

Document Management Case Study



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Replacing paper documents with electronic ones results in reduced labor, material expense, and better communication, customer service, and risk management.

A document management solution implemented by Interstate Steel Co. to replace an inefficient manual report distribution process not only saves hours in time and thousands in paper costs, but has enabled the company to eliminate an outmoded microfilm archiving system.

Interstate Steel: Girds Up With S4i Express

Interstate Steel Company, a division of National Material Company, is a leader in providing highly engineered pre-painted products to the marketplace.

The Des Plaines, IL-based company, with \$160 million in annual revenues, is an industry leader in value-added steel products. Interstate purchases sheet steel, cuts, paints, and resells it to manufacturers of finished goods, including large and small appliances, and office furniture.

Every morning, as many as 100 reports, generated by the company's iSeries and printed overnight, are distributed to about 50 company executives. The combined reports may total 300 pages. But not everyone needs the complete set.

Traditionally, an operator was required to manually burst the reports, separate them, select the sections required by particular individuals, discard the rest, and hand-deliver them—a process that took an operator four hours.

According to Jackie Baker, MIS Director, the report distribution process was intolerable. "It was taking too much time and manpower. There was a constant risk that some reports, especially smaller ones, would be lost, which meant they would have to be recreated and reprinted."

Searching for a solution

Baker began a search for a software solution that would automate the process. "It took a couple of months," she says. "I evaluated three or four products and eventually decided on the iSeries-based S4i Express Document Management System from S4i Systems, based in San Clemente, CA. We went live with it the following April."

iSeries based S4i Express is a fully integrated, network-centric document and report management system that electronically captures, separates, indexes, delivers and archives documents and reports. It also provides extensive online viewing capabilities.

"I evaluated three or four products and eventually decided on the System i based solutions from S4i. My only regret is that we didn't do it sooner!"

Jackie Baker, MIS Director

Factors in the decision: price, performance, flexibility

Several factors contributed to Baker's decision. "First was price. Considering its extensive features, the S4i Express price, was very favorable," she says. "We weren't burdened with paying for a lot of stuff we didn't need. It was an iSeries product, so I didn't have to add a lot of other equipment. Vendor support from S4i Systems was excellent, and still is. S4i has readily incorporated our requests into the product."

Now S4i Express prints only the report sections that each executive needs, identified by that individual's name, and separated with "banner-page" cover sheets. When our staff arrives in the morning, reports are ready for physical distribution.

Dramatic, 50% paper reduction

According to Baker, the immediate result was a dramatic drop in the amount of printing and paper. "We still do the same processing, but we're not printing sections that aren't used," Baker says. "We cut our printing, and therefore our paper consumption, by 50 percent. Because the system is splitting the reports and everyone's name is on the cover sheets, the operator knows exactly to whom they go. The information is available earlier in the morning and facilitates increased productivity."

"Some reports are still hand-delivered", Baker explains. "By routing files to departmental printers or PCs, S4i Express allows the options of local printing or online viewing, without printing or re-keying information." Hand-delivery of the remaining paper-based reports is now accomplished in half an hour, a significant labor savings. Reports for remote field salespeople that were previously faxed are now available online, via laptop, by dialing into the Interstate network.

In addition to reductions in paper and effort, S4i Express has eliminated the need to maintain the microfilm archiving system Interstate previously used. "Depending on content, we keep reports online for a year," Baker says. "Then, on a monthly basis, we move those reports from iSeries DASD to tape. It's all automated. Express takes care of everything...automatically, and on time."

Baker estimates that S4i Express saves Interstate \$7,800 annually in paper, microfilm and time. "To some companies, that may not seem like a big number, but it is for us," she says. "and that was a rapid ROI." In addition, the part-time position previously required to distribute paper-based reports was eliminated.

"There are other benefits that are harder to pinpoint," Baker continues. "We have eliminated lost reports and the need to reprint them. And our end-users know they always have access to the most current information. We've reduced the manual fax procedure to field sales people, with a corresponding reduction in paper consumption."

Looking ahead, Baker plans to take advantage of the S4i Express e-mail capabilities to distribute reports to remote users. "There may not be a great advantage over dialing into the system the way they do now," she says, "but e-mail has become familiar to everyone. In addition, salespeople are not used to getting into the iSeries. If they get reports by e-mail, it's easier for them."

For Interstate Steel, S4i Express has the potential to remove paper from the daily reporting process entirely. According to Baker, 60-70 percent of Interstate's executives now receive reports online with no paper printouts; the goal is 100 percent. But Baker is realistic. "It's a continuing process," she says. "We have to convince them that they have online access to their reports, and to access them online. The process has gone smoothly and it's still going smoothly. My only regret is that we didn't do it earlier!"



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