



Partnership And Processes: How Toshiba And Administrative Resource Options' Service And Responsiveness Trimmed A Law Firm's Copy And Mail Room Expenses By 20 Percent

IN BRIEF

Problem

At a large regional law firm in Los Angeles, the outsourced copy and mail Service Center was inefficient at best. Equipment would break down and stay down for days, backing up the workflow. Copy Center employees were never able to provide the legal staff with estimates of when they would be back online. Incoming documents—mail or fax—would get trapped in the system, with delivery lags that slowed business down company-wide. What's more, issues would remain unresolved, sometimes for weeks.

Solution

Toshiba provided the equipment, and partnered with Administrative Resource Options (ARO), for the on-site copy and mail room management. Together, they built and implemented a plan that optimized the Service Center itself, and created new and more efficient processes that solved ongoing labor issues. With strict attention to customer service, the team gained the law firm's trust and at the same time, saved the firm close to \$40,000 in annual document imaging costs.

A large part of a law firm's business is managing information. Legal contracts and orders, faxes to and from clients, email and even snail mail—it's all core to the business and it's moving all the time. Law firms are a favorite of copy centers; larger firms have in-house copy centers fully-staffed to run the equipment and also handle mail and fax delivery, records management and more.

Such is the case at this large regional law firm. With four locations in California and one in Nevada, the firm represents clients in every state of the country, with professionals specializing in more than 20 areas, including commercial law, construction, architecture and engineering law, appellate advocacy, civil litigation, environmental law, and product and professional liability. To handle its vast flow of information, the firm maintains an in-house copy and mail center—referred to as the Service Center—staffed by an outside provider.

"A law firm's main business is law, and they don't have time to manage the daily administrative activities that keep information flowing," says Justin Swigert, sales manager for Toshiba Business Solutions - California/Nevada. "The Service Center is at the heart of the law firm. If that goes down, information doesn't get disseminated and basically business stops."

And that's what had been happening far too often. Equipment would break down and stay down for days, backing up the workflow, and Service Center employees couldn't provide estimates of when they would be back online. Incoming documents—mail or fax—would get trapped in the system, with delivery lags that slowed business down company-wide.

What's more, issues would remain unresolved for extended periods of time. The firm's IT director remembers those incidents far too clearly. "Our head paralegal recommended that the previous imaging vendor make a change and gave them a week to do it," he says. "They blew that deadline. She gave them multiple chances, but they still did not come through. Finally,

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she began using a copy center down the street that does legal reproduction. At that point, we got a complaint from the vendor who said, 'Hey, your numbers have dropped about 25 percent.' And I said, 'You'd better look in the mirror, because you're the issue.' "

"The result was that the lawyers didn't trust their on-site staff. But by the same token they didn't have equipment that could handle the work," says Swigert. "They had one color system—a Canon IRC3200—and it was getting beat up with 10,000 pages per month. It was always broken, so they would outsource."

The Challenge

Having a copy center on-site, and outsourcing its copies just didn't make sense to the firm's executives. Something had to be done. When the contract with the previous vendor came up for renewal, they sent out a request for

proposal (RFP), offering Toshiba the opportunity to bid. The RFP called for the operation of a reproduction center in the Los Angeles office location, as well as mail room services, including delivery of all internal and external mail, fax transmission, and miscellaneous services, such as reception, restocking of supplies, inventory, and ordering.

Swigert was the first from Toshiba to visit the law firm. "I immediately noticed there were a lot of high-speed, high-volume copiers and about 300,000 clicks a month," he says. "I could handle all the hardware, but not the labor. So I brought in Dan."

Immediately, Toshiba and ARO met their first challenge: seamless installation. "The firm shut down its old vendor on Friday, we installed over the weekend and were up and running by Monday."

— Justin Swigert

That was Dan Stickers, national sales director for Administrative Resource Options (ARO). ARO specializes in on-site managed labor, with an emphasis on customer service. Together, Swigert and Stickers answered the RFP with a plan that used Toshiba and ARO's special talents to address the firm's needs.

The Solution

"We went in there as a team—Toshiba and ARO—and secured the business with the promise that we had the right equipment and the right personnel to back it up," says Swigert. Immediately, Toshiba and ARO met their first challenge: seamless installation. "The firm shut down its old vendor on Friday, we installed over the weekend, and were up and running by Monday," Swigert says.

The new Service Center was outfitted with two Toshiba e-STUDIO1101 black-and-white multifunction printers (MFPs) and one Toshiba e-STUDIO106520c color MFP, as well as four e-STUDIO fax machines plus various mail and binding equipment. Three e-STUDIO3530 black-and-white MFPs were also installed for self-serve use throughout the firm. The team redesigned the Service Center to optimize the workspace and create a more user-friendly and productive environment. Simple changes made a big difference. For example, they removed the desk that was in the middle of the Center, and instead, placed a laptop on the front countertop, so staffers could greet customers immediately upon arrival.

In addition to the Service Center itself, Toshiba and ARO addressed every one of the client's needs, as well as complaints about the previous vendor, with processes that ensured history would not repeat itself. Andrew Walega was put in place as ARO's client services director, and set out, as he says, "to win the renewal every day."

Incoming faxes, which previously could take hours to arrive on the end-user's desk, are now scanned into a Toshiba e-STUDIO device and emailed to the intended recipient within 30 minutes. Hard copies are distributed at the next mail run, which could be at most within the hour, and likely in the next five minutes.

Staff members were cross-trained and empowered so that each can answer for the Service Center as a whole. Says Walega, "The only 'no' our client wants to hear out of an employee's mouth is 'no problem,'" says Walega. "This makes every staff member able to say 'yes' to requests daily."

Toshiba and ARO created monthly volume reports for copy volume, incoming and outgoing mail, and postage use. "From this, we've created a capacity analysis to accurately predict the amount that can be sent through the Center," Walega says.

To prepare for the inevitable high-volume days and special projects, ARO maintains fully trained back-up staff, who can also cover for regular staff's vacation and sick days. Back-up staff members come in monthly for update training. "We're not using any temps, so end-users always see the same people they have come to know and trust," continues Walega.

Finally, the Toshiba-ARO team comes to work every day with customer service as their primary objective. They challenge themselves to constantly improve, and win back the trust that was lost under the previous contract.

"I communicate with Justin anytime there is an issue or concern that revolves around the equipment," says Walega. "And if he hears something in his meeting in regards to labor, he'll inform us so then we can go and handle it on-site." Swigert agrees, adding, "The customer likes this because it's a natural series of checks and balances."

Even with a vastly improved Service Center, processes that keep pace with the busy law firm, and employees who are empowered to deliver, the company has slashed Service Center costs by \$40,000 per year.

"When the contract is up with ARO and Toshiba, we'll sit down and look at the numbers and refine the processes and not miss a beat," says the firm's IT director. "Because they respond to complaints. They return phone calls, and they follow-up. It feels good to be able to pick up the phone and call or email one of these guys—anyone at ARO—and get a reply from them, quick. That's the chief thing: open dialog, open communication."

