

AutoStore accelerates responses to citizens while reducing costs.

Nuance document capture software goes to Washington.

Challenge

- Capture and index all constituent correspondence sent to the nation’s 435 congressional offices
- Integrate seamlessly with existing Intranet Quorum (IQ) content management system

Solution

- AutoStore orchestrates the capture and secure delivery of paper and electronic documents. No emailing, duplication or manual importation is required
- Can be installed and remotely administered from a congressman’s Washington D.C. office

Results

- Extended correspondence capture to home district offices
- Reduced staff time required to process a letter into the IQ repository by a factor of 10 to 1
- Allows instant access to captured data

Profile

Citizens have been exhorted to “write their Congressman” for as long as Congress has existed. Whether to express an opinion regarding an issue of the day or to request personal assistance, citizens write often. And as the means to communicate has grown from postal mail to fax, email, text message and social media, the amount of correspondence has mushroomed. Where does all that communication go? Does anyone actually read it? And if they do, does someone respond? Finally, how do Congressional representatives keep track of all this correspondence and the balance of opinion it represents?



“With AutoStore, I can process 10 letters in the time it used to take for one letter.”

—Illinois office manager

Unlike junk mail, when a constituent writes his or her congressional representative, someone actually does read it. Each congressional office is obligated to catalog and acknowledge receipt of all correspondence.

Challenge.

Each of the nation’s 435 congressional offices receives thousands of individual constituent communications each month. And much of it still arrives on paper via postal mail or fax, which has traditionally added time and cost to cataloging, acknowledgments and subsequent usage of the information and opinions in the documents.

Regardless of what form constituent correspondence takes, most congressional offices catalog and store it in a content management system developed by Lockheed Martin called Intranet Quorum (IQ), an enterprise content management and workflow system designed specifically for the needs of government offices. Once correspondence arrives in IQ, the information is secure and accessible for anyone authorized to use the system. This meets the requirement to acknowledge and catalog everything. How the correspondence is captured and indexed have been the primary problems, and where Nuance AutoStore has been able to help.

Ten congressional offices, representing the states of Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi and Washington, had purchased AutoStore at the time this case was written, and word was spreading fast among other offices. Prior to using AutoStore, some of these offices had attempted to scan correspondence to IQ—with mixed results. Typically, an office had purchased one or two copiers; a staff member manually scanned and emailed the correspondence to another staff member, who would then rename the file and upload it manually into the IQ application, which resulted in a third copy of the file within the IQ repository.

This accomplished the goal of securely cataloging the correspondence and making it searchable but the cost was high: According to the office manager for one Illinois congressman, capturing each paper letter required at least two staff members, three computer copies of the information and a lot of staff time. Emailing the document clogged the entire email system with file attachments, slowing its performance. Creating a second copy of each

document also increased storage and network loads, and manually uploading into IQ added to these burdens.

Of course, all of this also slowed each office’s response to its constituents and significantly increased the cost of each response.

Solution.

These same congressional offices had already invested in the IQ system but their system for feeding it reduced their return on this investment. These offices all had another underutilized piece of office equipment: their copiers. These multifunction devices (MFDs) were networked and, properly equipped, could scan documents intelligently and eliminate the bottlenecks between the receipt of correspondence and the IQ system.

Now, using AutoStore to orchestrate the scanning process, the MFDs scan and input documents automatically into the IQ system. One staff member does what previously required two people and eliminates the intermediate steps between scanning and availability in IQ. Thanks to AutoStore, the MFDs and the IQ system are now a single, integrated, simple-to-use system. Training is minimal, because staffers run AutoStore from the MFDs they already know how to use.

How it works.

AutoStore is a server-based software application that seamlessly and securely integrates with over 500 models of MFDs. It also integrates with dozens of content management systems, such as Lockheed IQ. In this case, a congressional staffer logs in to the MFD using the touch screen. Logging in enables security and auditing features, as well as activates personalized scanning options. The user chooses to scan to the IQ system from the available options, then AutoStore presents an on-screen form listing the information needed for IQ to catalog the letter being scanned: District ID, constituent name and the subject of the correspondence. The staffer fills in these fields and AutoStore captures this information, recognizes all of the text in the letter, then sends the text and indexing information to IQ in a form that permits everything to be imported automatically and available for use immediately. It will either create a new IQ record or add to an existing constituent record. No emailing, duplication or manual importation is required.

Benefits.

The Illinois office manager succinctly sums up the benefits: “With AutoStore, I can process 10 letters in the time it used to take for one letter.”

More specifically, AutoStore:

- Accelerates responses to constituent correspondence.
- Reduces staff time required to process a letter into the IQ repository by a factor of 10 to 1.
- Eliminates lost paper documents by capturing them sooner and reducing the number of people involved.
- Eliminates email attachment clutter and reduces computer storage and network requirements.
- Extends correspondence capture to home district offices. AutoStore can be installed automatically and administered remotely from a congressman’s Washington D.C. office.
- Eliminates the need to ship correspondence from the district office to Washington, and contributes to faster response times and fewer lost documents.
- Enables immediate full text search and retrieval of letters.
- Requires little or no training because staffers already know how to use the copier/MFD.
- Can search the IQ system for a specific constituent or mail record from the copier’s control panel.

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