

Laserfiche ECM Blogs

A Higher Level of Efficiency

Written by Laserfiche Staff



Name a recent natural disaster, and Ceres Environmental Recovery & Restoration Management has been there, helping clean up and rebuild. In fact, the licensed general contractor and government contracting firm has been awarded more than \$700 million in disaster recovery contracts during the past eight years—most notably a \$500 million contract to help Louisiana recover from Hurricane Katrina.

Laserfiche has played a significant role in Ceres' expanded success. Besides providing secure storage and retrieval of the 33 years' worth of documentation the company had accumulated, Laserfiche has been instrumental in:

- Accelerating and automating the effort and time it takes to manage and mobilize 4,000-plus subcontractors to respond to a disaster.
- Reducing processing time for debris load tickets, which track the actual clean-up effort, by 1/3.

As Michael Hansen, asset manager at Ceres, explains, it was during its response to Katrina that the Minnesota-based company first saw how Laserfiche could bring efficiency to its processes—and value to its business. Besides managing thousands of sub-contractors' contracts, insurance and payment data, Ceres' primary business process using Laserfiche was to catalog the hundreds of thousands of debris load tickets it collected to verify and invoice its clean-up efforts.

"We recognized record management and retention would be a monstrous task, so we began scanning job tickets remotely from Louisiana," Hansen explains. "But as the job wrapped up, we also knew that the data we'd collected needed to be shared across the company."

Hansen and Controller Jeff Zahn developed a plan to tie together a new Citrix cloud server network with the company's new VoIP telecom system in December 2007. Reseller ENS helped move the Laserfiche database to the company's Minnesota server farm in February 2008. Now load tickets and contractor information scanned in the Louisiana office were instantly available to the Minnesota office.

“Prior to this, we had to use company couriers or ship documents and hope that they made it intact,” Hansen says. “A lost box of information could mean tens—if not hundreds—of thousands of dollars of lost revenue.”

In June 2008, the company saw just how beneficial these improvements were when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) wanted to audit the actual debris load tickets and billing invoices from the Katrina project. “Normally this meant an Army auditor would be at the office for weeks, reviewing paper records,” Hansen says.

For a job the size of Katrina, that meant the USACE auditor would be wading through more than 500,000 debris load tickets. “Envision a room 30 feet long by 12 feet wide with both walls stacked to the top—that was one of our ticket rooms coming out of Katrina,” explains Ceres IS/IT Supervisor Tim Zanor. “To make it even worse, nine times out of ten, out of the 500,000 load tickets, the auditor would want to pull the documents from the bottom of a stack.”

Zanor configured the Laserfiche Katrina volume so the USACE could access the Katrina load tickets—and only the Katrina load tickets—to perform a major portion of the audit remotely through Ceres’ Citrix cloud network. “Both parties recognized this would be a great cost-saver, since multiple people could access records from multiple locations at the same time, for a true cross-audit of records,” says Hansen. “It also allowed the auditors the ability to do rapid searches for specific documents—something they just couldn’t do with paper documents.”

As a result, Ceres received an “Outstanding” performance evaluation from the USCAE. What’s more, the networked use of Laserfiche factored in Ceres’ quicker, more cost-effective responses to Hurricanes Dolly, Gustav and Ike.

Hansen and Zanor point to the use of Laserfiche by the Ceres Storm Department to mobilize subcontractors and coordinate respond to Hurricane Ike in 2009. “We have a database of over 4,000 subcontractors, and each one has a file of their company’s documents, which can be 30 pages,” Zanor says.

“When Ike hit, we got the call at 7:00 P.M. that we needed to have 75 trucks to Galveston by 6:00 A.M. To respond that rapidly, we had to first geographically search and qualify subcontractors, then get on the phone with them,” Hansen explains. “By midnight, thanks to Laserfiche, we already had a list of 150 ready. In the past, we’d still be making calls at 3:00 A.M.” What’s more, adds Zanor, was that each subcontractor already had their insurance and driver’s license information verified compliant with DOT and FEMA regulations, stored in Laserfiche.

Once on site, Laserfiche has also slashed processing time for debris load tickets—cutting labor costs and ultimately improving Ceres’ relationships with the company’s subcontractors. “During Gustav and Ike, we were actually able to process load tickets in about 1/3 of the time than it took during Katrina,” Zantor says. “We’re imaging 2,000–3,000 load documents a day from the site, so they’re available to the rest of the company the next day. In years past, they’d have sat on that site, waiting to be transported,” Hansen adds. “Right away, we cut our labor costs. Plus we’re able to pay our subcontractors faster, and have access at multiple locations to the actual load tickets in the event of any discrepancies.”

Though their use of Laserfiche has grown organically—“I refer to our system as ‘an octopus in training’ because we have our Storm Division, Construction Division, Property Management and Mulch & Soils Manufacturing companies all on it,” quips Zantor—it’s the balance of centralized administrative control and local flexibility that he continues to find value in.

“To me, security is really the biggest benefit of using Laserfiche,” Zantor says. “A supervisor in Indiana may need to get ahold of insurance documents and we can make sure that’s all he sees—just the insurance files, not HR or contract files.”

Future plans, Hansen and Zantor say, are all about business process management. “We upgraded to Laserfiche [Avante](#) because it includes Workflow, which we’ve already implemented in our accounting process to facilitate invoice approvals by managers and staff in remote project locations. We intend to utilize it for contract management, especially with our construction project process, in order to image-enable our Maxwell cost accounting system,” says Hansen. “We just want to be able to give our users that higher level of efficiency.”



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