

KOFAX

City of Gouda

The city of Gouda took a risk by building an internal digital mailroom. The document recognition is complex and the connection with the 600 municipal processes is a work of art. It is a combination of advanced software, technological expertise and specialization in document management.

City of Gouda Introduces Mailroom 2.0

It is easy to imagine that Chris Bellekom, director of Document Management Services for the city of Gouda, The Netherlands, installed a digital mailroom merely to save money. Naturally, automatic classification of incoming mail delivers necessary efficiency, offering savings on FTEs (full-time equivalents), something welcome given looming budget cuts. No, Bellekom sees the digital mailroom, equipped with advanced recognition and classification technology, as an important step toward a new DMS: a document management system for the administration, preservation, storage and retrieval of documents within the organization.

According to Bellekom, the new DMS is part of the broad front office that municipalities currently have or plan to build. The front of the organization is composed of a website with electronic forms, a call center (Client Contact Center) and a mailroom where, in the case of Gouda, about 140,000 items come in annually.

“The items have to be sorted and opened regardless,” said Bellekom. “They might be complaints, letters, application forms or opinions. Employees read and assess the contents, then register and classify the content using their experience, thereby setting the processes of the organization in motion. That work can be automated. For example, we already have experience with the digitalization of incoming invoices and Social Services documents. This expertise can now be used with the implementation of the digital mailroom.”



Gouda is a Dutch city south of Amsterdam in the province of South Holland. It's known for its namesake cheese and seasonal cheese market, regularly held on the medieval Markt square. Anchoring the square is the 15th-century town hall, a Gothic building with red and white shutters. Also on the square is the 17th-century Goudse Waag, once a cheese-weighing station and now home to the Gouda Cheese Museum.

Products in Use

Kofax Capture™

Kofax Transformation™

Focus

Accounts payable automation

Partner

Optima Global Solutions

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Automated Classification

The existing invoice system recognizes various fields on incoming invoices and enters correct items and values into the financial system, Decade. The system was based on Kofax's leading information capture technology, and was delivered and implemented with the help of BMConsultants.

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But Bellekom heard that Kofax could do far more, and he immediately thought about automating the mailroom. He decided to start a pilot in which all 600 defined processes could be linked to the capture system. The processes came directly from the archiving plan already in use by the city (Documentair Structuurplan – DSP).

In the pilot, after incoming documents are scanned, the software begins an automatic classification. This is composed of four elements:

- fixed characteristics with a fixed position in the document
- the layout of the document
- content, similarities in the text, or semantics
- keywords

BMConsultants used the Kofax Transformation in addition to Kofax Capture for this project. This combination enabled the city of Gouda to automatically classify, separate and extract information, regardless of the type of document. Users can further optimize the program's recognition

rate via its self-learning function. During the five-month pilot program, the city of Gouda processed about 4,500 documents using the old and new methods. They found that about 63% of the documents were recognized with 95% accuracy or higher. As a practical example, a request for a municipal monument grant (code B0163 in the DSP) was immediately recognized and the procedure for processing the request was started.

Part of the 37% that were not recognized with certainty, and thus needed manual intervention, were handwritten letters, which are simply more difficult for the software to recognize. On average, though, the processing time per letter was reduced from 7.5 minutes to 7.5 seconds. Those are solid results. Documents were put into the proper channels of the city quickly, efficiently and with much less chance of error.

The Verseon document management system from Circle Software will now be installed for further processing. Information regarding handling time, the responsible party and possibly delivery confirmation (receipt) will also be automatically created.

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Connection

Chris Bellekom is pleased with the pilot results. "The quality of the images and the degree of recognition are acceptable," he said. "A 100% digital match is currently not achievable. I expect that we will have to keep doing a control for the time being. The beauty of this solution is that you can identify each document in different ways. With the four methods that Kofax uses in recognition, you get there. In most cases, the connection between the correct product and the correct process code is produced. Only the degree of certainty can vary. The Document Service Manager can usually click 'accept' and only occasionally will have to search for the right process code manually."

Bellekom expects that the city of Gouda will no longer have a specific DMS division by the end of 2011. "The function of the document manager remains, but in another place in the organization," he said. "Think about the initiative 'City Gives Answer.' If you want to carry that out well, it's wise to gather the information resources within the whole structure into one place. Also case-oriented work, which everyone is talking about, only has a chance if the front office functions properly."

Piece of Art

The importance of a well functioning front office with an optimized mailroom is clear. For now, Bellekom and his colleagues (12.5 FTE) are committed to rolling out the Kofax-based solution. Jos Huigsloot, director of BMConsultants, indicates that the city of Gouda is creating a piece of art. "The way that Gouda digitizes their mailroom with advanced recognition, automatic classification and connection with their archiving system is unique. A few companies are this advanced, but it has never been done by a municipal organization."

Bellekom emphasizes that he works step by step. The connection to the digital mailroom goes department by department. He is open to other municipalities having a look at Gouda's model. His motto is a Dutch expression: It's better to steal something good than invent something bad.

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