

The George Washington University

Enterprise document capture and storage enhances and improves many key business functions

Benefits

- Greater control and accuracy in supply chain transactions
- Enhanced employee productivity through faster access to documents
- More compact and efficient processes for storing and archiving documents
- Inexpensive and easy-to-implement solution with far-reaching impact on many different areas

Business overview

Founded in 1821, The George Washington University (GW) is one of America's largest private universities with over 11,000 undergraduates, a law school, and a school of medicine. The university has more than 9,000 full-time and part-time employees, including faculty and staff, making it Washington D.C.'s largest private employer.

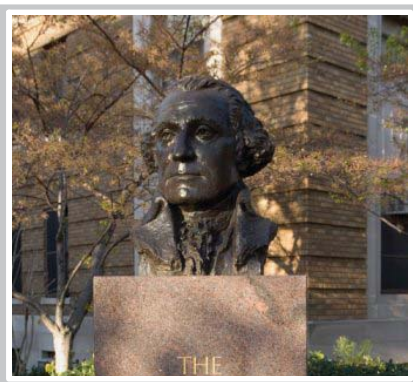
Challenges

Until recently, GW relied on manual, paper-based processes for managing and storing a variety of critical business documents and records. In the payroll services department, source payroll records were stored in hard copy archive boxes, creating severe inefficiencies. Requests from employees, such as payroll deduction or 401(k) changes, would often take days to process as payroll personnel sifted through volumes of paper records.

The university's supply chain organization, responsible for accounts payable, purchasing, and warehousing operations, also struggled with time-consuming, cumbersome processes. Here, invoices and purchase orders were stored in filing cabinets until they were archived to an offsite warehouse. "We needed a more compact and efficient way to store and manage these documents without having to take up valuable floor space with 22 filing cabinets of paper," said Tom Hughes, senior advisor for strategic planning at GW.

The lack of control inherent in these paper-based systems also created difficulties and delays in the auditing process. GW is subject to regular audits of its financial records by internal auditors as well as its external auditor, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Each auditing team may request records going back as far as seven years, meaning that documents more than a year old had to be retrieved from the offsite storage location—resulting in tremendous delays. "When they were done, there was never any guarantee that an invoice taken out of a folder would end up back in the right place, so we'd know where to find it next time," said a GW spokesperson.

To address these challenges, GW assembled a team to evaluate electronic imaging and document management systems. GW's objectives were to automate inefficient and time-consuming paper-based processes and reduce the amount of hard copy storage on university premises. At the same time, the university wanted to streamline the auditing process by giving auditors immediate, accurate access to the documents they needed.



Business profile

The George Washington University

Largest institute of higher learning in Washington, D.C., with more than 9,000 employees

Industry

Education

Geographies

Washington D.C., Northern Virginia, and Hampton Roads, Virginia)

Business solution

AP/AR processing/invoicing, transactional content management

EMC products

EMC Documentum
ApplicationXtender,
EMC DiskXtender for Windows,
EMC Centera

Deployment summary

System for capturing, storing, and managing supply chain documents such as invoices and purchase orders, as well as payroll records and other business-critical documents

EMC partners

Kofax, NMS Imaging

EMC solution

GW's search for a solution led it to EMC® Documentum® ApplicationXtender® and its companion product, EMC DiskXtender® for Windows. Together, the products form an easy-to-use electronic solution for storing, organizing, and managing documents, files, and other business-critical information that provides fast, security-controlled access to information from Microsoft Windows or web-based clients. The university engaged NMS Imaging to provide consulting and implementation services for the project. "We were impressed with the openness of the ApplicationXtender solution, including its integration with DiskXtender," said Hughes. "Unlike other products, these two are not based on proprietary database software, which gives us the ability to upgrade to the university's standard Oracle database if we ever outgrow our own SQL Server."

Seamless invoice indexing, imaging, and storage

In GW's accounts payable department, ApplicationXtender works in tandem with Oracle Financials and Kofax Ascent Capture to provide a seamless bulk imaging and indexing solution for invoice processing. Once invoice data is input into Oracle Financials by the invoice specialists, a program created by NMS Imaging extracts the data and hands it off to the Ascent Capture system for indexing. The system creates bar-coded separator sheets for each invoice, and then the entire invoice batch is scanned into ApplicationXtender using Kodak scanners. Currently, GW is using the system to process 6,000–8,000 invoices a month.

"GW relied on NMS Imaging to provide seamless integration imaging into its existing Oracle Financials Enterprise Accounting System," said a GW spokesperson. Under GW's guidance, NMS created its Active Listener product that allows users to quickly retrieve and view images based on data values displayed on Oracle forms.

An unexpected benefit of the new system is its ability to help invoice processors track invoice exceptions. Previously, paper invoices were stored in batch folders, and it was easy for processors to lose track of invoices that were held out due to exceptions or other problems. Now, the bar-coded separator sheets enable processors to track missing invoices immediately before they are scanned. In addition, the system helps processors catch inaccuracies and mistakes before vendors are paid—a vast improvement over the old paper-based system. "With the large volumes of invoices we process, we often wouldn't find out about mistakes until we'd hear from a vendor who had not received an overdue payment, for instance. Or, we might pay the wrong vendor, who would just keep the check and apply it as a credit—creating numerous accounting hassles," said a GW spokesperson. "Now, we can catch and remedy these mistakes up front, before the check is issued—saving time and money." In fact, GW estimates that the number of inaccurate payments has fallen almost to zero.

