Success Story:
Tulane University

Tulane University Manages Secure Business Processes With NSi™ AutoStore®

Tulane University, founded in 1834, is one of the most highly regarded independent research universities in the United States. With about 1,500 incoming freshman and undergraduate students per year, it offers schools and colleges dedicated to the arts, sciences, engineering, business, law, medicine and public health, among others. With 4,000 employees, Tulane is also the largest employer in New Orleans.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans and had a major impact on Tulane, forcing cancellation of the fall semester and extensive damage to the campus.   The University has made a remarkable recovery. Today applications well exceed its annual student positions due in part to the recognition Tulane received for its work in the recovery and its commitment to the city of New Orleans via a requirement for students across all fields to actively partake in community service activities.

Revamping Business Processes

Underpinning the many activities are driving Tulane's success in the aftermath of Katrina are its business processes. These activities include managing document services. Barry Lawrence, Information Systems Specialist, has worked at Tulane for more than 14 years. In concert with the IT Department, he and the Administrative and Document Services Department, he researches new business process technologies and implements the best of the best of these technologies across the University's infrastructure to assure faster and more cost efficient operations in many of its departments.

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Challenges abound in bringing a cohesive system through the entire University infrastructure, according to Lawrence. "We operate in an extremely diverse and evolving environment. Our systems have grown over time and will continue to do so in the future. We need systems that can meet our current requirements and grow with us as the University's needs change and expand."

The University needed a system that can leverage economies of scale. "We needed a system that can start in one Department and be used by many Departments," Lawrence said.

Tulane chose NSi™ AutoStore® from Notable Solutions to serve as a backbone for many of its business processes across a variety of departments. NSi AutoStore captures paper and electronic documents from a copier, scanner, printer, desktop, web browser or mobile device and then routes the information into the appropriate business system based on document type and workflows.

Secure Content Capture and Workflows

With a mixed fleet of both Ricoh and Xerox multi-function devices (MFDs), Tulane implemented AutoStore into several departments, including the Student Advising area, which deals with communications between the University and its students as well as between parents, students and the University. It's an area that's particularly concerned with privacy and security.

"When you're dealing with financial aid, billing information, grants and awards, there are a lot of birth dates, social security numbers, financial and personal information in the workflow path that could be prime for identify theft. However, all transmissions with AutoStore are so highly secure we reduce that problem," Lawrence explained.

"Correspondence is coming in from students, their parents and advisors. That correspondence is all scanned from paper and captured from email and put into student specific files within a Xerox DocuShare enterprise content management (ECM) repository. We use AutoStore as the routing engine or "traffic cop" so all information goes to the right destination. It is our on and off ramp for documents."

The University also uses the system for some Accounts Payable activities as well as back-end archiving. Plans are being developed to roll out AutoStore to several other departments and business units. According to Lawrence, each of these organizations has business processes that will benefit from the solution. "That AutoStore is device or method agnostic is a major draw," said Lawrence. "It just works and we can get it set up anywhere without a lot of headaches."

The University currently has three AutoStore production servers, 30 MFDs and about 15 to 20 people managing documents every day. According to Lawrence, this is a hub and spoke type of deployment. There is some centralized batch scanning and processing using NSi's Smarticket® cover sheets as dividers. This processing, involving thousands of documents, is conducted centrally. Ad hoc transactional scanning is conducted individually at the department level. "We process tens of thousands of documents a month," Lawrence added. "Our business lifecycle is seasonal and is particularly heavy in the late summer due to the amount of information we're capturing for all the new students."

Future Opportunities

With technology constantly changing and the recognition that not every business process originates on paper, Lawrence's group will also introduce NSi's WebCapture™ capabilities into several areas and sees great growth potential. With NSi WebCapture, Tulane can use the same AutoStore orchestrated workflows to move electronic documents from within a web browser. By bringing these capabilities directly to the web browser, users have wider, more mobile access to their business applications from virtually any location.

"One of the great things about WebCapture's capability is that it's OS agnostic. At Tulane we're about 30 percent Apple computers on our business side so being able to use a single investment to accommodate Mac and Windows users is a big plus for us."

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Benefits and ROI

"We have easily recouped our investment in terms of time savings, reducing expenses and eliminating the need for multiple solutions that are manufacturer based," said Lawrence. "We're sensitive to 'invest once, use many' and with AutoStore, we haven't found roadblocks in any area."

Another key attribute is ease of deployment and stability. End user feedback has also been very positive, according to Lawrence. "Users are losing no time in getting up and running, which means we are getting business done faster while reducing the errors normally associated with manual intervention."

Additionally, AutoStore provides the opportunity to develop and expand across a diverse user base. "Regardless of what system or business process they've implemented, our employees can adapt AutoStore to fit their business processes. If they want to keep their current system but make it work better, we can enable them with our same investment without having to drop a lot of money for something else," Lawrence added. "With AutoStore, we have a singular investment we can use across multiple devices. It's a real utility belt for solving workflow issues."