Time is Money

ABBYY Software Saves Government Agency Days

Client: *Department of Technology Services, Montgomery County Government, Rockville, Md.*

Executive: *Mayland Lin, IT Specialist (Project Manager for Enterprise Imaging System)*

Solution Provider: *American Heritage*

Problem: *Inaccurate, time-consuming scanning of more than 10,000 timesheets twice a month; managing the county-run liquor stores' inventory and receipts*

Solution: *ABBYY FlexiCapture ™*

Savings: *Reduced timesheet scanning time from two days to four hours; eliminated three days of manually correcting misread data from scanned files*

Results: *Up to five people now have four and a half days to work on other tasks*

Synopsis: *Every other week, up to five people in Montgomery County Government spent five days processing timesheets, using an inefficient OCR solution and keyed-in data. The process involved two days of scanning, followed by three days of correcting errors and verifying vital information, such as employees' identification numbers. The Department of Technology Services also needed to make it more efficient for Accounts Payable to process and pay invoices for other departments such as the county-run liquor stores. Having ABBYY's FlexiCapture solution allowed the county to process timesheets in only four hours, compared with 40 hours. Based on its initial success, Montgomery County expanded its use of ABBYY's solution, and now relies on ABBYY to process every invoice it receives.*

What began as a pilot program to improve timesheet-processing is now transforming Montgomery County's invoicing and accounts payable procedures into an adept system that dramatically reduces inefficiencies and greatly improves accuracy.

With more than 10,000 timesheets to process every other week, the Maryland county previously spent two days scanning documents and another three days reviewing them to correct errors in key pieces of data – such as employees' identification numbers – during the process, said Mayland Lin, Department of Technology Services at Montgomery County Government in Rockville, Md.

However, when the department heard about ABBYY FlexiCapture – which could be integrated seamlessly with its existing ZyLABS' ZyImage imaging solution, – Lin decided to investigate, and ultimately invest in ABBYY's sophisticated data-capture software. In some situations, the department had been using another vendor's Zonal OCR program. Unfortunately, that program was highly sensitive and all-too-often inaccurate, she said. In other instances, the county keyed in data – a more accurate but far more time-consuming process, said Lin. ABBYY FlexiCapture, however, anchors on a document's key fields, and then accurately extracts the information – vastly improving and abbreviating the once time-intensive process, she said.

"With the other program, there was a lot of manpower wasted," she said. "Now we're able to cut down and do corrections in only one morning, rather than over the course of three days."

Multiple Choices

Like any organization, Montgomery County receives thousands of pieces of paperwork a week. Lin and her team considered different ways in which the county would benefit from ABBYY's solution, hoping to expand their time-savings and efficiencies to other departments.

"Before ABBYY, they had been using ZyLAB for two or three years," said Ray Belden, sales manager at American Heritage, an ABBYY solution provider, referring to a document archiving system with full-page OCR capability, but without forms-processing capabilities built-in. "If you are extracting an identification number or date or any piece of information, you simply tell FlexiCapture what to look for and how to locate it."

Montgomery County, which has more than 665,000 residents, processes the Department of Liquors' invoices for the state-run stores. In May 2006, Belden integrated ABBYY's solution into its existing ZyLAB solution. The county immediately enjoyed vastly improved accuracy and a speedier invoice-processing schedule, said Lin.

But the county did not stop there. Having already achieved such terrific results from its timesheet and liquor store applications, Montgomery County expanded its use of FlexiCapture into its entire Accounts Payable department, Belden said.

"They are a neat customer because they use FlexiCapture for processing lots of different things for a lot of different departments," said Belden. "They save the information scanned in through ABBYY into an image that is stored in ZyLAB's imaging program. They process all of the Department of Liquor's invoices. They also use it in their Accounts Payable department, so every vendor that submits a bill to Montgomery County comes through the ABBYY system."

Implementation Process

Before launching into its initial foray into ABBYY's solutions, Belden spent about six months discussing various solutions to Montgomery County's paper nightmare. "I had talked to them quite a bit and they were excited about the ABBYY products," he said. "They needed lots of technical support. Because they are a government IT department, they don't have a lot of manpower."

To make matters even more complex, the county had many disparate paper-based systems in place — forms that used a variety of fonts, printers with varying degrees of clarity and a veritable rainbow of paper and print colors, said Lin. "If you look at the meta data, it's gobbledygook," she said.

Unlike the earlier scanning system, ABBYY's solution is flexible and forgiving of human or technical foibles, said Lin. "ABBYY FlexiCapture technology intelligently analyzes the elements and data on the county's timesheets and invoices, and captures the critical data elements the county needs to do its work," she said.

"With other products, if the document's not aligned perfectly, it doesn't work ," Lin continued. "When the page was off a hair, our old OCR system couldn't read it. With ABBYY, the end result is quality work. It's definitely been an improvement in quality and efficiency. ABBYY's OCR engine is one of the best in the business."

Forward-Looking Statements

Having enjoyed the initial results of its year-long work with ABBYY's solution, the county plans to further extend both its use of the vendor's software, its partnership with American Heritage and its investment in computerized solutions, said Lin.

"Montgomery County is in the process of putting in an electronic system for timesheets, but it's going to be at least another two years before it's completed," she said. "I have a lot of potential to make use of the ABBYY programs. As you can imagine, ABBYY has a lot of powerful tools that we can use to improve our productivity here. I want to leverage our continuing investment in ABBYY and the training Ray provided to my department."