Smooth migration to new storage devices

A key component of GW's EMC application is DiskXtender, an automated file system archiving solution whose portability has proved invaluable more than three years later. The university had originally chosen an optical jukebox to meet IRS requirements for storage of documents that can't be modified after initial scanning. When the jukeboxes began to reach capacity, Hughes' team made the decision to migrate the data to a set of EMC Centera™ storage devices that had been purchased by GW's Information Systems and Services (ISS) group for another EMC Documentum project. Since the Centera devices are mirrored between two data centers, GW was able to eliminate the single point of failure—the jukebox. "When we found out that ISS had unallocated storage space and would be willing to share it, this provided the perfect solution," said Hughes.

"Thanks to DiskXtender, we were able to convert to the new Centera devices without having to make any modifications to the ApplicationXtender application, and with no loss of data," Hughes said. "Not only does the new storage system run faster, but we have greater peace of mind on the storage and archiving side."

New efficiencies in the payroll department

ApplicationXtender has also brought significant improvements to GW's payroll services, where all employee records are now imaged and stored. The ability to quickly retrieve images of paper forms that substantiate payroll deductions has made researching and resolving certain payroll transactions much faster. It has also led to an increase in the customer service levels provided by payroll services.

“Now, not only can people find the information they need much more efficiently, but we have assurance that documents won't be misplaced or lost—and we can catch minor errors before they become major problems.”

Tom Hughes, Senior Advisor for Strategic Planning

Accelerated retrieval of business critical information

According to Hughes, the biggest benefit of the ApplicationXtender system is its ability to provide instant, accurate access to business-critical documents. GW's internal and external auditors, for instance, have been able to shave many hours off the time required to retrieve key financial information. Another group, working in the grants accounting area, is able to instantly retrieve copies of invoices to substantiate grant billing, with just a few mouse clicks. “It is hard to estimate the value of speedy retrieval of grant related invoicing when billing questions arise. Our grants accounting area is much more productive and provides higher degrees of accuracy than it could when it had to rely on retrieving paper invoices manually,” said Hughes.

The word spreads

With the success of the initial invoice and payroll implementations, GW extended ApplicationXtender to other functions such as imaging of purchase orders and corporate credit card receipts. Then, word began to spread among other GW organizations of the benefits of document capture and management using ApplicationXtender. Hughes' implementation team discovered, for instance, that the GW medical school had been sending resident and student files to an outside source for imaging. GW engaged NMS Imaging to consolidate that work into the ApplicationXtender system.

Later, the university's associate vice president for finance requested an ApplicationXtender system for managing a variety of legal and disbursement documents associated with university endowments and gifts in trust. Most recently, GW's executive vice president and treasurer requested that all of the university's tax returns be scanned into ApplicationXtender to make it easier for treasury staff to search for and retrieve the returns they need. “ApplicationXtender has shown itself to be a truly horizontal system, with many valuable applications across areas of the university that we had not originally envisioned,” said Hughes.

Across all applications, Hughes estimates that the university has scanned a total of 2.3 million pages of information into the ApplicationXtender system since its initial implementation in 2002.

Summary

EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender has revolutionized GW's processes for capturing, storing, and managing critical documents—not only in the accounting function, but across many other functions in the university. The result is greater transactional accuracy, enhanced employee productivity through faster access to documents, and a more compact method for storing and archiving documents.

“Before, we had very little control over the processes for managing invoices and other financial documents, and it was very difficult to keep track of the paper copies,” said Hughes. “Now, not only can people find the information they need much more efficiently, but we have assurance that documents won't be misplaced or lost—and we can catch minor errors before they become major problems.”

According to Hughes, high-ranking GW officials were very impressed with the low cost of the solution and its ease of implementation. “We were able to complete the entire implementation in only four months, and the application came in right at budget,” he said. “Given the unexpected spread of this solution across so many different functions of the university, we've been thrilled with our return on the investment.”

About EMC

EMC Corporation (NYSE: EMC) is the world's leading developer and provider of information infrastructure technology and solutions that enable organizations of all sizes to transform the way they compete and create value from their information. Information about EMC's products and services can be found at www.EMC.com.

About NMS

NMS is a full-service integration company specializing in Information Delivery Systems. Founded in 1971, the company has been deeply involved in the development of image management solutions for over thirty years. NMS is proactive in helping businesses, institutions, and organizations optimize their business process using the world's most advanced imaging and workflow technologies. The company's expertise involves developing systems that integrate document images, data resources and workflow technology into powerful information management tools that will achieve real, measurable business benefits. Our expertise, methodologies and business practices have facilitated organizations to implement solutions in a timely manner and derive best value for their investments. For more information, please visit www.nmsimaging.com



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