

MISL Case Study –Cambridge University



The world renowned University of Cambridge is a modular organisation that consists of a collection of 31 constituent colleges. The Colleges operate under their own governance on many issues but combine to form the second oldest university in the United Kingdom. Much of the administration of the University is carried out centrally and MISL was approached by the Student Administration function of the university to help them manage and work with their student admissions files.

The Challenge

The key challenge for the university department was that there were a significant number of student admissions files in circulation and, at the time of contacting MISL, there was no centralized mechanism in place to effectively manage the files and relate them to either available or filled college places. The student journey at the university starts with an application process that is more involved than most other universities by virtue of the various colleges. It is permitted, for example for a prospective student to apply to multiple colleges for admission. In a paper world that means that the admissions files must be circulated to different colleges for assessment physically. Each college assessing the application packs, adding information to the file, potentially inviting the applicant for interview and/or entrance or assessment examinations. This effectively lengthens the application process and is open for inefficiencies and potential loss of data.

Once a prospective student is offered and subsequently accepts a place at one of the colleges their student application file becomes their core student file for the duration of their time at the university. If they transfer between colleges during their course or to join post graduate courses then the responsibility for managing their student record falls to the hosting college. The Student Administration department therefore had a gargantuan task to manage the records of where each student was currently studying and opening the paper files so that the responsible colleges both had access to the information and could add documents to the student files.

MISL was brought in because the University acknowledged that the best way to move the information between the colleges and maintain a centralized and managed records policy for both prospective and incumbent students was to digitize the records onto an Enterprise Document and Records Management System (EDRMS)

Project Design

Fortunately, in advance of MISL's involvement in the project the University had already procured a state-of-the-art ERDMS system, Serengeti from Netcall. The Serengeti was already installed and

functioning across the university as an administration repository with the admin functions of all of the colleges having access to the system.

The Serengeti system provided the obvious centralized access mechanism for the project and MISL worked closely with the University and Serengeti to define the metadata and indexing requirements for the student admission files. The process involved assessing the files and then MISL meeting with the University team to assess how they currently search for and access the files in their paper form.

MISL works closely with customers in a consultative capacity at this early stage in the process to ensure that the project specification is effective. In simple terms if the files are digitized and indexed in a different way than the files are currently being accessed by the customer then the result is a digital repository that is difficult to use and results in a slower level of uptake from the end users. By asking the right questions at an early stage MISL were able to define the correct indexing parameters and deliver a digital repository that was fit for purpose.

MISL liaised closely with Serengeti to ensure that the digital data that MISL was due to produce would be straight forward to upload to the system for access by the University.

The MISL process

After the project was initiated MISL used the quantity assessment data from the department to assess how many document boxes they would need to pack all of their files for scanning. These boxes were delivered to the University and within a short time frame the department had completed the packing of their files. The University also recorded the files that were being collected in an electronic inventory. This was to facilitate the potential need for file retrievals by the department during the scanning process. As standard MISL provides free 24 hour electronic file retrievals for customers while they are waiting for the scanning to be completed.

The MISL team carried out the following process on the documentation for the University:

- Collected the boxes of Student files and transported them safely and securely to the MISL processing site in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire.
- Opened each box and checked the contents against the electronic inventory that was generated by the customer
- Prepared each file to remove bindings and staples where present and to ensure the paperwork was in the best condition for scanning
- The scanning team then scanned each file using a manual feed scanning process. This involved viewing each image as it was scanned to ensure the correct image quality.
- The indexing team then indexed the files (as specified) by the information on the file covers, spines or documents.
- 10% of the boxes scanned then went through a further QA check where every page was manually checked against the scanned images in the entire box.
- All of the scanned images were processed by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software resulting in a searchable, multi-page PDF file for each document or file.
- The final data was checked for accuracy a final time and then delivered to Netcall for uploading into the Cambridge University Serengeti system instance.
- MISL then stored the documents for a period of 3 months while the department checked their data for accuracy.

- After a period of 3 months the department authorised MISL to securely destroy the scanned and QA checked paperwork to the BS15713:2009 standard for secure destruction.

Conclusion

The project was a success for the University because it significantly reduced the storage space that was being used for the files and reduced their risk by holding the confidential files in a secure digital environment with audit trails and granular security access. The project was effectively designed and has since enabled the University to easily transfer ownership of the files as students are transferred to different colleges and through the complex admissions process.

The project was a good example of MISL's ability to work with the customer and software provider to design a project that was fit for purpose and that would result in a better working system for the administration department both centrally and in the constituent colleges. The scanning and quality assurance process was well executed and resulted in a high quality digital output. Overall the project achieved the desired results with a minimum of disruption to the customer.

MISL is still working with the University on a variety of projects including the scanning of student files for some of the separate colleges within the University.

Project statistics

- Duration: 10 weeks
- Total number of student files scanned: 6,233
- Total number of collection locations: 1
- Total number of images scanned: 523,436
- Total number of boxes supplied and collected: 220

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