



# Scanned Mail

A Pandemic Story

## State of Connecticut Revenue Services

**Category:** Business Process Innovations

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**Submission Contacts:** Stacey Ahern, Skip Burnham and Aminur Rahman

**Project Contact:** Stacey Ahern, IT Manager, [Stacey.Ahern@ct.gov](mailto:Stacey.Ahern@ct.gov) and Jay Anderson, IT Supervisor, [James.Anderson@ct.gov](mailto:James.Anderson@ct.gov)



## Executive Summary

March, 2020 – A contagious virus, named COVID-19, has a sudden, unexpected impact to our day-to-day lives. The cause for concern was so great that all signs pointed to Major League Baseball Opening Day being delayed for two weeks, at least. Alarming development, but surely temporary. Or, so we thought.



Then the reality of the pandemic quickly became our collective reality. In 2019 the State of Connecticut expanded its Telework pilot program. As a result, in February 2020, there were 800 active VPN connections in force by State staff. As the reality of the impact of the pandemic sank in, State Agencies began the daunting task of quickly configuring an unprecedented number of State workers for remote work. Within two months, State IT staff pulled off the amazing feat of enabling over 20,000 VPN connections. Literally thousands of State workers were quickly able to perform

some, most, or all of their work from the safety of their homes.

Workers, Supervisors, and Managers quickly experienced and identified the gaps between some, or most, of the critical functions being able to be performed remotely and the lofty goal of all. An immediate concern for every Agency, especially those with a substantial volume of hard copy correspondence, was processing the mail.

The Connecticut Department of Revenue Services is blessed with leadership and staff strongly committed to the mission of the Agency. Additionally, technically savvy with an openness to leverage technology to improve outcomes.

From the spark of an idea by an Agency Manager grew a collaborative effort with information technology and Agency business areas to quickly deliver a solution to the Agency that enabled staff to process their hard copy mail from their remote locations. The solution had no cost for licensing, infrastructure, and additional resources. The existing human resources developed and implemented the system leveraging existing infrastructure and technology resources.

The technology related to digitizing paper and routing the file is not new or innovative. What made this Scanned Mail initiative noteworthy is the speed in which it was implemented and embraced, the efficiencies gained and, most importantly, a vision for the future relative to office automation and the remote workforce.

## Concept

Prior to automation, mail arrived into the mailroom, was opened and sorted by mail room staff, and then delivered physically to the destination based on the office, floor, business unit and location. If necessary, when no specific unit was referenced, staff investigated and identified the appropriate unit. Business units had varying processing for routing errant mail to the proper area.

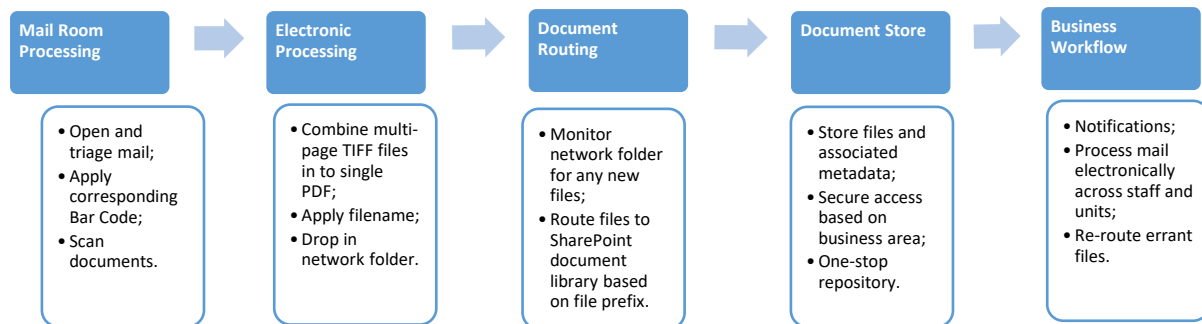


Once mail was physically delivered to the business unit, staff processed the mail according to their workflow. In many cases, the workflow included scanning the hard copy mail and saving the scanned files to a shared network drive. The files residing in the shared network drive could then be sent to additional staff as an attachment, and then forwarded, and so on. Over an extended period, the same file was propagated and stored repeatedly. In reality, this workflow created ongoing technical and potential security challenges related to file storage.

Our agency was using an enterprise document scanning system, Electronic Content Management (ECM) to perform high speed scanning and data extraction technology to process thousands of tax return forms and checks. However, this ECM system was not used to process the Agency “general correspondence mail” or any mail other than tax forms and checks.

In June, 2020, after several weeks of the Agency and staff adjusting to the sudden and unexpected “new normal” of remote work, combined with the State and Agency efforts to protect staff and citizens, the problem of processing hard copy mail was a critical problem because resources were needed on site in the office to process general correspondence mail.

An idea was born to use the existing ECM and SharePoint environments to scan and route documents to create a new business workflow.



### What makes it different?

The business area quickly adjusted to the new business workflow and extended use of technology and process without hesitation or resistance to cultural change. In addition, agency staff came up with ideas quickly to add additional features and further streamline the workflow.

