

case study



City of Niles

Small City Leverages the Power of Technology

This small town provider of electricity is using DocuWare to provide better customer service, reduce fraud, and operate more efficiently. The system is expanding throughout the city and will eventually become the records management system for all city government departments.

Founded on the banks of the St. Joseph River in 1691, Niles, Michigan is a small town located in the southwest corner of the state, just north of the Indiana state line and only 90 minutes from downtown Chicago. The City of Niles and the surrounding Niles Townships govern a combined population of 33,000 providing essential municipal, police and electrical services for the area.

Documents

The City of Niles is using DocuWare to store utility bills and utility applications, police incident reports and financial documents.

Work Processes

The City of Niles is unique in that it supplies its residents with not only water and sewer services, but electricity as well. Electrical billing is very complex and the Utilities department struggled to fulfil customer inquires and perform internal audits. Due to the nature of their billing software and electrical rates based on complex equations, the department was unable to view or recreate old bills. Unfortunately, the only information they had access to was the dollar amount of the bill. All of the detailed information contained on the bill such as the rate, meter number, service location and address was essentially lost. Additionally, when electrical rates changed, the software was reprogrammed with a new rate structure, making adjusting the rate or recreating an old bill impossible.

Solution Requirements

The Utilities department wanted to implement a flexible document management system backed up by strong technical and user support that could grow and change with the department's changing needs. They wanted the ability to access a detailed copy of each statement. Three years earlier, the City's Po-



lice department had begun using DocuWare. The IT department liked the program, knew that DocuWare kept up with technology through upgrades, so wanting to standardize the city on one package, choose to expand the system to the Utilities department.

Solution

Information and Records Associates, an Authorized DocuWare Partner, expanded the system to the Utilities department. Since implementing DocuWare, the Utilities department is now easily able to store an electronic copy of every electrical bill they generate. DocuWare's TIFF-MAKER print driver is used to import a copy of each bill into DocuWare. Because the name, date and account number are printed in the same place on each bill, the images are able to be automatically indexed using OCR technology. The staff can also do a full-text search on all the information contained on the bill such as the meter number, service locations and billing address.

The Task

- Implement a flexible document management system that suited the department's changing needs

Appointed Modules

- DocuWare
- CDMAKER

The Benefits

- Reduced workplace stress and employee turnover costs
- Improved customer service
- Less time needed for searches

Looking up old bills and other information is now a very simple process, instead of a series of "best guesses."

The Benefits in Detail

The use of DocuWare by the Utilities department has empowered the staff with a tool that helps them accomplish their jobs easier and faster, reducing workplace stress and lowering employee turnover costs.

The full-text search feature allows the staff to easily rectify complaints. The staff can quickly search for all bills attached to a specific meter and look for discrepancies such as a broken meter or meter reading that is unusually high. The staff uses the system to search for information associated with a particular location address, such as an apartment that has had various tenants, and resolve any issues. Customer service has improved as access to information regarding past bills is now instantly available. The department is also able easily audit individual accounts or all the accounts in order to produce a report for a rate study.

"The department can pull up and reprint old bills, something they could never do before. Having all of this information at their fingertips has improved customer service," said James Stump, IT Coordinator for the City of Niles.

Additionally, DocuWare is also used to store a permanent record of change of service request forms. The system is also helping reduce fraud. When an individual comes in to set up their electric service their application and a form of ID such as a driver's license or green



card are stored in DocuWare. The department can search across previous applications against name, date of birth, and social security number for outstanding bills. Before the system was installed, applications were stored in paper folders by SSN and were very difficult to check. Fighting fraud was inefficient as the department relied more on their employees' memories than the hard to use paper system.

"In the past, it was easier for our employees to use their memory to fight fraud, than to use our paper system. When an employee left knowledge was lost. Fraud isn't a big problem, but a reoccurring problem that we are now successfully managing with DocuWare," said James.

For the City, the expansion of DocuWare to the Utilities department brings them one step closer to having a city wide records management system. It all began when the Police department started using DocuWare to store old incident reports, eliminating the need to

store the records in a heated garage away from the main building, reducing document retrieval time and improving access to information, which helps the department solve cases faster. The system then expanded to the Utilities department and they have seen a substantial increase in productivity and customer service. Now the Finance department is using the system to store Accounts Payable checks and supporting documentation such as purchase orders, invoices and packing slips, reducing filing time by one third and showing the real time savings on the retrieval side, with only seconds to access information.

"In the future we would like to use DocuWare's workflow capabilities, we are only just touching the tip of the iceberg regarding the information DocuWare can help us manage," said James.

In conclusion, DocuWare is helping the City of Niles maintain fiscal responsibility to the tax payers by better serving its residents while keeping costs low.

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James Stump,
IT Coordinator,
City of Niles

For more information
please visit our website
at www.docuware.com

