

Laserfiche ECM Blogs

Law's New Order

Written by Melissa Henley



The Daviess County, IN, prosecutor's office, located in the basement of the county courthouse, isn't the biggest office to start with. But with files stacked from the floor to the ceiling, it was clear that the office, home to three prosecuting attorneys, desperately needed more room.

Thanks to Prosecuting Attorney G. Byron Overton, they're getting it. Overton and his staff are working with Laserfiche reseller Nancy Mathes of Paper-Lite to scan and store files electronically in Laserfiche. "We're not going paperless," Overton says. "We're going file-less."

Daviess County's move to paperless file management began when Overton attended the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) annual conference, where he heard [Laserfiche Luminary Jeff Sauter](#) speak about his [paperless prosecutor's office in Eaton County, MI](#). Sauter, a well-known speaker at industry events, is known to host on-site visits from other prosecutors interested in his Laserfiche paperless file management system.

"I talk about Laserfiche whenever I can," Sauter says. "When I present at continuing education events, I show screenshots of our Laserfiche repository and explain our various work processes. I also like to show photos of the 'before' and 'after' in our office. Instead of six file cabinets, we now only need a single drawer - and it doesn't even hold paper! We use it to hold evidence CDs. The fact that we haven't lost a single file in over three years is earth-shattering to other prosecutors."

At the event Overton attended, Sauter asked attendees to guess how much time prosecutors' staff spent working with case files. According to Overton, he and other attendees guessed 25 to 30 percent of their workdays. Sauter replied if they actually asked staff, they'd find it was likely closer to 50 percent.

Once Overton thought about it, he realized Sauter was right. "When we need older files, our administrative assistants have to physically retrieve them," Overton says.

“Somebody has to trek down there, find the file, get the file out and bring it back down here. It takes a lot of time, and it happens weekly.”

After Sauter’s presentation, Overton chose a [Laserfiche Avante](#) system for the prosecutor’s office. Although he knew it would take time to get up and running, he had confidence the payoff would be worth it. “We’re just running out of room,” he says. “Laserfiche is going to save us time, and eventually, save us money.”

Staff agree. “There’s no more looking for files,” says Chief Deputy Prosecutor Dan Murrie. “Everyone can work on the same file at the same time.”

The prosecutor’s office has six administrative assistants, each of whom has a Fujitsu fi-6130 scanner at their desk and scan documents into Laserfiche as they arrive. Mathes also worked with staff to create an electronic work process in Laserfiche that mirrors what they were used to doing with paper case files. The child-support side of the prosecutor’s office, with one attorney and four administrative assistants, is following the same process as the criminal side, as is civil cases.

When a case file arrives, staff create a standard document in Microsoft Word that lists necessary information such as the defendant’s name, case number and any other pertinent information. Using Laserfiche’s “Send To” feature, the Word document is sent to Laserfiche and a case file in Laserfiche is dynamically created. The case number and defendant’s information is automatically filled in the file’s template fields, and the template is attached to the original Word document. Staff then open the folder in Laserfiche and scan and enter all case documentation by document type, where a drop down list of document types speeds data entry. And at the end of the day, all scanned documents are full-text indexed for instant search and retrieval.

This system is just as easy for attorneys to navigate as it is for support staff. Attorneys are able to open the Word document and update their notes, just like they used to write on the front of a file folder—except instead of searching around the office for a file folder, they access documents right from their desktop computers. When they’re done entering notes, they simply close the Word document and their changes are automatically added to the case file stored in Laserfiche.

To guarantee disaster recovery, files are backed up twice at the courthouse and a third time off-site. “Even in the highly unlikely event all three back-ups fail, our files are largely made up of other agencies’ files, so we could reconstruct them if we needed to,” Overton says. And the original documents needed for trial exhibits—such as blood alcohol test results, documents from other counties and states and other supporting evidence—fit in one filing cabinet.

“It’s definitely a work in progress, but it’s one of those things where you have to realize that the problem didn’t occur overnight, and the solution won’t either,” says Mathes. “Byron and his staff have been great, hanging in there and sticking with it, knowing that the end result will be worth the effort.

“You can’t pick a perfect time to get started, you just have to get started,” she adds. “There’s no perfect conditions. With this office, they were just out of room, and that’s why they had to get started. But they have confidence that it will ultimately be successful, and it will pay off in greater efficiency.”

While the prosecutor’s office is still in the midst of deploying their Laserfiche solution, they still haven’t neglected to plan for the future. Overton says the attorneys in his office will eventually get laptops with “access to all files all the time.” And once the office is ready to implement the integrated business process management functionality that is included with the Laserfiche Avante system, Mathes will write a workflow rule that enables attorneys to automatically send necessary filing instructions and/or case files to support staff for additional processing. “We designed the template to enable Workflow automation in the future,” she says. “We were able to sit down, plan our implementation and do what we needed up front to make things easier as we move ahead.”

Once the office finishes scanning this year’s files, they plan to start on older files in storage, a process that will likely be handled by interns. “It’s a never-ending process,” Overton says. “We need more room. The courthouse has limited space. Everybody needs more room.”

And while Overton knows his office’s Laserfiche deployment is still unfolding, he has faith in its eventual outcome. “The conversion phase is in process,” he says. “It’s a difficult process, but it will ultimately prove to be worthwhile.”



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