Industry: Retail

InputAccel® Gives Home Depot the Competitive Edge

Document Imaging System Expedites and Improves Internal Processes and Vendor Relationships

Founded in 1978, in Atlanta, Georgia, Home Depot is North America's largest home improvement retailer, currently operating 1459 stores, including 1312 Home Depot stores and 50 EXPO Design Centers in the United States, 84 stores in seven Canadian provinces, seven stores in Puerto Rico and ten in Mexico. In total, the company employs about 280,000 people. Each Home Depot store stocks approximately 40,000 to 50,000 different kinds of building materials, home improvement supplies, and lawn and garden products.

Home Depot knew it was imperative to start planning for the future. Adam Klein, Manager of Information Services, states, "As we've grown, 21-23% per year, we've been drowning in paper. We needed a document imaging system solution that afforded us the ability to easily capture that paper in a digital medium."

THE PROBLEM

Home Depot's Merchandise Accounting Department receives 150,000-200,000 sheets of paper per day, consisting of invoices, freight bills, and packing slips (making it the perfect choice for the pilot project for a new document imaging system). Most of this information must be kept on file to conform to the company's records retention policy.

"We determined that we needed a document imaging system to help us get a handle on the paper and give us a competitive edge by making it easier and more efficient to work with our vendors. Our ability to respond to internal requests and vendor requests in a timely manner was limited by our microfilm processing lead-time. Before implementing the new document imaging system, Home Depot was using 10 to 14 cameras to accomplish this task. There could be a two to three week backlog just to get the information to film. If any of the stored information was requested, retrieval required between two and seven days," Klein explained.

"In the past, employees had to talk to vendors over and over again. For example, there might be a situation where we ordered ten hammers, received eight, and we were billed for twelve", said Klein. Because the information was not readily available, the employee could not immediately solve this issue. It had to be set aside until all backup material had been retrieved. This process could take upwards of ten days if the original documents were stuck in the backlog channel. Home Depot realized that the continuing business success depended on being able to access this information more quickly, thereby expediting the process on both the vendor and client side.

THE CRITERIA

Home Depot's decision to purchase InputAccel was impacted by three requirements. They needed a system that could:

- Perform high-volume document capture,
- Write custom PCFs (Process Control Files) that specify how documents will flow through the system, and
- Support multiple scanner types.

Because of the high volume of documents, Home Depot needed a production level document capture system. Klein confirms, "Although there are 150,000-200,000 sheets of paper per day that are scanned, these are two-sided documents. So, in reality the InputAccel system is processing up to 400,000 pages per day. There was no other system out there that could handle that kind of volume."

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Another decisive factor in Home Depot's purchase of Input*Accel* was that it supports nearly 300 scanner types, and does so at each scanner's rated speed (or even faster). Home Depot was uncertain which scanners would be used in their capture process, so the software's ability to support multiple scanner manufacturers and scanner types was a benefit.

While the aforementioned criteria were the major reasons Home Depot chose to use Input*Accel*, the ability to also use "plug-n-play" modules was something they considered favorable. Captiva has partnered with more than 35 imaging component vendors to ensure customers have all the features and functionalities they may require.

THE SYSTEM

The Home Depot document capture system has been designed to accommodate the company's most critical needs—high volume throughput and a reduction in document capture lead-times—to alleviate the backlog of paper accumulated in the work environment. Input*Accel*, running on two servers, uses the following process:

- **Scan**—Five Kodak 923 Duplex scanners are used to scan the documents (primarily comprising packing slips, invoices, and freight bills).

- **Image Rotate Utility**—Since most of the documents are scanned in landscape format, this feature allows the pages to be automatically rotated to portrait format.

- **Image Enhancement**—Pages are sent to this module for noise removal and deskewing, and checked for Home Depot barcodes. These barcodes determine what kind of document is being processed. Pages without barcodes are automatically determined to be continuations of the previous document.

- **Multi Utility**—This utility modifies the Batch Tree structure by inserting levels in the document set based on separator pages or barcodes.

- **Quality Assurance**—Because such a large number of pages are processed, it is not cost effective for QA operators to look at every page. Pages are spot checked for bent pages and lines every 'nth' image, based on document type.

- **Manual Indexing**—If documents do not have a barcode, a special manual index barcode is placed on the page with a number. A PCF Script has been written to detect this special barcode and route this document to a manual indexing operator for keyed entry.

- **Rescan**—A Fujitsu 3099® is used to rescan unclear images and rejected pages.

- **Export**—The data is then exported to Optika Media System®.

- **Reporting Function**—Information is collected so the system administrator can analyze the productivity and throughput of the scanning system.

THE RESULT

Using microfilm, it could take Home Depot up to seven days to retrieve necessary information. With their document imaging system, they can get this same data within seconds.

Home Depot also reduced labor cost by using Input*Accel*. "There was a learning curve for the new technology, but in a few months we could really see a difference in the department," says Klein. By creating a more efficient work process, Home Depot has allowed its employees to focus on a key business objective—growing the business.

By implementing an electronic document imaging system, Home Depot has positioned itself to fully utilize workflow technology in the future. The complete document imaging system enables Home Depot to be more efficient internally and to provide better customer service to their vendors.

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