

U.S. Court Finds RFID Less Taxing for File Tracking

The U.S. Tax Court has deployed the 3M File Tracking System to keep better tabs on files related to income tax and other law cases.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

July 14, 2006—When a U.S. Tax Court judge needs to see a file on a particular case but staffers are unable to locate it, things can get ugly, says Dave Sayers, marketing development supervisor for 3M's Asset Tracking and Protection division. That's why, earlier this year, the federal court deployed 3M's RFID File Tracking System, used widely by law offices, to track and retrieve its approximately 100,000 case files, as well as the library of 30,000 books, periodicals and documents in its Washington, D.C., office.

The Tax Court hears cases involving income taxes, as well as federal and state tax-assessment issues. It deployed the 3M system to make searching for files and other media hassle-free, handling of court cases more efficient and research more productive.

The U.S. government's General Services Administration (GSA) recently awarded 3M a five-year schedule contract allowing government agencies to purchase its RFID File-Tracking System at a low price, and without having to go through a bidding process with multiple vendors (see GSA To Deploy 3M's RFID File Tracker). The Tax Court is the second government office to purchase the system; the first was the U.S. tax division of the U.S. Department of Justice, which installed the system last year.

To track the files and other media, U.S. Tax Court staff members applied 3M's 13.56 MHz, 2-by-2-inch passive RFID labels on each file folder, periodical and book it wanted to track. The labels are embedded with tags containing Texas Instruments' (TI) Tag-It chip. Encoded to each tag is a unique ID linked to information about the attached file, periodical or book. This data is stored in the 3M file-tracking software, which runs on a Microsoft SQL server. The system works in a manner similar to that of a library. A staff member looking to check out a file or other media provides an RFID personnel card to a fixed-position interrogator located in the filing area or library, then presents the items to be checked out. Those items are linked to that staff member in the 3M tracking software, which other personnel looking for particular items can access to see who might have them.

U.S. Tax Court workers use a handheld 13.56 MHz interrogator to take inventory of all tagged file folders, books and periodicals in the court. The collected tag IDs are downloaded to the tracking software, which generates a list of tags not read yet not checked out by staff. The court can then set the handheld interrogator to seek out these IDs during a second inspection of the filing area and library.

Sayers says he does not have any hard numbers to reflect the savings in labor and time the RFID file-tracking system has provided the court so far, or how much more accurate it is over the court's previous manual, paper-based tracking system. Other deployments of the tracking system, however, have proven successful.

Last year, the district attorney's office in Marin County, Calif., deployed 3M's File Tracking System (see [Marin County DA Saves With RFID](#)), and [Florida State University](#) became the first academic institution to deploy it. The school's Offices of Sponsored Research Services and Sponsored Research Accounting Services expects to recoup its \$25,000 investment in the system within a year (see [RFID Brings Order to a Chaotic Office](#)).

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