



Case Study

Digital Document Management at the American Jewish Historical Society

Powered by
SoluSoft Document Management System

Introduction

The American Jewish Historical Society's (AJHS) existence dates back to 1892. It houses approximately 1,000 archival collections including 20 million documents, 50,000 books, paintings and other objects that bear witness to the remarkable contributions of the American Jewish community. This archive and library is made available to researchers and visitors for reference and study. Limited access to certain materials is also maintained due to privacy issues. This collection is fragile, unique and a valuable source of information for future generations. The Boston branch of the American Jewish Historical Society collects and preserves these archived materials for research by current and future generations.

Challenges

Initially the information and documents of the archive were stored in a series of boxes and folders. Researchers had to go through a tedious and time consuming process to locate desired information. Those searching for information had to use Research Guides to locate the relevant collection and then manually search through the specified boxes and folders to locate the documents of interest. Each such search raised the issue of possible damage to the aging documents which were deteriorating over time despite careful handling.

The key challenges faced by the members and associates of AJHS society:

- Difficulty in locating relevant documents and materials
- Storage space constraints
- Excessive cost of time consuming manual searches
- Concern about the handling the delicate original documents

The Boston branch of the American Jewish Historical Society was facing storage issues for the collection and wanted to save time and effort searching for the information. AJHS decided that they should digitize the historical collection so as to overcome both the onsite storage space limits while improving their ability to search the collections. The ultimate goal was to enable efficient research of the documents with greater speed and at a lower cost than physically handling the materials. Offsite storage of the original materials would also give them the ability to exert greater environmental control over the storage of the documents thus preserving them against the ravages of time.

Kinds of Documents

The holdings are divided into two categories: personal papers, which include the papers and artifacts of individuals and families, and institutional documents, which contain the records of schools, synagogues, orphanages and other organizations related to Jewish life in the Americas.

Materials in their archival collections include correspondence, journals, administrative records, clippings, manuscripts, and memorabilia. AJHS' oldest document dates back to the year 1572. The Society houses a significant amount of Colonial-era material and its collections document many of the important nineteenth- and twentieth-century events and trends of American Jewish life. (Source: <http://www.ajhs.org>)

Solution

The society felt a pressing need to digitize the collection and made a decision to implement a system that addressed all of their concerns. The complete solution was jointly architected and implemented by SoluSoft and its partner Inception Technologies, Manchester, New Hampshire, USA. The solution included Kodak scanners which were used to scan the document archive. The scanned images were then imported into SoluSoft's N2 Document Management application to index and store these vital documents.

“Digitizing was the most logical solution. It was less costly and more searchable while giving us the ability integrate our older paper-based collections with the electronic documents that will become more the norm in the future,” said Justin Wyner past President and Chair of the Boston Board of Overseers of the Historical Society.

With the implementation of the N2 Document Management System all of the storage, search and document handling concerns were resolved. After scanning the originals, they were moved to an off site storage location. The original documents could thus be preserved while allowing onsite storage space for new documents and materials which could in turn be digitized and added to the collection.

Researchers and society members alike were pleased with how the search and retrieval process became easier and faster. The powerful search features of N2 Document Management System enabled the researches to quickly locate required information and made it available to multiple researchers simultaneously. The “Full Text” search feature generates relevant results for users and the results are ranked based on a relevancy percentage. Further search operators allow users to narrow down the search results until the specific information needed is located. Based on search results small document intercepts are displayed, reading which user can decide about the suitability of his interests. Special categories of documents are given restricted rights based on privacy policy.

Digitizing the archival collection proved a boon to both researchers and archivists. Currently the system is handling 0.3 million digital documents and simultaneously adding on an average 1000 documents per day. Researchers can now refer and access more information in lesser time. Society members now can promptly respond to researchers queries.

Advantage of SoluSoft Solution

- Ease in information access
- Optimum use of storage space
- Fast and efficient search
- Preservation of originals
- Lower operating costs
- Zero cost in document search and retrieval
- Ease of use substantially reduces man-hours

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