



UFI Corporation

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Owner,
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Success Story

Setting Up Shop Online with M-Files

Document management system syncs with book distributor's new website

"I would not say this if I didn't really believe it," says Said Lahrichi, owner of UFI Corporation, an Annandale, VA-based book distributor. "I highly recommend M-Files for small businesses, medium-sized businesses, and even large businesses. This software makes any kind of office work run incredibly well."

Lahrichi is taking his small business a step further with M-Files document management software. For more than 3 years, UFI has used the system to keep track of all its administrative work as well as its diverse inventory of products, which besides books and educational materials includes digital media and electronics. Now UFI is in the midst of building a new shopping-cart-based website that automatically draws upon up-to-date product details already stored in M-Files' database.

"Any document that refers to a specific product we store in the M-Files vault with all the metadata associated with that product," explains Lahrichi. Embedding metadata tags to documents is a simple and effective document management strategy. M-Files lets users add whatever metadata keywords that help to identify a file. For UFI offerings, Lahrichi embeds everything he needs to know about his inventory: the publisher, publication number, title, author, description, number of pages, shipping weight, unit price, and so on.

The metadata in M-Files allows employees to locate the correct file in an instant. M-Files' precise database queries also act as a useful tool of analysis. "How many titles do I have from a particular publisher?" An M-Files search gives not only the answer, but also brings up the important documents related to the question – invoices, product descriptions, price lists, etc.

Once this metadata scheme is in operation, the database contents can easily be linked to other IT systems, and used in billing, CRM or ERP. Or, in UFI's case, a web server can publish up-to-date product information to an online webpage.

An affordable, build-as-you-go electronic office

"I did a lot of research into document management systems. Most of the solutions I found were extremely expensive. Luckily I stumbled upon M-Files. For us, the price was acceptable, and once we started trying it out, we found it fits very nicely into Windows which meant the learning curve is very short," says Lahrichi.



"We manage every single piece of paperwork that comes into the company with M-Files."

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M-Files controls integrate directly into the interface of Microsoft Windows. Employees can make file commands in any Windows application just as they would before.

"Employees can pick up the basics of M-Files in under two hours," says Lahrichi. "From there, we can build upon the system gradually, adding in custom workflows, more metadata, or new templates as we go along."

Templates made in MS Word or Excel, for example, form the basis for entry of new product information into the system. An employee only needs to fill all the basic data for a new product on the preset form once. M-Files automatically incorporates the completed blanks as attributes in its database.

This onetime data entry performs double duty. The dataset is used both as catalog details in UFI's online shop and as embedded metadata in every future business document associated with the product. The indexing allows UFI to cross reference files based on any product detail.

"Templates are another excellent feature of M-Files," Lahrichi says. "Automatic templates makes it easy manage our catalog and lets us quickly retrieve lots of diverse information. We save a lot of time, too, since we don't have to re-enter product data."

Lahrichi plans to have UFI Corp's new online store up for wholesale customers later this year. In the meantime, the company is enjoying a streamlined office that he estimates is 98 percent paperless.

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About UFI Corporation

UFI is a publisher and distributor of various books, audio books, DVDs and a variety of other products including electronics, health & hygiene, software and children's books and toys that cater to the 9 million Muslims in North America. UFI currently carries over 1,500 products from publishers, manufacturers, and vendors from around the world. ■