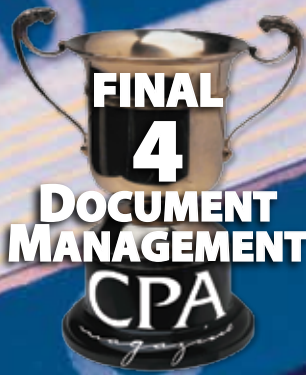


Indexes: The Key To All Document Management Systems



What's in a name? Well, anyone trying to design or maintain an electronic document management system knows that just about everything is in the document's file name. Or is it? The document management systems reviewed here have made remembering file names a thing of the past. This is accomplished through the use of indexes, the key to all document management systems.

Indexes are the plain English way of "naming" the file. Indexes consist of several fields that define the document. Typical fields include client name, client number, date, and document type (such as tax return, letter, W-2, etc.). The more fields used the more information the system has by which to search for and retrieve documents.

The level of flexibility in the indexes is also a vital feature. The success of the system relies on what information is provided at the time of saving the document into the system. Fortunately, all of the systems reviewed offer assistance in the index setup process.

Each system also offers at least a basic level of password security, where users are identified as authorized to access specific documents or groups of documents. The web-based systems offer more functionality in this area, as they produce audit trails of users' actions—saving, viewing, and altering documents.

Web-based systems also require a different level of security from that of local systems (where the documents are stored on the CPA's own hardware). Additional data security issues include the security of the buildings, servers, and Internet connections. Both web-based systems have security guards, multiple data locations and Internet encryption for document uploads and downloads.

Transferring the documents back and forth is also unique to the web-based systems. Since these services function as complete data storage solutions, they allow for multiple document types (such as Microsoft Word, IBM Lotus Notes, and e-mails). There is an expectation that these documents will be uploaded to the service and downloaded to the user's workstation multiple times before the documents are considered final. As a result, both services have a feature that prevents a second user from downloading and editing a document that has been downloaded and not re-uploaded. However, both services allow the downloaded document to be viewed online by additional users in a read-only mode.

The local document management systems take a different approach to managing the documents, as they consider them final upon being saved into the system. Users do all editing on their workstations using whatever software necessary. Upon completion, users then send the documents to the management system where they are converted to PDF format versions of the originals. The PDF files then become permanent additions to the system for retrieval, reference, and archive only. This is a limiting feature, as it offers simple categorized storage with little management.

What the local and web-based systems do have in common is a centralized and secure storage of documents, including confidential information. As the government begins to pass regulations and requirements on these issues (such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act regulating the documents of U.S. publicly held companies with \$75 million or more equity market capitalization), taking the steps now to electronically organize, audit, and archive documents can save paper now and headaches in the future.

—By Ellen DePasquale

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FCS Allows “objects” to be Embedded Such as Word & Excel

By Ellen DePasquale

Simplicity, organization, and easy storage and retrieval of client and internal documents are the virtues of Thomson Creative Solutions FileCabinet Solutions (FCS). FCS installs on your local computer or network as either an add-on to Creative Solutions’ other programs, such as ClientBookkeeping Solution, or as a standalone program.

As an add-on FCS utilizes information in the main application to help organize and categorize the documents as they are added. The communication between the two applications plays a role in the design of the indexes, referred to as drawers and folders in FCS. As a standalone, the structure is designed as part of the system configuration, so it is customizable to each accounting firm.

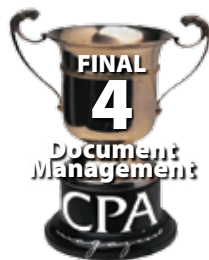
Features

The familiar split-window interface will facilitate a short learning curve for navigation resulting in quick adoption by users. The drawers and folders are listed on the left in the folder window, with the image of the document on the right in the watch window. The event history log, also in the watch window, tracks information regarding the documents in the selected drawer. It is kept at the drawer level because there is only one folder level in a drawer, no folders within folders. All documents are available in the log with their appropriate folder noted. The number of items in the log can be set in the system configuration to limit its size.

All documents added to FCS are images of the original. Among the 18 supported file types are PDF, BMP, JPEG, and TIFF. Users can either scan directly into FCS or manually attach image files.

In addition to the images of documents, FCS allows “objects” to be embedded, such as Microsoft Word and Excel documents. These objects can be viewed in the watch window, and FCS will also launch the application in the watch window to allow editing.

The search function is slightly different. Users are required



The familiar split-window interface will facilitate a short learning curve

to first select whether to search in a single drawer or all drawers. They can then search the results using a different term or phrase. This can be repeated multiple times to narrow the search results to exactly what the user needs. However, since the drawers are the top index, it would take less time to search if the user could start at a lower folder instead.

FCS’s approach to security is another example of its features breaking the mold. Instead of user-level passwords there are drawer-level passwords. This can be a challenge if the user has to remember multiple passwords to access necessary data. There is also a “master password” to control the system configuration settings. This must be generated before the drawer-level passwords can be implemented.

