



Alfa Insurance

Automated content management system improves customer service, boosts productivity, and replaces costly paper and microfilm storage

Benefits

- Instant access to documents and photos reduces response time for customer inquiries from days to minutes
- Consolidating information leads to greater productivity for customer service representatives
- Easy-to-use web interface puts policy information at agents' fingertips
- Reclaimed office space eliminates costs incurred from paper and microfilm storage
- Electronic documentation of all customer agreements helps reduce liability exposure

Business overview

Alfa Insurance is a regional insurance company headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama. Founded in 1946 by what is now known as the Alabama Farmers Federation, Alfa consists of eight property and casualty (P&C) insurance companies, one life insurance company, and four non-insurance companies offering other types of financial services. Alfa has 2,500 employees working in 400 service centers across 13 states.

Challenges

Alfa services more than one million insurance policies a year, but until recently the company was still relying on manual, paper-based processes for capturing, storing, and accessing policy and claim information. The mountains of paperwork generated by Alfa's business created delays and inefficiencies, and required more than 8,000 square feet of costly office space for mass storage of microfilm and paper files.

The inefficiencies of the previous processes were felt most acutely in the P&C insurance division, where customers often waited up to three days for the answers to their routine policy questions. When a customer called in for information, the agent would pass the request to a customer service representative, who would then refer the request to the home office records department. If the information was stored on microfilm, records personnel would then have to manually search for the appropriate documents using a microfilm reader. If the documents were in paper form, file clerks often faced additional delays if the requested file was in use by other personnel. Once the document was located, the records clerk would then copy the information and route it back to the customer service representative, who would pass the information to the agent.

"In addition to the customer service issues, the company was exposed to a great deal of risk through the hardcopy storage of all documents onsite in either microfilm or paper form," said Kevin Lawrence, Alfa Insurance's vice president of office systems.

Business profile

Alfa Insurance

Regional insurance company servicing more than one million policies

Industry

Financial services

Geographies

Headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama with 400 service centers in 13 states

Business solution

Claims management, transactional content management

EMC product

EMC Documentum
ApplicationXtender

Deployment summary

Single system for capturing, storing, and managing electronic documents supporting insurance policies and claims

EMC partners

Business Systems & Consultants, Inc.,
EMC software consulting services

Limited room to grow

A legacy imaging system installed in the late 1990s presented only a partial solution. "The system required a great deal of custom coding in order to integrate with our IT environment, and it was not the robust solution we felt we needed to support the company's continued growth," said Lawrence. "We needed a system that would support our strategic vision and scale with the company as new acquisitions are made into the future. We were also running out of space!"

Alfa looked at several options for more efficient document storage, but the paper-based options (including offsite storage) did not address the inefficiencies of the customer service process. "We realized that replacing the paper with an electronic document management solution was the only way to solve the storage problems. And we knew it would help us provide faster response times to customer inquiries," said Lawrence.

EMC solution

After a thorough product evaluation, Alfa Insurance chose EMC® Documentum® ApplicationXtender® to provide the electronic document management solution. ApplicationXtender electronically stores, organizes, and manages documents, files, and other business-critical information, and provides fast, security-controlled access to information from either Windows or web-based clients.

"ApplicationXtender was our top choice because it provides document-level security out of the box, without requiring custom coding," said Lawrence. "It also provides the best solution for web clients, and we felt that ApplicationXtender would provide the fastest migration path from the previous system."

To date, Alfa has implemented 31 separate ApplicationXtender applications across the company, with the top three serving the P&C, life insurance, and claims departments. In addition to 450 direct users of ApplicationXtender in the Alfa home office, more than 1,500 users in field offices access the system via the ApplicationXtender Web Access client.

Instant access to policy information

ApplicationXtender provides a centralized, fully automated repository for all policy and claims documents, replacing Alfa's old paper and microfilm document storage systems. Once new policies are underwritten and the paperwork is complete, the paper documents are sent to the scanning center within the content management group. There, two content management technicians scan the documents into the ApplicationXtender repository using eight Bell + Howell 8125D scanners running AnyDocs OCR for Forms scanning software. An additional technician scans color photos directly into ApplicationXtender using a separate process. Together, the two technicians scan more than 60,000 documents into the system every day. "We're now putting about 1.4 million images into the system every month, and that number is growing rapidly," said Lawrence.

Now customer service personnel can respond instantly to client inquiries without having to process the request through the home office. ApplicationXtender automatically indexes the scanned documents according to policy type, service center, agent number, and other search attributes. Using the ApplicationXtender Web Access client, the representative can access complete information about a policy, including all supporting documents and photos. If the policy information needs to be referred to the agent for further research, the representative can attach electronic annotations to the documents describing the information in question.

Alfa has not only improved its response times for customer inquiries, but service representatives have become much more productive. Prior to ApplicationXtender, if a field representative needed clarification on a photo or entries on a document, service staff would either copy the item or return the original to the person seeking assistance—incurring delays and postage costs. Now, instead of spending hours or even days tracking down hard copy documents or photos, both parties can access the item in question simultaneously online and resolve the issues with a single phone call. “Before the ApplicationXtender solution, this scenario at a minimum would take four to five days. Now it can happen instantaneously,” said Lawrence.

“ApplicationXtender has enabled us to be a more effective and productive company by replacing paper and automating many cumbersome and time-consuming tasks.”

Kevin Lawrence, Vice President of Office Systems

In addition, the new system provides an important audit trail for customer data. “In this litigious world, it’s good to have a quick and easy method to show that a policy has been executed in good faith, according to the client’s instructions and confirmed by their signature,” said Lawrence. “By capturing all critical information related to a policy or claim, ApplicationXtender gives us that protection.”

Reclaiming valuable office space

Since implementing ApplicationXtender, Alfa has reclaimed more than 2,100 square feet of office space that was formerly committed to storage of hardcopy files and microfilm. Eventually, that number will grow to at least 4,500 square feet as the company continues to scan archived documents into the system. Alfa is using specialized scanning technology from Mekel Technology to capture the microfilm records.

“Every square foot of space we’re able to put to more productive use means dollar savings for the company,” said Lawrence. “Without this system, we would have incurred additional expenses of leasing more office space or offsite archiving of hardcopy documents.”

Coming soon: Workflow

With the completion of a new, highly secure data center, Alfa will be implementing ApplicationXtender Workflow functionality to automate many of the manual, paper-based processes that take place prior to document scanning. Alfa is using EMC professional services to identify requirements for the workflow, which will enable the company to scan documents immediately upon their receipt in the mail distribution center. The documents can then be electronically routed to all necessary business units for processing and signoff. “Currently, a document can be touched as many as 40 times before it finally reaches our scanning center,” said Lawrence. “Not only will ApplicationXtender Workflow make this process much more efficient, but we expect it to bring huge savings to the company in time and money—up to \$250,000 annually in staffing alone.”

Summary

EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender has enabled Alfa Insurance to replace many manual, paper-based processes with an electronic system for capturing, storing, and accessing critical insurance policy and claims information. As a result, the company has been able to improve its response times for customer inquiries, improve productivity among content management and customer service personnel, and reclaim office space for higher-value use. "ApplicationXtender has enabled us to be a more effective and productive company by replacing paper and automating many cumbersome and time-consuming tasks. We look forward to taking the next step and experiencing the time and cost savings that workflow will bring," said Lawrence.

About EMC

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Customer Profile
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