



iChannel helps Eldredge, Fox & Porretti, LLP take the firm paperless

Industry	Accounting and Consulting
Issue	Document Management
Solution	iChannel Document Management
Result	Established a paperless office as the standard for all offices and new acquisitions.



Eldredge, Fox & Porretti, LLP

Eldredge, Fox & Porretti (EFP) is a full service accounting and consulting firm headquartered in Rochester, New York. The firm has 75 employees, including 13 partners and 35 CPAs, and maintains additional offices in Canandaigua, Corning, and Elmira. EFP Group is the exclusive Rochester/Finger Lakes region member of CPAmerica, an invitation-only group of 75 independent accounting firms that share high-level expertise across the nation. They provides accounting, auditing and tax preparation, forensic services, litigation support and contract auditing as well as wealth management services for individuals and business consulting for companies and professionals.

Since its founding in 1979, EFP has steadily expanded its services to meet the growing needs of its clients. As the firm grew and added offices, partners began spending time in multiple offices. This led to numerous occasions where the client file a partner needed was in another office and, for all practical purposes, inaccessible. The firm was also facing increased competition on audit fees. According to Porretti, "some firms in the area are giving audits away. If we were going to remain competitive, we had to become as efficient as possible."

In 2002, with the increasing frustration related to document management and the growing competitive pressures, the partnership decided that the firm needed to go paperless. Once the decision to go paperless had been made, the search began for a solution. Porretti put Dennis Morga, a tax partner at the firm, in charge of the project to take the firm paperless. After seeing how Conarc, Inc. used iChannel to integrate the audit and tax software, manage all electronic documents, enforce retention schedules and handle all scanning, he became convinced that it offered the solution he was looking for at EFP.

After using iChannel through it's first complete busy season, the firm began to realize the benefits of a paperless office. "We saw significant improvement in efficiencies on some of the audit jobs this year," said Joe Kehm, audit partner. Morga said, "The efficiencies we realized this year were somewhat offset by the learning curve associated with the new system. We spent a great deal of time in converting to our new trial balance software and in learning to use iChannel. The consensus here is that the efficiencies we saw this year will be much more significant next year."



In Porretti's view, about half the jobs went better with the new system and half took longer because of the learning curve. "I saw some real benefits on some engagements," he said. "On one large job, the time went way down. Most of the staff feels year 2 will be the break through year."

Once major change that Porretti noticed is that there are no longer e-mails asking for lost files. All client files are now 100% available through the system. No matter what office partners or staff members are in, they have full access to all the documents they need to work on a job.

Policies and procedures have also been improved. "Where before we had different procedures in each office and many were unwritten, now we are more standardized and documented," said Kehm. Laura Favo, scheduling coordinator noticed a big change. "Under the old system, when I scheduled a job, I had to pull together all the client files and get them to the person working on the job. Sometimes this took several days. Now, I just schedule the staff and they go out to the system and get all the documents they need," she said.

In addition to the gains in efficiency are the cost savings. Morga projected a 20% to 40% reduction in staff costs relative to revenue over the next couple of years. "This will allow us to grow our revenue without adding staff, thus increasing realization," he says. Morga also projected a 10% to 15% reduction in supply costs. Favo noted that the costs for supplies during the 2003 tax season were significantly lower than the previous year.

In the end, the partners expressed a firm conviction that their decision was the right one. Porretti said, "I believe our firm will definitely benefit from going paperless. Our costs will be lower and we will be able to provide a higher level of service to our clients. We definitely made the right decision."

"EFP Group is at the forefront of utilizing the latest technology for the benefit of its clients. Technology helps keep costs under control. Continually evolving standards bring increased complexity and increased costs. As we move toward the EFP Group standard of a paperless office, additional costs associated with complying with the latest standards can be kept to a minimum."

Richard Davis
Partner

iChannel is a product for Enterprise content management with a focus on helping managing a client relationship. Conarc, Inc. was founded in 1997, based in Atlanta and is privately held.