

From FileDrawers to FileNet – Behind the Digital Scenes in the Board Office

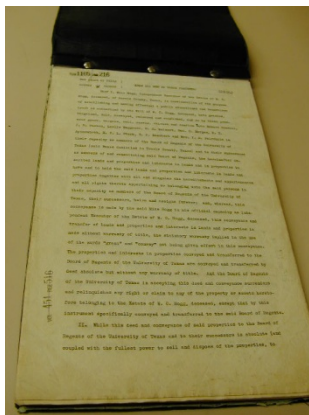
By Carol Felkel and Gay Faulkner



The eyes of Texas have never been so strongly focused on the 129-year history of The University of Texas System. Thousands of documents, including the Minute Order reaffirming [The Eyes of Texas](#) as the school song for The University of Texas at Austin, are now securely stored, readily retrievable, and easily searchable by board office staff using IBM's FileNet document management system. Over the past several years, millions of pages of historical paper documents have been converted into electronic images.

Records Retention – The Roadmap

As a public institution, the U. T. System is the depository for important state of Texas documents, and the board office has the ultimate responsibility for archiving historical documents.



For some time, we have been concerned about the proper preservation of the myriad of documents under our care. When we became aware of an option called FileNet, we were quickly sold. FileNet digitizes paper documents into PDF (portable document format) or TIFF (tagged image file format) images. Electronic documents such as PowerPoint presentations, emails, and PDF reports can be saved directly to FileNet. Paper documents need to be scanned and then committed to FileNet.

With a tried and tested file plan and an approved records retention schedule in hand, we jumped on the FileNet bandwagon and haven't looked back.

It took us about a year to plan our new filing strategy. With over 100 years of university history, we had file drawers upon file drawers of valuable documents that needed to be archived for safe storage. We also needed a plan to handle current and future documents in both paper and electronic formats.

First, we decided to electronically file inactive documents that might need to be retrieved, primarily for research and open-records requests. Paper records dated prior to the year 2000 would be sent to the university archives off-site and become the official document. For documents dated 2000 or later, the electronic copy would be committed to FileNet and become the official document.

Our records retention schedule determines which documents are permanent, which are transitory, and which can be tossed. Permanent documents, including Minute Orders, agenda items, wills, appointment letters, legal documents, board correspondence, and regents' correspondence and speeches, are committed to FileNet.

Transitory documents, such as travel arrangements for regents, bill files, and working drafts of memos and speeches are not committed to FileNet; they are kept in paper or electronic files for one year, and then are destroyed.

The Procedure

Prior to scanning, documents need to be checked for anything unusual—e.g., pages that are double sided, in color, irregularly sized, on onion skin paper, or of poor quality—so they can be handled appropriately when scanning. Documents also must be organized according to one of five document classes (general, real estate, construction, gifts, and confidential) and scanned into the proper “doc” class.

After scanning, documents are indexed in Kofax Ascent Capture, which is an intermediary program that provides customized index fields and releases the scanned documents into FileNet. Scanned documents need to be checked to be certain they have scanned correctly, are legible, are complete (all pages accounted for), and are correctly indexed. Once this step has been completed, paper documents can be archived or discarded according to the records retention schedule. Older, historical paper documents that are to be kept permanently and have been committed to FileNet are placed in acid-free files and acid-free boxes for permanent archival storage.

Documents in FileNet can be emailed to someone with a FileNet ID or sent as an email attachment to someone who does not have FileNet access. Documents in FileNet can also be annotated with sticky notes, stamps, and highlighted areas. In all cases, the original copy is never altered.

Advantages of FileNet

FileNet provides a centralized, easily accessible, secure electronic library for documents. Unlike paper storage systems, documents can be accessed by many individuals simultaneously; all you need is a computer with an Internet connection. Vital records are protected while access to public records is enhanced.



Digital filing also frees up physical space previously consumed with file cabinets. Centralizing and consolidating documents in one system eliminates filing bottlenecks and the inconvenience and frustration of searching for paper documents, and it significantly reduces the amount of time spent on research. Since FileNet is available via the Internet, documents can be retrieved at will, from on- and off-campus locations. Searches can be performed on a specific index field or by a full-text search of entire documents. Confidential documents can be stored in a secure environment accessible only by authorized individuals.

From a risk-management perspective, FileNet also offers an easy means for properly and legally protecting and disposing of documents. This is an extremely attractive feature that provides an organized, logical means for record management and paper handling.

Costs

FileNet's "off the shelf" list price is moderate and depends on the number of licenses and modules purchased. As a state agency, the U. T. System received state contract discounts as well as an incentive discount to retire the previous FileNet system. The upgrade cost approximately \$300,000. Sixteen departments use FileNet, with a total of 1.9 million documents in the system.

Having a FileNet system has reduced operating costs for paper, physical files and file space, and staff time. Electronic storage is relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of providing physical storage for millions of documents.

Security

Because all of our permanent historical documents are in FileNet, it is mission-critical to have redundancy in the system. Our FileNet system is regularly backed up as part of the larger back-up system for the university; thus, the cost of backing up FileNet is not a significant budget item.

In summary, the repository of documents in FileNet contains a treasure-trove of the university's history, just as "The Eyes of Texas" is a treasured tradition for the community of The University of Texas at Austin, linking together generations of students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Takeaways

1. If you are loaded down with papers that need to be archived, FileNet or another electronic document management system may be your answer.
2. FileNet will **significantly** reduce staff time spent on research.
3. FileNet is easy to use both for storing and retrieving documents.

Carol Felkel is the secretary to the board and Gay Faulkner is the records and information management analyst in the Office of the Board of Regents at The University of Texas System in Austin, Texas. Email questions to cfelkel@utsystem.edu or gfaulkner@utsystem.edu. Be sure to come to the AGB Board Professionals Workshop in Los Angeles, April 1-3, 2011, for a demo of FileNet.