SimpleSoftware
Simple solutions for document management

CASE STUDY: Professional Civil Process of Texas, Inc.

Overview
Professional Civil Process of Texas, Inc. (PCP), founded in 1978, stakes its claim as both the largest legal support and process serving company in Texas and one of the most technologically advanced process servers in the industry. PCP is headquartered in Austin and has 23 additional offices throughout Texas employing over 150 people who provide service to all 254 counties.

PCP provides a variety of legal support services, including service of process, the procedure employed by the legal community to furnish legal notice to a person (such as a defendant or witness) by delivering to the named party legal documents issued by a court or administrative body. In most cases, service of process is fulfilled by hand-delivering the documents to the individual or business. In addition to its agents within Texas, PCP also maintains an extensive nation-wide network of process serving subcontractors who deliver documents to those living or working outside of Texas, and they also work closely with sheriffs' offices on jobs that require the presence of law enforcement officials. PCP handles over 100,000 service of process annually – collecting, delivering, managing and filing a significant volume of documents on a daily basis.

To manage high paper volumes, PCP has remained committed to utilizing technology that speeds up delivery, secures documents, and simplifies processes for agents and customers alike. A technology leader within the process serving industry, PCP utilizes technology for online access to data through its client portal, instant e-mail notifications of service, online subpoena preparation, e-filing and online ordering. Its technology – which includes a document capture and routing solution based on the SimpleIndex® platform from Simple Software – has enabled PCP to provide fast, reliable service of papers and achieve unsurpassed customer satisfaction.

Challenge
"Basically, we're a delivery company. We pick up legal documents from courthouses and attorneys' offices and hand-deliver the documents to the named individuals," said Julie Mercier of PCP, who was responsible for orchestrating and implementing the document imaging system that enabled PCP to address their growing paper volumes and workflow bottlenecks. "This can include subpoenas, complaints, writs, court summons and other types of legal notices."

Over time, with the continued growth of its process serving business, PCP began to realize that it was drowning in paper – legal notices in varying stages of process, documents being routed between offices, hard-copy documents in the field, documents maintained in storage rooms, etc. Prior to the implementation of the document imaging system, PCP would copy and/or print and then mail many of the legal documents to their agents throughout the state and to contracted agents in other states. State laws dictate that service of process be effected within a specific timeframe, and PCP would, on average, lose a week simply to mailing time. Furthermore, documents were always at risk of loss. In addition to losing documents in the mail at a rate of about one document per week, documents were misplaced at other offices and in the field during transit. The manual process also generated skyrocketing copying, printing and postage costs. These challenges hindered PCP's ability to quickly and affordably fulfill service of process.

Upon process completion, paper copies of the documents were stored in file cabinets, which were taking up space in PCP's Austin headquarters and in their 23 field offices. Since no central document repository existed, in paper or electronic form, locating a specific document after it had been served proved difficult – or at the very least, time-consuming for employees.

It was PCP's recognition of its paper challenges, coupled with its commitment to use technology for the betterment of the business, its employees and its customers, that led PCP to SimpleIndex.

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Solution

SimpleIndex is desktop document scanning and indexing software that provides robust capture tools in an application scaled for small businesses and departments. The SimpleIndex platform performs enterprise-grade barcode recognition and optical character recognition (OCR), indexing, PDF output, document distribution, and more. PCP currently has SimpleIndex installed on 25 seats. Each PCP office has one scanner and Austin has two – of various makes and models – and access to SimpleIndex. All 24 offices have the ability to scan paper documents and upload them into a central repository that sits on PCP's web server.

Today, PCP's system for managing service of process documents is based on a more streamlined workflow. Legal documents are picked up from courthouses and attorney's offices and taken to the closest PCP office, where they are scanned at the point of entry. A half dozen barcodes, which appear on 99 percent of incoming documents, are used to designate the document type at the time of scanning. For the one percent of documents lacking preprinted barcodes, the system allows for barcode emulation by the scanning operator. SimpleIndex then converts the document images into PDFs, and a module called SimpleSend uploads the PDFs to PCP's web server. PCP has 25 SimpleSend licenses, one for each of its offices and two at PCP's headquarters in Austin.

