Case Study
Port of London Authority
Port Authority
Outsourcing

Ricoh helps Port of London Authority turn old asset documents into accessible, valuable information

The Port of London Authority used to have around 1 kilometre of shelving, which staff had to rummage through to find old charts and documents needed to manage property along 95 miles of the River Thames.

But with a Ricoh Outsourcing service the PLA has turned these old documents into valuable, easy-to-access information. It has also cut data retrieval down to seconds and, in the process, removed over 13 tons of paper.

Executive summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Port of London Authority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>350 staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
<td>Port Authority</td>
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**Challenges**
- Accessing key historical information consuming too much staff time, sometimes up to half a day
- 1km of document shelving eating up valuable office space
- Difficulty managing, handling and preserving dirty and fragile documents dating back to the 1800s
- Protect valuable historical documents

**Solution**
- Ricoh Outsourcing service

**Benefits**
- Improves access to information and also increases the use and value of information
- Cuts out 95% of staff trips to the archive room
- Information available in seconds rather than 30mins or more
- Helps the PLA serve customers better since information is easier and quicker to access
- Ensures irreplaceable documents are safe and secure for future generations
Challenges

The Port of London Authority (PLA) is responsible for safe navigation along 95 miles of the River Thames, from Teddington in west London, through the capital, and out to the sea. The Thames is home to the UK’s second biggest port, busiest inland waterway for passengers and freight, and a centre for tourism, sport and leisure. The PLA owns and is responsible for the river bed up to the high water mark and for maintaining and protecting the river’s environment.

Although its remit ends at the river bank, the PLA does have an interest in buildings and development along the water’s edge where these impact the river. The PLA is a self-financing, public trust, funded through fees and licences from vessels and river users.

A key part of PLA operations is accessing a wide range of information related to activity on and adjacent to the river. For example, if there is an alteration or change of use to a water-side building that impacts the river, the PLA may need to trace ownership, sometimes going back hundreds of years. Monitoring even small changes is important. What might seem a tiny alteration, like putting a pole into the river bed for a small jetty, can change the flow of water or sediment, which could have a much bigger impact downstream.

But much of this information, which ranges from financial records and staff pension documents, through to building deeds and site charts dating back to the 1800s, was in hardcopy. In the PLA’s archive room, these documents used to occupy more than 1 kilometre of shelving. For PLA staff, accessing information was time-consuming and often messy, as some of the documents were old and dirty. Typically, someone would need to go to the archive, find the document required, get it out of an envelope, unfold it, photocopy the relevant section and then replace it again. This could take anything from half an hour to half a day, depending on the information request.

With a proposed building reorganisation needing the archive area as office space, the PLA had initially considered moving the documents to an alternative location.

Nigel Tate, IS Project Leader at the Port of London Authority, was asked to investigate how the PLA could better manage its document archiving. Tate says, “Our first step was to approach each department about their documents. Of course when we asked if these were needed, the initial response was yes. But after going through the documents we found we were able to get rid of quite a lot. In fact, we were able to shred nine tons of confidential documents and recycle another four and half tons of paper. But even then, 40 percent of the hardcopy documents were left in the archive.”

Solution

The PLA had recently started using Ricoh Multifunction Products (MFPs) in its offices and asked if Ricoh could also help with managing documents. Tate says, “We tested document scanning with several different suppliers and found they all did a very good job. However, Ricoh invited me to its Print & Document Services centre and I was struck by the efficiency of the whole operation - the equipment and the processes looked very impressive. I felt that, of all the suppliers, Ricoh offered the best job, in the right time scale, at the right price.”

The PLA is using a Ricoh Outsourcing service to electronically archive its documents and improve information access. Documents are taken away by Ricoh to one of its document management centres where they are scanned, saved on to CDs and sent back to the PLA. Depending on the type of hardcopy document, these are either destroyed and the paper recycled or returned to the PLA document archive.

The project started with Ricoh scanning charts and plans relating to every building or site along the river with which the PLA has had some dealings. These documents fold out to A0 size and some are old and date back to 1879. Other documents that Ricoh has scanned include historical pension records for all PLA staff who have since passed away. This means that the Pensions Department can access their data much faster than before. There are still a large number of other documents that need to be scanned, which include financial information, property deeds and information on licensing for vessels using the river.
Case Study Port of London

Benefits

For the PLA, the benefit of the Ricoh Outsourcing service has been to have documentation that was in a dirty, musty state, online and easy to access. Enabling staff to function more efficiently reduces the time it takes to find information and helps the PLA to provide a better service to its customers. The PLA estimates that using the Ricoh Outsourcing service has cut down staff trips to the archive room by 95 percent.

Now, when information on a specific building is needed, staff can access it electronically in a few seconds and copy or extract the information. If they need to use the physical hardcopy it is still available in the archive.

Tate says, “The fact that we can provide information electronically at peoples’ finger tips is really positive. It’s so good that it’s just there and it works - I don’t think I’ve had any complaints about the system. The Ricoh Outsourcing service means that we can get a document scanned easily and quickly and get it available to people where it becomes really valuable.”

As well as making information retrieval more efficient, the Ricoh Outsourcing service has also increased the use of information. The PLA has plans for most of the property along the full length of the river, from Teddington to the sea, and each property could have up 30 or 40 different plans. But because the amount of property documentation was so large - around 150,000 plans - staff would only use it when necessary.

But with documents now at their finger tips, staff are making use of the property information system much more than before. With electronic copies of each document, the PLA has been able to create electronic folders, so that all documents relating to a particular property can be grouped together, which makes accessing relevant information easier. Sometimes information or data from a scanned document is easier to access than from the original document because it is cleaner and the user can zoom in on finer details.

One of the other benefits of electronic archiving for the PLA is being able to protect some of its older and more vulnerable documents which, without constant opening and touching, will last much longer.

Having seen the success of the Ricoh Outsourcing service for PLA’s document archive, other departments at the PLA have been asking how the solution could be used for digitising concurrent documents that are used day-to-day in their offices.

Ricoh Solution/Products

- Ricoh Outsourcing service
- Ricoh Print & Document Services Centre

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