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Spire Aspires

Spire Investment Partners, LLC, relies on Laserfiche to automate critical business processes—and simplify the cost of compliance

For Spire Investment Partners, LLC, a combination broker/dealer, registered investment advisor and insurance agency based in McLean, VA, managing several billion dollars in assets and answering to multiple regulatory agencies—including FINRA, the SEC and state insurance regulators—brings with it the need for especially agile enterprise content management (ECM).

When the firm built its own broker/dealer in 2008, Chief Administration Officer Phillip Fournier and the rest of the Spire management team saw the opportunity to streamline operations. “We knew there would be countless audits, reviews and requests for information from the various entities,” Fournier says.

Coming from other broker/dealers, “we’d experienced lost forms, high overnight charges, delays in getting business processed and audits that required home office staff to keep coming back to us for forms they had misplaced,” he remembers. “We knew we could do it more efficiently—for compliance supervision and oversight, for operational efficiencies, for field reps to access information from everywhere.”

Fournier says right away Spire’s management team had the vision to build a system that included both enterprise content management (ECM) and business process management (BPM). “We were talking about more than going paperless, we were talking about setting up workflows and automating processes,” he says. “Our management team is always trying to remove friction points, like lost documents. We really wanted to be able to say, whether you’re five miles or 500 miles away, you’re submitting your OSJ and principal approvals the same exact way.”

Spire was referred to Laserfiche reseller John Caso of One Source/ADI. “We were impressed that ADI had about 100 financial services customers using Laserfiche,” Fournier says.

Making Work Flow

For 18 months, the Spire team considered options. “We just couldn’t find anything on par with Laserfiche. We were either going to have to build our own homegrown system—or we could just customize a proven and established software solution. And we didn’t want our consultants to be beta testing a homegrown system.”

The firm purchased Laserfiche Avante for its 100 consultants working between 17 offices. “We asked them how they would like the system set up, and then we set about doing it in as few clicks as possible,” says Fournier. For compliance and auditing purposes, each client file would have three different sets of folders: fee-based accounts, commission-based accounts and insurance accounts. One Source/ADI helped design workflows to automate processes for OSJ and principal approvals, branch audits of sales literature and correspondence, as well as security protocols.

Organization Profile

Spire Investment Partners, LLC, a broker/dealer, registered investment advisor and insurance agency based in McLean, VA, has 100 consultants in 17 offices who manage several billion dollars in assets.

Situation

When the firm built its own broker/dealer in 2008, Chief Administration Officer Phillip Fournier and Spire’s management team began looking for ways to streamline operations and reduce delays in processing business.

Solution

Spire purchased a Laserfiche Avante system to store, secure and automate client-related paperwork and processes. Within 18 months of implementing Laserfiche, 80% of offices were regularly using Laserfiche. Today, all of them are.

Benefits

- Annually, each of Spire’s 17 offices saves \$3,500 in overnight charges.
- Due to automating compliance, operations and trading processes, Spire has eliminated the need to hire new staff members.
- The Operations Department can now process direct and custodial business the day it is received.
- During a recent FINRA audit, staff satisfied an on-the-fly request in less than an hour. In the past, it would’ve taken days and countless staff hours to fulfill.

Processes

- Advertising Review
- Audit Response
- Branch Reviews
- Business Continuity
- Correspondence Review
- Order Approvals
- Trade Processing

Within the first 18 months of implementing Laserfiche, 80% of Spire's offices were regularly processing content through Laserfiche; today, all of them are. "We use our Laserfiche system for required paperwork for FINRA, but our offices have the capability to scan anything they want, and many scan paperwork for their entire book of clients," Fournier adds.

Laserfiche data is stored offsite in a data bunker with Equinix to ensure its safety and security, while Spire consultants have instant access to all their forms over a virtual office system. The business continuity advantage this brought to Spire became apparent two winters ago.

"We had several snowstorms that shut down the whole Washington D.C. area for two weeks, and we were able to continue working remotely," says Fournier. "We've basically got our information in Fort Knox as opposed to being one burst pipe away from it being lost forever."

Accelerated Transfer, Halted Costs

Now it doesn't matter if an office is five or 500 miles away, since Spire's Operations Department is capable of processing direct and custodial business the same day—removing the delays and costs of overnight shipping.

"Many of our accounts are fee-based, so each day assets are delayed during transfer adds up quickly," Fournier explains.

The accelerated transfer allows Spire to process business with immediate feedback. If a set of forms is not in good order (NIGO), Workflow pushes it back to the rep's assistant with an e-mail that tells the assistant exactly what information is missing. "The assistant knows exactly what the situation is and can fix it, so we reprocess business in real-time."

With no physical forms to lose—they're scanned directly into Laserfiche and indexed immediately—there are no processing bottlenecks. "One of our biggest complaints at our previous firm was lost forms. An overnight package would show up, and when it was opened, forms would be lost or attached to other forms accidentally," explains Fournier. "Now, if a form is incorrectly filed, the Laserfiche search and indexing system can find it in seconds."

From Days to Hours: Audits Made Simple—and Less Onerous

To facilitate auditing, Spire Operations configured a compliance folder in its Laserfiche repository where consultants scan in their required documents—correspondence, advertising and bank statements, among others—that the firm's Compliance Department needs to review.

"Our Compliance Department can be much less onerous in its supervision," says Fournier. "Much of what we need can be searched, reviewed and saved right in Laserfiche." Secure access to each folder can be scripted individually, further mitigating compliance risks.

Fournier points to a recent FINRA audit of the firm's 529 college fund business. "On the fly, the FINRA auditor asked to see all our new 529 accounts opened from April 2008 through April 2010. Using Laserfiche, our staff was able to search through the entire database and provide him a copy of all our new account forms. We had all 300 forms for him on a zip drive in less than an hour. He was really impressed," he says. "If we had to find all those paper files, it would have required days and countless staff hours to satisfy that one request."

Quantifying Success

Fournier says Spire gauges the success of using Laserfiche in several ways, starting with the fact that each of its 17 offices saves approximately \$3,500 in overnight charges annually. "Add the cost of storage, file cabinets, the business continuity issues of having that paper in the same place as our facilities, hours of file maintenance, lost paperwork, overnighting paperwork to be signed, not to mention the lost dollars due to delays in processing, and the numbers become even more significant."

The most significant benefit to Spire, Fournier says, is not hiring extra staff. "We estimate we're saving two or three bodies because of how we use Laserfiche to automate compliance, operations and trading.

"We knew it would enhance our operations center and create synergies between our field reps and our home office, but the smoothness of the system and the removal of friction has been really remarkable," he adds. "After only 2 ½ years, if we tried to remove Laserfiche, our reps would revolt."

Your Next Step

Please call (800) 985-8533 or e-mail info@laserfiche.com for more information.

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