

Case Study



Disaster-response Organization Struggles to Manage Volumes of Volunteer Paperwork

Hope Force International (HFI) is a non-profit organization that assists in crisis-response through the efforts of volunteers around the world. The Tennessee-based Christian organization has a cadre of trained volunteer Reservists who have responded to a broad range of disasters, such as Mid-western floods, tornadoes in the South, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and the disastrous Hurricane Katrina. HFI trains volunteers in advance so they are prepared and allowed to respond—often in restricted areas—when disaster strikes.

Business Needs

Henry Williams is a reservist for HFI who is helping the organization with its document management needs. He says the need for a better system for handling documents became evident when he returned from helping out during catastrophic floods in Tennessee in 2010 and 2011. When Williams returned to the Hope Force headquarters in Brentwood, Tennessee after implementing a database that could be used to manage and track activities of rebuilding with Reservists during the flood recovery, he realized there was an obvious need at headquarters to do the same.

“We had multiple file cabinets containing information on the Reservists involved in the disaster recovery efforts, which included a lot of personal paperwork such as immunization records, copies of passports, and health information,” Williams says. “It is critical to properly manage information like this. The nature of disaster response is working to make order out of chaos, moving quickly while being strategic. Instant access to data on the 1,000-plus HFI Reservists is crucial.”

The problem was the sheer volume of paper documents that HFI was accumulating.

“When we first started doing this, we quickly got up to more than 1,500 files in the filing cabinets,” he says. “One can imagine the number of files that were either misfiled or not up to date. We had to find a solution to be able to scan documents into a centralized database. Our goal was to reduce paperwork and free up the room that filing cabinets occupy to provide immediate accessibility to volunteer data.”

Solution: Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500 scanners

HFI deployed Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500 desktop scanners to help reduce its paper workload and streamline processes. The S1500 is a sheet-fed device that scans in both monochrome and color, creating searchable Adobe PDF documents at the touch of a single button.

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“The ScanSnaps are used, at present, with a simple file system on the computer,” explains Williams. “As we grow this application, a more sophisticated database and software solution needs to be implemented along with a secured, centralized storage system where files can be accessed and searched by key personnel.”

Benefits: Fast, easy capture of volunteer information

Hope Force International put its new scanning solution to the test in early 2012 when a group of University of Southern California students—including 16 members of the USC Trojans football team—traveled to Haiti to build several homes. HFI has been active in Haiti since the devastating earthquake of January 2010.

“It was the first test of the scanning process,” says Williams. “We gathered about 14 pages of handwritten information from every group member who went to Haiti. Their information was then scanned into our database. We used the person’s name and HFI account number that helped in organizing the documents. Portions of the scanned documents were sent to Haiti so our volunteers who were already down there would know, for example, if someone is allergic to mosquitos or might have problems with extreme heat.”

HFI is currently scanning up to 500 documents a month, many of them coming from new Reservists volunteering with the organization.

“We have regularly scheduled training sessions for new volunteers, and can get up to 100 people signing up for a session. There can be as much as 50 pages of documentation required for each new volunteer,” Williams says. “The scanning solution using the Fujitsu scanners and the database software is going to save us many hours of what would be cumbersome, time-consuming document management tasks, allowing us to focus more of our energy on the HFI mission.”

Hope Force benefit snapshot:

- Helps in digitizing thousands of documents that provide critical information about, and for, volunteers [Reservists].
- Reduces or eliminates hundreds of hours of manual work that used to be required for managing paper documents—time that can now be put toward the organization’s vital mission work.

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