CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

Digital Imaging Project Underway

CNS Document ID: u000208a
Last Updated: 02/01/00

UF Information Technology

UFIT

2046 NE Waldo Rd, Suite 2100
Gainesville Florida 32609-8942
(352) 392.2061
<editor@cns.ufl.edu>
Table of Contents

Digital Imaging Project Underway ................................................................. 3
Digital Imaging Project Underway

For many years, officials at UF have needed a way to replace microfiche and microfilm as a means of storing documents. Digitally scanning documents into a computer system so that the actual documents can be sorted and retrieved seemed to be the answer. Over the years, a number of systems were considered and rejected by several groups on campus, including the Office of the University Registrar (OUR), the Office of Student Financial Affairs (SFA), and Information Systems teams. They didn't give up, though. They kept looking for the system that was right for UF.

Laura Guazzelli of the Office of the CIO demonstrates the Digital Imaging Project, which captures documents as images and enables retrieval of the images via the Web.

In 1992, the SFA put a digital imaging system in place that served their office well, but there were some problems. It was stored on a server within the office, accessible only from SFA workstations. SFA had to maintain the database. And the technology used by the storage system became obsolete, making the purchase of needed supplies difficult.

These were no small problems, considering that UF students generate huge numbers of documents and that all of these documents have to be stored and accessible to satisfy state, federal, and university regulations. There was a recognized need for a large-scale, centralized system that any department on campus could use. Building on an initiative started by the OUR, the UF Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) [http://www.cio.ufl.edu/] and IBM worked closely with OUR staff and in June of 1999 launched the Digital Imaging Project.

The Digital Imaging Project is a way of storing paper documents as digital images that can be viewed by appropriate personnel via the Web. This allows for better access to the actual documents as well as to the information they contain. Staffers no longer need to pull the actual student file to see its contents. These documents are available online from anywhere in the world via the Internet and can be shared by as many people as necessary. The images are stored on two dedicated servers at NERDC; a third server provides the Web interface using EAGLE, the Enhanced Application Generation Language for the Enterprise. EAGLE is a
software system which enables mainframe databases to be directly accessed from the Internet.

When a form is processed, the image of the form is scanned into the system. The scanning system operator then keys in the Social Security number of the individual to whom the document pertains. Once this index key is entered, other information is automatically filled in from a database lookup. For this reason, the indexing process is extremely important for accurate later retrieval of the image. Once the images are scanned and indexed, departments may decide how long they should be stored on the server. When they're no longer actively needed, the records are migrated to optical disks for permanent storage.

Associate University Registrar Steve Pritz, whose office was the first to implement the system, points out that the Digital Imaging Project provides an important service in allowing image retrieval from any workstation with access to the Internet. Eventually, Pritz hopes to have students viewing the images of documents in their own records. For now, only university staff members in the SFA and the OUR who normally access student files can view the images. "The key thing about the system is that it allows access to documents in a student's record via a Web browser from anywhere in the world. Because the documents are accessible via the Web, no special client software is required to access the documents if a person has the required security."

Tony Gordon is a coordinator of computer applications for the SFA, which has had the new technology for about a month. He has been very pleased with the results. Once his office has scanned and indexed the information, they have only to retrieve it from the Web. A happy "side-effect" of the change for this office has been that routine backups and other duties are performed at NERDC.

Laura Guazzelli is a coordinator of computer applications in the Office of the UF Chief Information Officer (CIO) and is in charge of getting the project up and running. She says that the backbone for this project is already in place, including the servers at NERDC for storage and Web interface, and the support of NERDC and CIO staffers. Departments handle the costs of scanning the images. A typical investment includes an adequate number of scanners and workstations to handle the department's volume and licensing fees for the proprietary indexing software, IBM VisualInfo and Kofax Ascent Capture.

This system was designed to be a university-wide service that any department can use once it invests in the peripherals. A central system can provide departments with more efficient and secure access to their records than is possible with disparate systems that don't interface with one another.

For more information, contact Guazzelli at laura2@ufl.edu [mailto:laura2@ufl.edu], or see the Web site at http://www.cio.ufl.edu/docu_img.htm.

Your Comments are Welcome

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this and all UFIT documentation. Please send your comments to:

UF Information Technology
UFIT

2046 NE Waldo Rd, Suite 2100
Gainesville Florida 32609-8942
(352) 392.2061
<editor@cns.ufl.edu>