

St. Anthony's Hospital

Digital storage cures hospital document problems

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In operation since 1870, St. Anthony's merged with nine other hospitals, five in the northern region of the state, and others in Lafayette and Indianapolis. Benefits of the merger include the ability to specialize, increased buying power and economy of systems. The newly merged hospital group will also be able to take advantage of advanced digital document storage processes now in place at St. Anthony's.

IS Manager Susan Gembala and her team were tasked with replacing St. Anthony's existing document storage and retrieval system, which was based on old rapid changer optical technology implemented in 1994. "The number one problem we wanted to solve was very costly annual maintenance fees," she said. "We were spending \$80,000 a year just for software maintenance, and we weren't satisfied with our previous vendor. We determined that this was primarily a training issue, with lack of adequate training for both our staff and, worse yet, vendor support personnel." As a result, any time there was a problem, the system could be down from one to as many as three weeks.

It was no surprise that the system had to be replaced. The challenge was that management wanted it done by the end of the year. Nevertheless, the IS team and others managed an extremely aggressive schedule to put new technology in place in less than three months, from first research to final install.

EVALUATION INCLUDED USER DEMOS AND SITE VISITS

A quickly organized search and evaluation process gathered input from a variety of sources, including multiple groups within the hospital. St. Anthony's sought information on COLD storage software from

Optical Imaging magazine and picked the top rated products, which included Datawatch|BDS (Business Document Server) digital document repository software from Datawatch Corporation. Gembala was impressed that Imaging and Document Solutions magazine had named Datawatch|BDS Product of the Year in the COLD/ERM (Enterprise Report Management) category.

Product demos further convinced St. Anthony's that Datawatch|BDS offered the capabilities they needed. "We had three demos altogether from Datawatch," Gembala said, "including one for our technical staff and one for users. We made it a point to ask our users what they thought." Datawatch also put technology on the Web so management could evaluate that aspect. This was important because the hospital hoped to use the Internet for report distribution in the future. A site visit to the University of Chicago gave Gembala an idea of how reports could be used, as well as insight into the product and company. Acquiring the new Datawatch|BDS system actually ended up costing the hospital less than the annual maintenance of their old system.

QUICK INSTALLATION AND THOROUGH TRAINING

"Even after everything was signed off, I thought there was no way we would get up by the end of the year," declared Gembala. "We signed in November, and I was quite surprised when Datawatch said they could install the following week. I had expected a longer time frame." Datawatch met the hospital's aggressive schedule, even though St. Anthony's still had to get their server up and wasn't able to start the install right away. "But once we were ready, the next week they were there with us, and when

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they left, we had a working system, and our managers were using it the following week. I had managers calling to say it was great."

SCALABILITY HANDLES EXPANDING VOLUME

The documents now accessed on Datawatch|BDS are largely financial, such as patient charges, but there are some clinical records. Currently the hospital's system handles volumes of 250 reports a day, but peaks can reach 350 per day. Thirty to forty reports were recently added to those numbers, and volume could double with the addition of more clinical reports. The scalability of the system will allow it to easily handle the growing requirements.

The hospital is now in the process of increasing the number of additional users by adding other data groups and document categories. Data groups are specific to business groups such as finance and purchasing. "We have 80 people who potentially could be using it," Gembala noted. A number of areas within the hospital already benefit from access to the digital repository. Users include patient accounting, finance and the IS group. Soon users from the other hospitals will also become part of the Datawatch|BDS community.

MAKING INFORMATION EASIER TO USE

The hospital's new digital storage and retrieval capabilities are providing considerable advantages over the previous systems, and even financial users are finding Datawatch|BDS makes their lives easier. For example, when auditing cash, if the total was off by a certain amount, it usually meant someone might have to spend hours looking for the mistake. Now users just do a quick search for the discrepancy amount, boosting both accuracy and productivity.

"Right off the bat Datawatch|BDS has been beneficial because it interfaces with our mainframe and automatically brings reports down," said Gembala. Before Datawatch|BDS, operators had to move reports down from the mainframe to optical storage, and sometimes reports would be missing or hard to find. Handling reports could take at least 30 minutes every morning because only a few could be

processed at a time. Someone would have to physically wait for the reports to process and make sure there were no interruptions. It created a major bottleneck, but now St. Anthony's has greatly reduced the time this takes, and no one from IS has to over-see the task of moving reports to the system.

Analyzing information has also become easier. Before, managers had to pull together pieces of information from different sources, and it was awkward and time-consuming to create reports. Now managers at St. Anthony's rely on Datawatch|BDS capabilities to build reports quickly, turning around in a day what previously might have taken several. Convenient cut and paste features allow them to move information right into Excel spreadsheets. Also, the hospital is implementing workstation-based report mining and analysis to help users more easily extract and manipulate information. This will make it even easier to generate more comprehensive reports and save more time in the process.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND GAINING ACCEPTANCE

Installation of Datawatch|BDS has helped drive changes in other areas of document management. "When we put in the Datawatch|BDS system, some of our manual procedures had to change," Gembala said. "Part of the challenge we have had is organizing and standardizing according to the different data groups and the way our reports are written."

The hospital still prints a lot of reports, but has made great strides towards a more "paper-less" environment. A recent staffing shortage had an effect on printing services and made it even more imperative that users turn to Datawatch|BDS for the information they need.

For St. Anthony's and its partner hospitals, the system is proving to be just what the doctor ordered for productive document management.



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