

THE COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY



LOCATION:
*Riverhead, New York,
United States*

YEAR:
2006

STATUS:
Laureate

CATEGORY:
*Government and
Non-Profit Organizations*

NOMINATING COMPANY:
FileNet Corporation

ORGANIZATION:

Suffolk County

PROJECT NAME:

Virtual County Clerk

Summary

The Suffolk County, NY Clerk's office records more than \$40 Billion annually in Real Property transactions. This translates into approximately 500,000 mortgages, deeds, judgments, liens, court records and related documents annually. In the past, managing this massive quantity of information frequently required up months to process and record documents as official records. Seeking to increase operating efficiencies, streamline processes, improve customer service by bringing government closer to the people, Suffolk County implemented a complete Web-based Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution. Leveraging FileNet ECM solutions, Suffolk County achieved its objectives, today providing real-time Web-based access for the public, increasing internal efficiencies and improving customer service. Additionally, the solution enabled the generation of a new revenue stream for the County with 24/7 online access to public information through an external/internal subscription service. The service allows subscribers to search County records, extract information through data mining, and/or receive real-time updates regarding deed, mortgage, and other land record information. Different from the complimentary Web access, it offers increased search capabilities and provides alerts of updated information in the system to subscribers via e-mail or hand-held device in addition to allowing one to create an abstract of land information similar to a TRW credit report.

Introductory Overview

The Suffolk County Clerk's office records a large volume of mortgages, deeds, and related documents each month - representing approximately \$750,000 a week in transactions. Personnel found it difficult to handle and make available for viewing in real time such a large volume of documents in an effective manner. It typically took months for a paper file to be recorded as an official document after making its way through various departments for processing. Adding to the already-heavy workload, in recent years, the real estate market in Suffolk County - about 1,000 square miles in area - exploded with the appreciation of homes and a population migration from New York City which led to unprecedented demand for this information. Several business challenges contributed to Suffolk County's inefficiencies. Low mortgage rates spurred an increase in home purchases and refinancing, resulting in a significantly higher volume of



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mortgage land record documentation pouring into the Clerk's office. Concurrently, Suffolk County, like many government agencies, found itself challenged to execute this growing workload with no increase in staffing. Frequently, the citizens of Suffolk County literally walked the extra mile to obtain copies of mortgages, deeds, and related documentation in the public domain. Due to location of the office, the public needed to travel up to 50 or 60 miles just to get there only to face the challenge of locating and copying the required documents. With the new County Clerk Virtual Office [Note: Recommend that you name the application consistently], copies of documents and related data are available through the internet subscription service, eliminating the need to travel to the County office. A side benefit has been the creation of a new revenue stream for the County to help offset taxes, which is projected to amount to \$750,000 in 2006 and many more times that in future years.

Benefits

The FileNet ECM system allowed Suffolk County to eliminate many of its manual, paper-based procedures in favor of a self-help, automated solution open 24/7/365 that greatly increased efficiency and improved customer service. Today, the Clerk's Office can record documents in days instead of months. Additionally, office staff report a great improvement in their ability to address citizen and other inquiries. With a growing demand for government data as demonstrated through calls from all over the world from individuals seeking documentation and information, office staff appreciate the fact that they can retrieve requested information immediately through their workstations and the Web. Going beyond the government, Suffolk County citizens win as well. By enabling citizens to access information via the Web, phones, hand-held devices or pagers, Suffolk County brought government closer to the people, promoting better community relations, improving its public image and improving its relationship with the local government. Many different businesses that require land record data for their respective business models need to have the ability to retrieve this data in a real time environment. The creation of the Suffolk County Clerk Virtual Office (SCCVO) enables businesses to flourish without having to rely on traveling to the Suffolk County Clerk's Office and mining the data.

Has your project fundamentally changed how tasks are performed? Yes

How do you see your project's innovation benefiting other applications, organizations, or global communities? The benefits extend to departments beyond the Clerk's Office. For example, the police leverage the system to review images of original mortgages, deeds, and title transfers in conducted analyses surrounding illegal or inappropriate activity. Additionally, Suffolk County generated a new revenue stream in expanding Web accessibility to public information to entrepreneurs and businesses through an online subscription service. In addition to searching by tax map ID number, subscribers can search records by a person's name to view all deeds, mortgages, liens, court judgments, civil judgments, and any other public domain information on that person. This real-time service feature also provides e-mail alerts - automatically sending an email to a subscriber regarding changes to a record based on customized queries built within the system. The subscription service helps legitimate marketers build lists with real-time information.