The initial version of the system included the same, basic processing features for all of the 40+ designated business areas. Agency staff using the system quickly realized the benefits of the basic processing and requested additional features. Multiple Agency business areas have worked with information technology to enhance the Scanned Mail system to more closely match their business process. As a result, manual processes utilizing tracking spreadsheets, various duplicative analog and digital storage areas and cumbersome data sharing mechanisms have been eliminated in favor of the centralized processing and storage provided by the Scanned Mail system.



## What makes it universal?

Although the specific technology or workflow may not be a template for reuse universally, the concept of revamping workflows and reuse of technology to adopt for extended use quickly is universal. Overcoming cultural change can be achieved without hesitation when staff is faced with adversity.

## Implementation

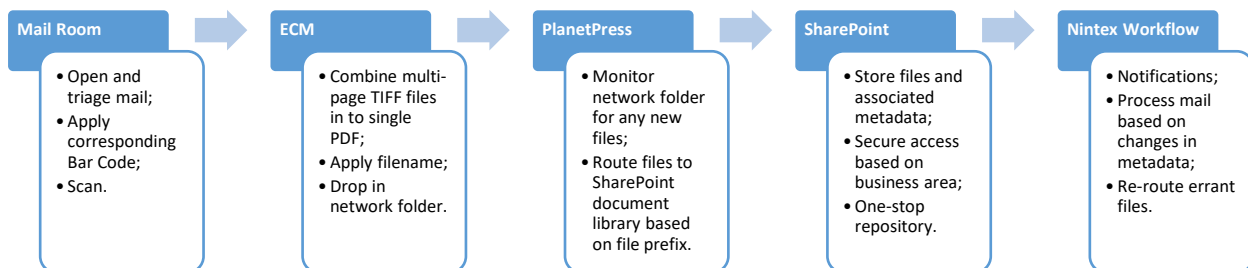
### How it came together

A small team quickly identified the components to be involved in the solution and what would be required to configure them for this solution.

### Core Technology components:

- **Electronic Content Management (ECM)** system;
  - High speed scanners,
  - File delivery.
- **PlanetPress** by Objectiflune;
  - Enterprise workflow;
- **SharePoint 2013**;
  - File Storage, metadata and Security;
- **Nintex Workflow 2013**;
  - Notifications and workflow processing.

### Scanned Mail Components



### Who was involved?

- Tax Supervisor, IT Analyst, ECM SME, Fairfax SME, ECM Vendor, Planet Press SME, IT Supervisor, and SharePoint/Nintex SME.
- Also involved was the DRS Agency leadership team.

### Design Process

- After identifying over 40 distinct business units to which mail would be routed, the small team designed a file naming convention that would identify the business area, scan date, scanner used, and unique file ID;
- The same team designed a process for a bar code containing information about the mail packet, how it would be applied in the physical scanning process, along with a process to combine individual TIFF files from each scan in to mail packets, where applicable;



- Meanwhile, a process utilizing a PlanetPress plugin for SharePoint that would route files to the appropriate SharePoint document library and/or folder;
- Next, a design was developed for the functionality that:
  - Ensures that the scanned mail files were accessible to designees only;
  - Assigning mail files to staff, with notification;
  - Re-routing an errant scanned mail file to another business area;
  - Sending an illegible file back to the mail room to be rescanned.

### The implementation

- Within three months of inception of the idea, we were ready to pilot with a single, moderate volume business area;
- We leveraged a new Microsoft M365 environment to create and host training documentation and videos;
- We leveraged Microsoft to host a Town Hall event to launch the system and provide a collaborative space for staff to ask questions and report issues;
- Within four months of inception of the idea, we went live for the entire Agency, comprising 50 separate Business Areas, over 90 staff designated for processing mail files, and another hundred or more staff who may be assigned to process a mail file.

### Significance

Under normal circumstances, as tax season key months approach, DRS staff process volumes of hard copy mail. During the 2021 tax season, DRS staff remotely processed over 44,000 scanned mail files while reducing the number of staff required to be in the office to only those resources required to open and scan the mail.

### Impact

In addition to successfully addressing the immediate need to protect Agency staff while continuing to perform the work, the Scanned Mail system has sparked joy in the majority of users to the degree that they are excited about further enhancing the system to meet their needs. Beyond the tactical necessity of providing remote access to a critical business function, technically savvy business staff are regularly recognizing opportunities for improving their business processes.

To that end, IT lead worked with business owners from the EITC and Registration Forms areas to add metadata and workflows to their areas that have eliminated their need to scan mail themselves for digital storage, maintain manual tracking spreadsheets and, save and share files in the agency shared file stores. The Scanned mail system has illuminated the concept and benefit of one version of the file in a centralized location rather than multiple copies in multiple areas. Staff can send a link to a file rather than the file as an attachment.

After months of using the Scanned mail system and recognizing additional areas that could be positively affected by this solution, staff have requested that faxes be included. Whether staff are currently receiving faxes in digital format or taking hard copy faxes and then scanning them to a digital file, having faxes be processed in the Scanned Mail system enables faxes to be delivered to staff in the same manner, also eliminating cumbersome manual processes of varying flavors.