FCS also offers a variety of annotations that can be attached to the document including highlighter, typed text, “stamps”, image from file, and audio. Users can place the highlighter, typed text, and image from file anywhere on the document. Stamps, such as “Draft” are located in the same position on all documents and resemble an ink stamp. (Users choose from the stamp library.) Audio annotations can be recorded, edited, and played right in FCS, or users can import pre-recorded WAV files.

Summary

Smaller firms that need to reduce paper yet keep detailed records will find FCS useful. It is easy to set up, easy to use, and offers enough security to prevent unauthorized access to sensitive data. FCS is a simple but useful tool that users will most likely leave open for most of their working day.

Thomson Creative Solutions

www.creativesolutions.thomson.com

800-986-8900



GoFileRoom Offers Features and Benefits Not Found in Local Systems



By Ellen DePasquale

Thompson Corporation's web-based document and workflow management service, GoFileRoom, can remove many of the headaches associated with both the accountant's accounting workflow and IT concerns. Since this is a web-based service, it requires accounting firms to closely review the system's security features before placing their clients' confidential documents out on the Internet.

Ease-of-use, document audit trails, and workflow management as well as data back-up and disaster recovery plans are already being implemented at GoFileRoom. However, reliable user Internet service is a must.

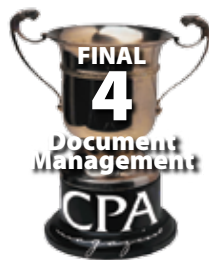
Features

GoFileRoom servers are located at several IBM data centers which are "tier 1" in the industry. This means seven layers of physical protection, from security guards to physical locks on the hardware. Physical access is only one element of the necessary security; anti-hacking is the next. All server transactions use 128 bit encryption, the same level as online banking. The servers have also been audited and tested by FoundStone (a web-application security company owned by McAfee). FoundStone certified the GoFileRoom servers with their highest grading since they could not hack into them.

Second only to security is back-up. GoFileRoom is redundant with two servers housing the data and replication between NY and Chicago, so there are four layers of protection. They also produce monthly backups of all documents and deliver them on a DVD to the accounting firms.

Access to the GoFileRoom servers is through redundant OC3 connections to high-bandwidth multiple independent Tier 1 backbone networks. As long as users have access to the Internet, they have access to the documents.

User-level access and security privileges are extensive. In addition to file location and/or client access restrictions, actions can be restricted, such as document viewing, annotat-



The TaxFlow provides bird's eye view of all work-in-process

ing, and editing either by user, user groups, drawers, or even down to the individual documents.

GoFileRoom offers easy document search, retrieval and viewing online. However, all editing is done at the users' workstation via downloading the documents in their native application format. Downloads and uploads are managed through a check-out/check-in process, and monitored by the audit trail function. Any document that is checked-out, can only be viewed online, until it is checked back in. This prevents two or more users from editing a document simultaneously.

The indexing feature is extensive and offers a host of initial criteria to quickly find the right document. Based on the user privileges, searches can span across data types, clients, and file locations.

Client access is also available though a seamless service allowing clients to log in to the accountant's website and be shown the data from GoFileRoom. Their documents never leave the secure servers, yet they feel as though they have received all their information from the accountant's website.

The TaxFlow revolves around tax preparation services (although user customization can utilize this feature for other client services). Utilizing a pre-determined workflow the system reveals who is responsible for each phase and how long it is taking. Additionally, if any user seems to be falling behind, their responsibilities can be reallocated to another user. This bird's eye view of all work-in-process is valuable to maintaining deadlines and balancing the work load.

Summary

GoFileRoom is the most comprehensive document and workflow management system reviewed here. From data security, ease of retrieval, audit trails and document management to customer service and employee management, it is a priceless tool to improve productivity.

Thomson Corporation

www.gofileroom.com

866-463-4531



ProSystem *fx* Document Provides Access to Documents in All Stages of Processing

By Ellen DePasquale

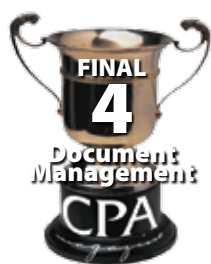
ProSystem *fx* Document from CCH, Inc. is a robust electronic document management and workflow management system. A local program, residing on the user's workstation or network, it offers features that are comparable to the web-based systems, allowing collaboration, not just document search and retrieval.

Staff and clients can easily access all documents necessary to collaborate during the accounting process, such as tax preparation or quarterly reports. By working together electronically the process can proceed much smoother than if paper documents were passed from office to office.

Features

One of the strongest features is ProSystem *fx* Document's integration with the ProSystem *fx* Office suite of products. Many of the documents generated by the suite, such as invoices, workpapers, and financial statements can be saved directly into the document management system. Additionally, several of the suite applications can be launched directly from ProSystem *fx* Document including Engagement and Profit Driver. However, users that do not own any of the other suite applications will still benefit from the depth of document and workflow management offered in ProSystem *fx* Document.