The web server utilizes barcode and index data collected during the scanning process to designate where documents are to be sent. Custom scripts that reside on the web server – which were written by the PCP IT team – automatically generate and submit a text message to the applicable process serving agent for each document that must be served. The text message is quite simple and informal; it contains a unique URL automatically generated by the web server scripting and is linked to the PDF stored on the web server. PCP agents throughout Texas and contractors across the country use their smartphones to receive text messages, click on links and open PDFs, which can be printed on any printer or multifunction device. Many agents in the field carry portable printers in their vehicle, enabling them to instantly print in the field. The printed PDFs can then be hand-delivered to named individuals, thus fulfilling service of process.

"In a nutshell, SimpleIndex performs the scanning, barcode recognition and PDF conversion; SimpleSend gets the PDF into our web server; and the web server does the rest," said Mercier. "This system enables us to transmit a legal document anywhere in the country within mere moments of it entering one of our offices. Agents have immediate access to documents, and nothing slows down service of process. It's a powerful system. And yet it's just so simple."

PCP agents also have rights-based access to the centralized document repository, where all documents are securely archived on the web server, which physically resides in Austin as part of the company's in-house IT infrastructure. Process serving agents and other employees can log in to reference any previously scanned document at any time – provided they have the credentials to do so. PDFs can be retrieved using a variety of index data, including job number, recipient name, jurisdiction, case number, etc., fields that were entered at the time of scanning.

As part of PCP's IT infrastructure, the repository is backed up regularly, providing for disaster recovery assurance. PDFs are retained indefinitely, as they consume little space on the web server. Paper documents are retained in hard-copy form only until the court case or legal matter has been closed, at which time they are disposed of through shredding and/or burning.

All infrastructure, records management tools, backup and recovery technologies, web scripts and supporting databases, scanner support, and other IT functions are handled by PCP's IT department. SimpleIndex is jointly supported by PCP IT and Simple Software Tech Support.

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Results

"I've been with PCP since the days of manual processing, through the company's growing pains and the implementation of many new technologies … to the current system in place today, which offers incredible levels of instant gratification," said Mercier. "SimpleIndex's efficiency benefits our agents and other employees, our contractors, and our customers. Ironically, we barely even touch on all of SimpleIndex's capabilities, but the features we do use are simply priceless."

Workflow Efficiencies. Even with as many as 9,000 documents processed monthly, (large offices in Dallas and Houston each processas many as 2,500 per month) high document volumes no longer slow PCP down. The document imaging system has provided for workflow efficiencies that fuel PCP's ability to quickly and reliably fulfill service of process all over the country – which enables PCP to meet legal deadlines and eliminate the risk of lost and misplaced documents. They no longer lose time mailing documents to their network of state offices and nationwide contractors, and workflow bottlenecks have become a thing of the past. Agents also have secure access to documents hosted and preserved on the web server as PDFs, which speeds up the process of retrieving any document that must be referenced at any point in the future.

Records Management. The centralized document repository has provided for better records management practices, improved document control, disaster recovery preparedness, and the ability to dispose of documents when it is no longer necessary to retain originals, which has also led to a reduction in required storage real estate. "We keep paper documents by choice," said Mercier, "but only until a case is closed." Therefore, while some physical storage space is used to retain originals for pending cases, it is not necessary for PCP to keep any paper files.

The Bottom Line. Tangible cost savings have been realized through reductions in manual processing expenses such as postage and filing supplies. PCP has also improved its cash flow, since faster service of process fulfillment has accelerated the company's accounts payable operation. They have also experienced significant time savings, as documents are converted into PDFs at their earliest point of entry into the company, are instantly available for process serving, and remain available in electronic form for rapid, web-based search and retrieval. Substantial time and cost savings can also be found in the elimination of lost and misplaced documents. The eventual destruction of paper documents, while maintaining them in electronic form, has enabled PCP to reduce its physical storage space and use old file rooms for other purposes.

Quality Support. Simple Software worked closely with PCP at each step of the project to ensure its success. "As complex as this project was, with all the moving parts needing to work together smoothly and efficiently, the Simple Software team was always there to advise us, diagnose any problems and tweak SimpleIndex for us," said Mercier. "I've worked with a lot of software companies, and by far, Simple Software's attention to detail and quality support are unmatched."

About Simple Software

Simple Software develops capture solutions that bring enterprise document capture features to the desktop. SimpleIndex®, its flagship document scanning and indexing application, provides robust capture tools in an application scaled for small businesses and departments. The SimpleIndex Capture Suite contains complementary software for barcode printing, document distribution and system integration designed to work both with SimpleIndex and as standalone applications. Simple Software is a division of Meta Enterprises, LLC, founded in 1998 and headquartered in Knoxville, Tenn. For more information, visit www.SimpleIndex.com.

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