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The Importance of Technology

The Suffolk County Clerk's office is responsible for "warehousing" numerous original paper records, including but not limited to mortgages, deeds, judgments, liens, sub division maps, Lis Pendens, etc. The only practical means by which to manage the voluminous amount of paper and still allow the public to retrieve these records efficiently is to digitize and eliminate the paper. Therefore, the cornerstone to an effective process improvement and bringing government closer to the people is to implement an imaging system and eliminate the paper and make the images and data available through an easy to use single point of access on the Web. (Similar to a 311 type system for data.)

Originality

There are several aspects of the project that make it exceptional and unique: By creating a single point of access for all County Clerk data and images it creates a Virtual Land Records Office which allows for users to retrieve valuable real property data remotely without having to travel physically to the office. The concept is exceptional from the perspective of a TRW or carfax-like abstract report which can be created for a particular parcel of land, and that same land can be placed on an eBay-like watch list that will push any new data recorded to the user without logging on to the system.

It is original in the process of creating a "credit report" abstract of property through the use of a single point of access Web-based application, similar to an individual's TRW like credit report. Because of the uniqueness of the application with relevance to real property, a patent has been applied for.

Success

"We publish information about the Long Island Real Estate market.

Over the years, the most difficult thing to for us to get right was the actual street addresses and hamlets of the properties.

The county's new web site has significantly cut down my Riverhead trips (to Suffolk County Clerks Office)and has made it easy for me to navigate the large number of varied documents associated with a property, and quickly determine the correct address.

The key word being "quickly." "

Pat Ammirati
General Manager
Long Island Profiles
www.liprofiles.com

"I am excited with the prospect of exploring potential new revenue streams that can be generated through the information available at the Suffolk County Clerk's Virtual Kiosk.I welcome the opportunity to grow my business with cutting edge technology that will enhance my company's ability to continue to compete in the marketplace."

John C. Meyer, President
<http://www.safeharbor-title.com/>



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Since the SCCVO creates real tangible business value with subscribers/users being able to achieve a quick ROI the targeted user community has embraced the application with enthusiasm. The initial projections were for 200 users at \$6,000 per license, currently there is over 600 people on a waiting list to subscribe.

Difficulty

From a purely technical standpoint, the SCCVO is a rather straight-forward architecture. The most challenging aspect was to integrate and normalize the numerous legacy databases and the requirements gathering of a never before tried concept. From an organizational standpoint, since the requirements had to be created from a “predictive state,” a host of meetings occurred with many different business and governmental entities with “what if scenarios” posed and feedback solicited which essentially made the application design an iterative methodology and approach. The Suffolk County Clerk’s Office records approximately \$1 Billion weekly in real property transactions alone, therefore, there is a tremendous demand to access the details of these transactions for many different business and governmental reasons, including new reasons that were only created and understood with the advent of the SCCVO. In the past the County Clerk’s Office was almost exclusively used by title searchers performing their work for title insurance purposes. However with the SCCVO, that paradigm has been changed drastically with a new vision of what the data means and how to use it.

In the past, title searchers and business would rent space from the County Clerk to gain almost exclusive access to the land records; they acted as brokers of this data with outside abstract companies, title insurers and other large real estate data mining businesses. These title searchers are a very powerful and influential lobby, and with the creation of the SCCVO system, the title searchers perceived the system as a threat as they believed that their livelihood would be in jeopardy. The abstract companies, title insurers and other large real estate data mining businesses however embraced the SCCVO as a means to obtaining the same data remotely, real time and more cost effectively. Additionally, the SCCVO required many levels of approval through government which included the legislator county executive and numerous working and steering committee presentations. Furthermore, local state law had to be created to institute the subscription service to access the SCCVO. This process took several years and many-many presentations. However, at each step, 100 percent agreement was achieved, including appropriating additional funding to create an application to redact social security numbers from all the images, which by law was not mandated, but was necessary to garner acceptance.