More than just document management, it is a tool for workflow which promotes a paperless office since there is no need to wait until a document or process is complete to save it into the system. Documents maintain their native form when they are brought into the system, including Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and even Microsoft Outlook files retain their formats. Additionally, they also retain the ability to be viewed and edited in their native application, so there is no new software to learn. This feature allows documents to be saved to the system as soon as they are generated, in any draft form, and accessed by all users involved in their completion. All this accessibility is not limited to internal use. Client Portal allows clients to access their documents in a secure environment; from anywhere they



Documents maintain their native form when brought into the system, including Word, Excel and Outlook

have Internet access.

Since the system expects tremendous usage, it captures all document history. Not only does ProSystem *fx* Document track who accessed a document and when, but when using the check-in/out function, it also maintains prior versions of the document. This provides a complete audit trail with the ability to go back to a specific date to view an earlier version. In addition, since the documents keep their format, the "track changes" function in Word and Excel are also available so edits can be easily identified in each version.

To accompany this wealth of accessibility, the system delivers a high level of user security settings. ProSystem *fx* Document first utilizes the user's initial network login information, then offers additional access authorization within the application. Each user is identified as having access to internal companies/departments, then clients within those companies/departments, and lastly the type of access to the documents. Some examples of the types of access include edit, read only, and delete.

Successful implementation of ProSystem *fx* Document requires careful planning. CCH offers what they call the Implementation Consulting Phase. They work with the accounting firms to establish a default list of index fields. They also provide a Best Practices, so users will get an idea of what other firms have done with their indexing structure.

Summary

The level of interaction in ProSystem *fx* Document makes it functional and useful immediately upon installation. Not only does it store and maintain all documents, but also provides an environment for collaboration, workflow, and document processing that substantially reduces paper waste and time spent.

CCH, Inc.

www.tax.cchgroup.com

800-PFX-9998

WebDocs CPA Synchronizes Data to LAN for Additional Security



By Ellen DePasquale

RJS Software has tailored their WebDocs service to specifically address the needs of the accounting firm with their WebDocs CPA. Although its features revolve around typical accounting firm services and their required documents and processes, it also provides a level of customization to serve the needs of the individual accounting firm.

The name of the game with web-based document management is security, not only from a user access standpoint but from an “anyone” access standpoint. WebDocs CPA offers an additional level of comfort with the synchronization feature that allows accounting firms to house a replica of their online document database.

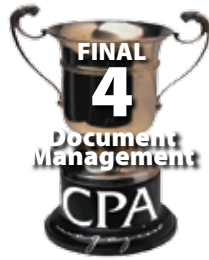
Features

WebDocs CPA's data center security includes security guards and locked combination doors around the server. All communications with the servers are encrypted and accounting firms can work with RJS to limit the IP addresses that are allowed access. This feature would need close examination as it might prevent clients and any member of the firm access from remote locations.

Nightly tape back-ups are rotated to three off-site locations. There is also a disaster recovery site in Colorado that houses a replication of their server. Additionally, RJS Software is planning to mirror their server by the end of the 2006 tax season.

Unique to this service is the synchronization option that will store copies of all the accounting firm's documents on their in-house server (it supports Windows and Linux servers). This would also be used as a cache server to assist in faster document retrieval. The index searches would look through the central server, but return documents from the local server. This would be exclusively for viewing and would require the user to download (check out) the document from the web-based server for editing.

The documents are saved in their native application format



Synchronization feature allows accounting firms to house a replica of their online document database

for easy editing. WebDocs CPA has a built-in PDF driver so users can view the documents online without having to launch any local applications. The service also saves old versions of the document in the audit history for as long as the accounting firm retention policy requires for that type of document. The retention policy is specific to the individual accounting firms.

Client access to the documents is provided through the accounting firms predefined passwords. The clients are logging right into the WebDocs CPA application, but with limited access. User password security is standard with privileges and limitations available per user or related to various aspects of the service.

There are up to ten index fields that are customizable and searchable. Searches can start in specific folders or span across clients and file locations. Results include both documents and PDF scanned images since WebDocs CPA works with OCR scanning.

Unique to WebDocs CPA is the user inbox. Each user has an inbox where they receive work pieces as they are assigned. A useful workflow feature that presents the projects and phases required from employees without confusion or misunderstanding.

As with GoFileRoom, WebDocs CPA allows managers to monitor workflow and identify employee work loads. They can also monitor due dates and reassign items if necessary.

Summary

Since WebDocs CPA is specifically designed for accounting firms there are many aspects of the service that are ready to run without any customization. User inboxes, local document replication, and direct client access set this service apart, but the limit of index keys could be an issue with some accounting firms that have detailed index structures.

RJS Software Systems

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