,” said the Clerk of the Court. “We can find each one and pull the set back together easily if all of them are needed at once.”

Full Life-Cycle Management

FileTrail automates the full life-cycle of case files. At the next annual purge the Circuit Court will utilize FileTrail boxing and archiving transactions to streamline boxing of old case files and transmission to storage. Detailed tracking at this point assures reliable retrieval because the exact box is known. This location appears on the screen in FileTrail, just as it does for case files that are filed in the stacks or checked out to a clerk.

While not used in the Circuit Court, FileTrail can print color-coded labels on demand, simplifying creation of new case files. FileTrail can also automate tracking in court-operated storage locations.



About FileTrail

FileTrail, Inc., is the leading provider of web-based business records automation, including file tracking and records management solutions. FileTrail helps Justice agencies implement and enforce standardized processes in handling paperwork, documenting compliance, and managing workflow, providing a fast-track to “best practices”. With FileTrail your agency responds faster and more reliably to internal and external clients, contributing to higher customer retention that is important in today’s economy.

FileTrail is the leader in UHF RFID for records handling and tracking. FileTrail’s RFID technology brings additional timesavings to managing paperwork including passive tracking, securing exits, and locating critical files using the FileDetector™. FileTrail’s clients span over forty industries on four continents. Based in San Jose, California, FileTrail has been providing solutions for records management since 2001. Visit us at www.FileTrail.com.

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...because Paper Happens®

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Sophisticated Configuration Tools

The system supports unlimited number of user-defined fields. This allows the screen for each department/division to mirror the data fields that is kept in the Circuit Court’s Case Management System.

FileTrail’s RFEnterprise Middleware manages communication with the RFID hardware, and organizes the data into transactions. FileTrail has built some sophisticated tools that help tailor performance to each specific situation.

“The Verification Settings help eliminate unnecessary tracking, especially when a clerk is delivering files and passes by a reader and we don’t want an entry to appear in the file’s history,” said the Chief of Technical Services. “We can configure the system not to do a move to this location unless the reader sees the file there for at least 30 seconds, and that enhances our results.”

Automating Tables and Counters

RFID sensors have been used to automate case file tracking at public counters. Sensors installed under the public counter record comings and goings of case files without requiring any specific action by clerks.

RFID sensors have also been used to automate case file tracking at work tables. Case files may sit at a work table for a few minutes or a few days, and there may be a few dozen or a few hundred. A set of RFID sensors placed every two feet along the underside of the table read the tags on all the case files. The use of verification settings, described in the previous section, ensure that files are not tracked to a work table accidentally as staff walk past the table.

Summary

The Circuit Court had been using a bar code tracking system since 1986 to gain control over case files. Even with bar code tracking the Circuit Court felt that the entire problem was not solved.

Since implementing a FileTrail RFID solution, many tracking issues have been resolved and other changes are saving time. Case files are automatically tracked by RFID sensors at 170 key locations and processes like calendar management and loose paper filing have been streamlined using the system.

“We operate with less effort and fewer disruptions because RFID is automatically tracking the files as they move,” said the Clerk of the Court.

Contact FileTrail

For more information about the benefits of automating with FileTrail, contact your local FileTrail representative at:

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