

CUSTOMER NAME

Texas Railroad Commission

INDUSTRY

Energy and Environment

LOCATION

Austin, TX

SOLUTION HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 million pages of searchable documents online
- Average more than 31,000 website hits daily
- 25,000 to 30,000 additional images scanned per month

BENEFITS

- Single solution combines files previously stored in paper, microfilm
- Provides faster search and retrieval
- Cut transaction time for certain requests from hours to minutes
- Delivered consumer access to documents via a public website
- Uses staff members' time more efficiently to educate public, rather than search for documents

ONLINE IMAGE SEARCH SHORTENS RESPONSE TIME & INCREASES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

BUSINESS PROFILE

The Texas Railroad Commission serves the role of energy commission for the entire state of Texas. The Commission was originally formed in 1891 to regulate the rail industry; however, its primary responsibility is now regulating the exploration, production, and transportation of oil and natural gas.

Through district offices and field inspectors, the Commission oversees facilities across the state and ensures their compliance with rules and regulations. Additionally, the Commission works to prevent economic or physical waste of oil and gas production and protect Texas' water resources from damage by oil and gas field activities.

OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

From requesting permission to drill an oil or gas well, through production and plugging of the well at the end of its lifecycle, companies must submit a variety of documents to the Commission for review and approval. Staff members process and store these well records, making them available to the public for research and future reference.

The Commission's oil and gas well records were traditionally stored in its Central Records department in Austin. Companies or individuals that needed to perform research could come to the Central Records department in person, or call, fax, or email their order to the Commission office. Once the requests were received, staff members would begin searching for files, making copies, and responding to requests.

BUSINESS NEED

When the price of oil began to rise, the Commission started receiving a growing number of requests. The increased volume, combined with the varying complexity of each individual request, made it clear that the agency would need to hire additional staff or find a more efficient solution to keep up with demand.

According to Susan Rhyne, Manager of Information Services in the Administration Division, the Commission faced a number of challenges addressing these needs. First, well records were stored in multiple formats. Records older than the 1980's were stored on microfilm. Records from the early 1980's to the present were stored on paper, taking up about a mile's worth of linear space. Without an intuitive indexing structure, staff members needed specific information and a detailed understanding of how files were stored before they could even begin each search.

Adding to this challenge, the agency maintained a single copy of most records. Decades-old paper files had begun to deteriorate, and individual documents would sometimes be misfiled or disappear.

Based on these factors, individual records requests could take hours or even days to fulfill.

The Commission had tried to implement an in-house imaging project a few years earlier, but found that it did not provide adequate technology and flexibility to help staff members find the information they needed. Wary of implementing another solution that might not meet the Commission's needs, Rhyne and other leaders worked with Neubus to conduct a thorough business analysis.

They determined that image quality would need to be as good as a paper file or better, and the information would have to be organized in a logical way that was easy to use without prior knowledge of the Commission's processes or filing structures. Also, because the files are open, public records, the technology would have to enable the Commission to post its files on a publicly available website.

SOLUTION

Based on the detailed analysis of the Commission's needs and current processes, Neubus rolled out a suite of online services to enable the Commission to capture, store, manage, and share well records.

Neubus migrated 1,400 rolls of microfilm to its online system, along with historic paper records and new documents received by the Commission.

Using a unique lease number field, Neubus auto-indexed each image, combining the index field with data from the Commission's existing database. The Neubus solution also included full-text optical character recognition (OCR), to read the entire contents of each image and make it searchable.

The solution made over 15 million pages available online, covering close to three quarters of a million oil and gas wells. All of the images are accessible to anyone with Internet access, through an easy-to-use search function on the Commission website. Average monthly traffic to the website has increased 21% since the start of 2009, reaching 979,788 hits in October 2009, the highest number of hits ever seen.

Rhyne estimates that the Commission also provides 25,000 to 30,000 additional pieces of paper to Neubus for scanning every month.

BENEFITS

SECURITY

Moving the Commission's images online provided added security for historic and recent documents, protecting them from loss or degradation.

SHORTER TRANSACTION TIME

For customers who require assistance with their search, the solution has drastically reduced the time required to find each file.

"Now, it might take 5 to 15 minutes to find a record, when it used to take 10 minutes to several hours," said Rhyne.

MORE EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES

For the oil and gas well records that are now online and accessible to the public, staff members no longer have to search for physical files. Instead, team members can assist customers with finding the records themselves.

"We show them how they can get well records for themselves – educating them about the resources available on the Web for their future use," says Rhyne.

INCREASED CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Most importantly, the solution increased customer satisfaction by enabling users to quickly and easily find the records they need.

"Once they learn to use it, they can find information themselves," says Rhyne. "They love how easy it is!"

SUMMARY

With a suite of Web services, Neubus enabled the Commission to capture all of its well records from microform and paper and make them available on a public website. The Commission has been able to reduce the risk of lost documents, reduce transaction time, and provide better service to its constituents.

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