PROFILE
- Name: Rutherford County School District
- Location: Murfreesboro, Tennessee
- www.rcschools.net

CHALLENGE
Convert hundreds of thousands of personnel documents to digital, to save space, streamline productivity, and assure security and confidentiality.

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The purchase of four Epson DS-860 scanners, a local server, scanning software, and off-site backups allowed the district to efficiently scan and archive all personnel files, resulting in increased efficiency, productivity, and file security.

Making Paperless a Reality

SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NASHVILLE AREA GOES PAPER-FREE

Human Resources Analyst Leslie Duke says she had two questions when the Rutherford County, Tennessee, School District began seriously considering a paper-free filing and archiving system.

"How are we going to convert our old files to digital form?" she asked, and "How are we going to move forward in a paperless way, given that many of our personnel forms must be signed by hand?"

The answer, now fully and successfully implemented, was based on a remarkable desktop document scanner, the Epson DS-860.

FIVE THOUSAND PERSONNEL FILES

The Rutherford County School District is a large district, with 46 schools, 42,600 students and more than 5,000 employees. Each personnel file contains 25 to more than 400 documents, and each must be maintained for the working life of the employee and be available for review upon request. The accumulated paperwork, though purged regularly, filled three large rooms.

While staff had talked about going paperless for several years, space became so short this year that they knew they had to do something. "We've experienced tremendous growth since our district office opened," Duke says. Freeing up space became a priority.

That said, the main benefits of the change have come from improvements in productivity. "We were spending a tremendous amount of time creating new files, organizing them, finding documents, and pulling files when someone would leave," Duke explains. Each summer, for example, the district hires 300–400 new teachers plus 150 support staff, generating thousands of pages of documents. While Duke doesn't know exactly how much time her office has saved, studies have shown that, in most organizations, it takes from four to five minutes to locate and retrieve a single piece of paper. Today, she says, it takes less than a minute to scan, index and electronically file a new document. Locating a document, once it's in the system, takes about 15 seconds.

"Then too, there are lots of human errors when you have this volume of paper," she adds. "I'm not aware of ever losing a file, but if a file becomes misplaced, a search can waste a lot of time." Last year, the district purchased a turn-key system with four Epson scanners, a local server, and third party scanning software and off-site backups. They also purchased a

similar system with five more Epson scanners in the English as a Second Language department, which has started its own move to paperless

A 3 1/2-MONTH PROJECT

Duke says the original plan was for HR to begin using the system for all new records, but then take about a year to scan the existing paper files. In that way they could leverage the time saved not filing new paper documents to scan the old. "It went so well," she recalls, "that we decided to power straight through it, and we were able to finish in about three and a half months." That meant scanning about 70 employee files each day, a total possible only with an extremely fast and reliable scanner.

"I was amazed at the volume these scanners can do each day," Duke recalls. Four HR people have scanners on their desks, and when they had some free time, they would retrieve an employee

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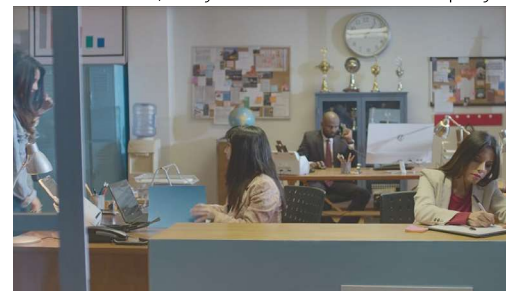
file, remove any staples, then place the stack of paper on the automatic feeder. The Epson DS-860 scans both sides of each page at once, creating a full-color image file in PDF format plus an attached text file, optically reading not only printed characters but hand-printed fields as well.

The third party scanning software automatically titles each scanned document with the headline it finds on the first page, and it converts other headlines into metadata for faster searches. That said, if the user does not find the document needed from a headline/metadata search, he or she can search for any word or phrase found in the body of the document.

The most remarkable part of the conversion process is that the Epson-based system scans, optically reads, saves and indexes a stack of documents at 65 pages per minute[1]. At the end of the scan, the user can manipulate the PDF file it produces, splitting it into single pages or storing it as one packet.

Duke says if the scanner detects a problem, it simply stops and waits for the user to make an adjustment. "It's a really simple mechanism, and it's very easy to troubleshoot," she explains. "Sometimes with an older document, two or three pages would stick together. When that

happens, you just open it up, pull out the paper and re-feed it."

While the scanner reads both sides of the document if running in duplex mode, it is smart enough to delete any blank pages before transferring the file to the third party scanning software. "If someone marks up a document with a yellow highlighter, it will pick that up, along with any handwritten notes in the margins," she says. At the end of the process, it gives the operator a count of the pages scanned, so she can double check if anything was skipped, but none were found in almost 500,000 pages.

Maintenance, Duke says, is quick and easy. "Some of our files were very old, so periodically we would blow compressed air into the scanners to get the dust off the rollers."

The benefits of the change were obvious early on. "Each summer, we send a mailing to teachers. We had 1,200 replies to file this year. That took me less than two hours with the scanner, whereas with paper we would have been filing for several days."

MOVING FORWARD

Today, Duke believes, the system is as close to paperless as possible. Any paper forms submitted are processed quickly and scanned for storage. "We use the scanners at least 20 times each day," she says.

All of these electronic records are not only easy to find, but easy to send out when someone requests a copy. "In certain circumstances, we would pull the whole employee folder out of the file room then send it to those who would have to approve a change. That always made

me nervous, because I was afraid we might lose it." Now supervisors can have electronic access to employee records, and if an outside agency, such as an insurance company, requests a form, HR simply prints a copy for them. "If we need to redact a social security number or some other sensitive information, the software does it automatically, even if it's written by hand."

Duke believes the records are more secure than ever, given that anyone with access to the storage rooms could access any paper file. "Today HR can see HR files and ESL can see ESL, but only with the proper passwords and credentials," Duke explains. Fire was always a catastrophic risk when the files were on paper, but given the system's Cloud-based backup, that's no longer the case.

Duke says the district is so happy with the Epson DS-860 document scanner that they're expanding their use into other departments and into the individual schools. The Special Education department has been looking into its own paperless program, and several high schools have begun scanning student transcripts, which they must keep on file for 100 years after graduation. The district now has 14 DS-860 scanners and is planning more purchases in the new year.

In an application like this, the Epson DS-860 offers a far better feature set for the price than any other brand. The double sided scanning, blank page deletion and the speed were crucial for this application. In day to-day operation at the district, the scanners have performed flawlessly. "There's a tremendous amount of documentation we have to keep in a district this large," Duke explains. "By scanning and storing these records electronically, we will free up room after room and save hour after hour for our support staff."

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