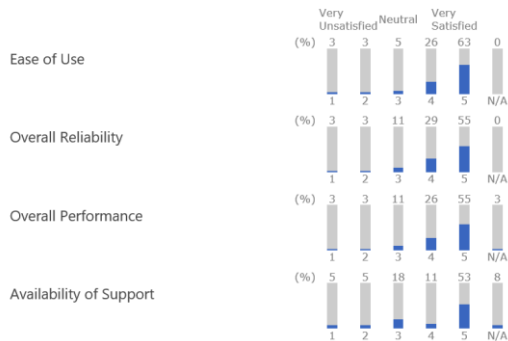


These improvements in the business process relative to these files has also reduced or eliminated the need to store additional copies of a scanned mail file elsewhere, providing some relief to the network relative to storage requirements and bandwidth. Additionally, one version of the file as the document of record greatly assists with security and file retention policies.

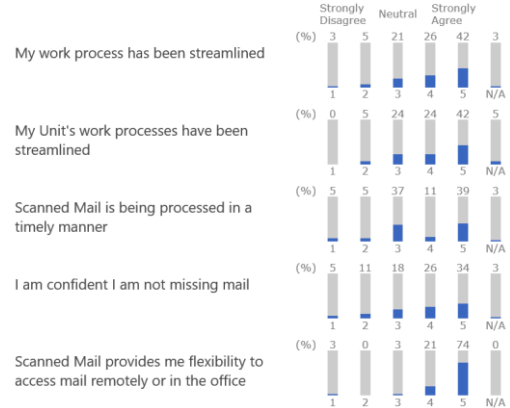
### Customer Feedback

A user survey was administered to give us a better sense of the impact, what staff liked and didn't like, and suggestions for improvement. Here's what we heard from staff:

#### Considering your overall experience with the Scanned Mail system, please rate your level of satisfaction:



#### Considering your usage of the Scanned Mail system:



#### What are the most significant changes to your work as a result of Scanned Mail, if any?

- "Prior to scanned mail we would process 11,000 to 12,000 pieces in the EITC unit. Opening, patch sheet, boxing and sending to scan unit. It has significantly cut down on our time processing the mail and getting the cases ready to review."
- "Huge labor saving over previous method of have examiners in Audit scan paper mail to add to audit files. Able to get scanned mail while working from home. No lost or misfiled paper files."
- "Improved efficiency – no longer have to scan mail myself. Also able to address mail with quicker turn around. Previously when given mail in office by the time it reached my desk it could be over a month old. Scanned mail allows it to get distributed to employees faster which allows us to resolve taxpayers issue faster."
- "It is helpful and convenient to get scanned mail, all in one place."
- "While working from home, I haven't had any issues getting documents from taxpayers. The scanned mail system has been easy to access."
- "It is super easy to use, reduces clutter, allows immediate forwarding of mail pieces to coworkers - and to multiple coworkers at once."
- "My workflow process is becoming more efficient. SharePoint has allowed for the elimination of steps in my intake process and has transformed the way I manage my workflow. Utilizing SharePoint as a tool has allowed me to conceptualize new more effective ways to work. It has created a lot of AHA moments for me, in regards to how I can manage moderate to large volumes cases. SharePoint keeps simple open communication with other units in regards to file sharing. It took the headache and stress from trying to keep up and manage all my intake files efficiently."

#### What do you like most about the Scanned Mail system?



- “Wow! Everything. Scanned Mail is like being part of the 21st century. Best thing since DRS got email. The support staff have been great every step of the way right from day one.”
- “No paper to review; the readiness of the documents.”
- “It's convenience. It is true the mail is available even from home.”
- “I no longer have buckets of mail in my cubicle. I always had many of them when the rush for my work went into effect. For me this is working really well.”
- “Hands down the ability to forward pieces of mail to others immediately and to more than one person at the same time. Moreover, to be able to ask questions of multiple people where they can all look at the same piece of mail simultaneously is so dramatically and significantly better!!!! Job well done! Thank you!!”
- “You can review what has been received and assign it to the appropriate party in a matter of minutes.”
- “It has revolutionized the way I think about how to better manage and store files. The filing and sorting system is unmatched, eliminating workflow steps and leaving us with a more efficient, effective, reliable filing system. It allows for open communication between units and divisions in regards to sharing information. SharePoint eliminate the need for multiple folders. It makes file management easier and more efficient. Also, it allows for proper accountability for files while providing a variety of report option via pivot tables.
- “All the steps we need to do: viewing, researching account, letter tracking, examiner review, and statistics are all contained within our scan folder.”

## What's Next?

Now that Staff have made it clear that the Scanned Mail system is an important part of their workflow, we will leverage the capabilities of the M365 environment to further enhance the features and integration of the Scanned mail system. The successes with streamlining the business processes for some units provides us with a foundation to similarly serve additional business areas.

In addition, the onboarding of over 80 State Agencies to an enterprise environment there will be opportunity to apply solution to automate workflows within other agencies.