Case Study

Virtual Film by nextScan proves to be a Cost Effective Microfiche Conversion and Preservation Method for the Idaho Board of Professional Engineers and Professional Land Surveyors.

The Idaho Board of Professional Engineers and Professional Land Surveyors is the agency for the State that licenses Engineers, Surveyors and businesses who offer those services. This agency has been in place since 1937 to ensure that Engineers and Land Surveyors are competent to perform in their professions. They issue licenses and certificates and then provide public access to records that verify credentials and licensure status. Because the agency wants to provide quick and accurate access to records, (many dating back to the early 1900s), they were exploring what could be done with their archived records stored on Microfiche. Over time, Microfiche begins to crack, scratch and could be prone to vinegar syndrome making the documents less readable as time passes. The Idaho Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (IPELS), like many other agencies with vital records, was running the risk of losing these historical documents. One large challenge faced by this agency was that they had very limited funds available for conversion of their Microfiche records. After learning of nextScan's scope and capacity for Microfilm and Microfiche scanning, (IPELS) reached out to nextScan to see if a cost effective solution might be available to them.

The Challenges and Scope of the Project

The Idaho Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors wanted to protect aging records that were on Microfiche but did not have a large budget for this type of project. They also had the problem of their old Reader Printer being broken and non-serviceable. Jim Szatkowski, P.E., Deputy Director notes... ***"we were nearly to a point where we were having to use a light and magnifier, just to access these records for the public"***. Because nextScan's Virtual Film conversion approach offers a significantly less expensive option to traditional conversions, nextScan could offer a solution that was within budget and would give them permanent preservation of their records and an easy, streamlined viewing method for retrieval.

To complete this task, nextScan provided a FlexScan 400 high-speed, multi-function Production Scanner with Microfiche Autoloader, capable of scanning 200 microfiche images per minute. The Scanning Project for IPELS, including Audit and Database creation time, took about one week with one operator.

Virtual Film Conversion Procedure:

The Procedure for Virtual Film Conversion using nextScan's solutions is relatively simple.

- Load the FlexScan 400 and Microfiche Auto-Loader with Microfiche and begin scanning
- While scanning, the operator can enter the index information from the previous Microfiche
- When FlexScan Autoloader bin is empty, reload with new batch of Microfiche
- Return Microfiche batch to "Completed" container
- Return film to Storage Cabinet.
- At the end of the day, export the Database and Ribbons to an External USB Drive.

Auditing:

Although Virtual Film **does not require** any frame-by-frame detection, for the Idaho Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (IPELS) Virtual Film project all frames were individually detected and inspected for proper framing during the audit process. For IPELS, nextScan created output templates in both PDF and TIFF so that when saving/printing or emailing documents, the user would have the flexibility to choose either format. Due to film age, use, and conditions, some of the Microfiche had degraded and was considered of poor quality. Because nextScan technology includes comprehensive image enhancement tools, nextScan can reduce conversion costs by minimizing operator setup and QA, optimizing scanning speed, and eliminating the need for rescans. All image data is captured initially in grayscale as a "Ribbon", so image enhancements can be performed at the audit workstation and concurrently while the scanner operates at maximum speed.

No images are ever missed during scanning. nextScan Scanners also feature LuminTec, nextScan's patented stroboscopic LED illumination system, which effectively increases the character definition and image quality of scanned images without increasing image file size. Using this patented technology, resulted in the quality of images being very high.

Database and indexing creation:

Virtual Film allows end users to custom design their workflow and indexing processes based on their unique needs. For PELS, the Microfiche was indexed using Dates and License numbers. PELS officials commented that this conversion was a huge step in the right direction for their agency as it allowed them to integrate two record types and create a complete and workable file system of all data in one location. The actual entry of the fields and database creation takes only a few minutes. Virtual Film is a very easy to understand and streamlined system, so minimal training of an hour or so with key employees was all that was required.

The Virtual Film System:

Virtual Film converts your film or fiche into a user viewable digital ribbon format, and allows access to the film images using the microfilm scrolling and search techniques, but without the need for the film or fiche! The cost of digital conversion can be less expensive than making a duplicate of the film, and is a permanent record that can be viewed at any PC workstation using nextScan software. Simply use your existing workflow with the same indexes. Enter the roll or fiche number, instrument or case number in the Viewer and the roll or fiche is instantly displayed. Virtual Film emulates your existing process (typically a Reader Printer), but in a digital format, providing immediate access to the data and allowing for instant remote access. Virtual Film is the perfect tool for low retrieval rate Microfilm or Microfiche, and at any time the images can be output for import in to your current Document Management System along with your current day-forward content.

Virtual Film Viewer Features:

- Smooth Scroll action on the PC viewing screen, images can be accessed in seconds.
- Zoom features to zero in on a specific portion of the page of file
- Search by image, roll or blip
- “draw a box” around an image or paragraph and print, email or save
- Virtual Film allows custom security setting and user permissions
- Virtual Film Viewer can be installed on multiple workstations
- The Virtual Film Viewer is very user friendly, no hassles of retrieving, loading and unloading film

The Solution and Results

This Virtual Film Microfiche conversion resulted in increased efficiencies for record retrieval, reducing the response time to potential customers dramatically. It also completely replaced the need for a Reader Printer and filing cabinets to view the images. ***“You would be hard-pressed to find a more competitive product. Our records were scanned in a few days. The image quality was very good and the new system is very straightforward and fast.”(IPELS)***

About nextScan:

nextScan is a world leader in cutting edge technology for the micrographics conversion and document management industry. Incorporated in 2002, nextScan was established to give the microfilm and microfiche conversion market a high performance alternative to existing technologies. nextScan’s innovative patented products are designed and built with simplicity and functionality to increase user production and lower overall costs for scanning film and fiche.

For more information on Virtual Film and other nextScan products and services, contact www.nextscan.com or 1-208-514-4000.