

# WASHINGTON TECHNOLOGY

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE FOR GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS INTEGRATORS

JUNE 26, 2006

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Tech Media

## IP breaths new life into fax technology

BY DOUG BEIZER

Technology and the Web continue to change the way we work, but humming away in a corner of most offices is a relic invented 163 years ago: the fax machine.

Its relatively archaic core technology is a big part of why it remains relevant today. Unlike an e-mail, a fax isn't susceptible to hacking, nor can it be redirected by a spam filter. A fax is considered a legal document in the United States and most other countries.

Those legal attributes are why Old Bridge, N.J., a township close to New York, relies on faxing to receive bids from contractors on everything from snowplows to firearms for police. Far from phasing out faxes, Old Bridge's Management Information Systems department wanted to upgrade its faxing capability.

Township officials chose fax server automation tools from FaxCore Corp., Parker Colo.

"Before FaxCore was introduced, the township had four different fax machines that would handle all incoming bid requests," said Paul Banco vice president of Marlboro, N.J.-based CiBan LLC, the project's systems integrator.

"These machines were shared amongst the finance department, so when the township would put out a bid request, they'd literally get hundreds and hundreds of pages worth of faxes, and there was no way to really manage this process," Banco said.

By law, every bid request must be stamped with the date and time when it arrives. A bid that comes in five minutes late cannot be honored, Banco said.

"With FaxCore, all faxes that come in are electronically stamped and delivered to their Exchange server or to whichever user is

designated to receive them," Banco said. "This gives them the ability to electronically manipulate the faxes and place them into the correct public folders. It enhanced their workflow twofold."

The fax server system now routes all faxed bid proposals into the city's Microsoft e-mail



Corbis image

system, said Tom Sommers, director of Old Bridge's MIS department. The system routes the faxes to the correct recipients, who then can decide whether or not it needs to be printed.

"Before this, fax distribution had been labor intensive," Sommers said. "Even though we don't do zillions of faxes, hand distribution is a lot of work."

Because faxes are images rather than text, FaxCore can use barcodes to help with routing tasks.

Some bids go out with barcodes on them. When the faxes come in, FaxCore can recognize the barcodes and extract information from them, CiBan's Banco said.

"Based on the routing rules of those barcodes, it either delivers it to the appropriate person, appropriate department or both. It also places it directly into appropriate folder residing on the network."

### FAX IN AN IP WORLD

Even though faxing has been an analog technology, the transition to IP networks is under way, said Max Schroeder, senior vice president at FaxCore.

Analog fax boards are being supplanted by fax over IP, he said.

"Fax over IP is, in many ways, easier than using the legacy fax technology with a fax board," Schroeder said. "With IP, we are on the network as an IP application, so now we're in a true converged IP environment."

FaxCore integrates with both Microsoft Active Directory and Exchange, Banco said. In the township's installation, FaxCore was loaded on its own server running Windows 2003 Web Edition. About 175 users have access to the system from their desks, Banco said.

FaxCore's software developer kit lets IT professionals fax-enable customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, Exchange, e-mail and office productivity software.

Using a fax server also has helped the department comply with regulations to back up official documents. When a bid is received, it can be immediately backed up, even to offsite storage in a data vault.

Incoming faxes are stored, indexed and can be retrieved with a Web browser as JPEG, GIF, PDF or TIFF files.

It has also helped with meeting Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act regulations to keep patient information confidential. With a paper fax, anyone walking by a machine in an open area could see the information.

The fax server also has helped with maintenance issues such as toner replacement and jammed machines.

"The human resources department constantly gets faxes for insurance claims, medical forms and all kind of hospital records," Old Bridge's Sommers said. "And they required a lot of support with their fax machines, because they were such heavy hitters. We don't need to get involved with them anymore since we put the fax server system in place." ■