

LAB PUTS SMARTSEARCH TO THE TEST

CASE STUDY



Rigorous use of SmartSearch by environmental lab reveals greatly elevated levels of economy and efficiency, plus high ROI metrics and LIMS compatibility

Within a few months after Phoenix Environmental Laboratories began using SmartSearch to electronically manage its lab reports more economically and efficiently, the results were in. "SmartSearch has been a home run all the way around," said Peter LaBarre, database administrator for Phoenix Environmental Laboratories. LaBarre was pleased that SmartSearch was affordable and integrated seamlessly with his proprietary Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). Once up and running, SmartSearch eliminated the need to photocopy more than 10,000 pages of lab reports each day, and made storing and retrieving them quick and easy, greatly improving customer service in the process.

In the rapidly growing field of environmental testing, Phoenix Environmental Laboratories is known for its high quality data and outstanding customer service. Using state-of-the-art instruments and equipment, the lab provides soil, water, sludge and solids testing that meet the stringent requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state Departments of Environmental Protection and Departments of Health. Phoenix Environmental Laboratories' custom-designed facility is located in Manchester, Connecticut.

Soil, water and other environmental samples arrive at Phoenix Environmental Laboratories continuously. These samples are run through the laboratory and analyzed, after which a report is generated and a paper copy of the report is printed. As part of the lab's rigorous quality control processes, the printed copies of the reports are reviewed carefully by the lab's director and manager; when necessary, they mark changes on the reports by hand and return them to the staff for reprinting.

Before mailing them to its customers, the lab needed to photocopy every report for its own files, an undertaking that consumed valuable resources at the end of each work day. Phoenix Environmental Laboratories generates about 500 reports daily, each from 10 to 50 pages in length—about 20 pages per report on average. This meant photocopying roughly 10,000 pages of reports every day. At one time this process had been manageable, but as the lab's workload grew it had become a tremendous burden.

"Copying this high volume of reports every day was very time consuming," LaBarre recalled, "and our massive multifunction printer was chewing up an incredible amount of paper and toner. The more paper we ran through our MFP, the more problems we experienced with it and the higher our maintenance costs were."

Storing these massive quantities of paper documents was a large problem—literally. The lab's client services staff would bundle the reports into file storage boxes, label the boxes by hand and then carry them to designated onsite storage rooms. After six months, maintenance staff would move the boxes to an offsite storage facility.

BUSINESS:
Environmental Laboratory

COMPANY:
Phoenix Environmental Laboratories

OBJECTIVES:
Manage hundreds of daily lab reports more economically and efficiently



ABOUT SQUARE 9 SOFTWARES

Square 9 Softworks is a leading developer of innovative, business-centric software solutions including the award-winning SmartSearch Content Management Suite. Dedicated to making content management available to organizations of all sizes, Square 9 Softworks designs solutions built on open architecture and cutting-edge technologies that drive efficiency and productivity across all business applications.

Through decades of experience with content management technologies in business enterprises of all kinds, Square 9 Softworks has acquired a thorough understanding of document-driven business processes. Intensely customer-focused and highly responsive, the company delivers effective, value-driven solutions and has achieved a reputation for excellence in meeting the rapidly evolving needs of its customers.

Square 9 Softworks distributes its solutions exclusively through a network of highly skilled channel partners from its corporate office in New Haven, Connecticut. For further information, visit www.square-9.com

"By the time we transitioned to SmartSearch," LaBarre said, "the boxes in our offsite storage facility formed a solid 'wall' eight feet high, four feet wide and 60 feet long."

Retrieving these archived reports from the offsite storage facility was highly problematic, too, although this had to be done once a day on average. "One of our maintenance crew would be sent out to locate a specific report, but these people were not used to looking at our report formats," LaBarre said. "It didn't take much analyzing to realize that this paper-intensive system was cumbersome and inefficient, so we began to research electronic content management solutions. That's when we found SmartSearch."

LaBarre was impressed with SmartSearch's affordability and ease of use. He was also impressed with SmartSearch's design and compatibility with Phoenix Environmental Laboratories' LIMS. "Being a software developer," LaBarre said, "I was able to 'pop the hood' and evaluate SmartSearch's architecture."

"SmartSearch made a great marriage with our in-house Microsoft-based LIMS," LaBarre said. "SmartSearch is SQL Server-based, so I could tailor it to meet our business needs on the back end. Our client workstations use Microsoft Access and SmartSearch is built on the .NET Platform using an open architecture design, so there was no need to modify the front end. While I think many SmartSearch users will want to use SmartSearch 'out of the box,' IT professionals will really appreciate being able to customize their application like we did."

The final analysis: SmartSearch has put an end to Phoenix Environmental Laboratories' big paper pollution problem, streamlining its business operations. "We do not have to photocopy a huge pile of lab reports each day and store them in boxes any longer," LaBarre said. "And we are no longer systematically destroying our MFP! While we chose to retain the reports we stored in our offsite facility, SmartSearch stopped the growth of 'the wall' in its tracks. In addition, SmartSearch has given us quick and easy access to our lab reports and this has greatly improved customer service."

Not surprisingly, Phoenix Environmental Laboratories' Return On Investment (ROI) metrics are impressive. Based on the hourly rates for the lab's client services and maintenance personnel, LaBarre conservatively estimates the lab's labor savings at more than \$525 per week. LaBarre also estimates the lab's report printing requirements have been more than halved, saving the paper, toner and equipment maintenance costs associated with printing more than 50,000 paper copies per week. Factoring in his time to "marry" SmartSearch to his LIMS, LaBarre estimates SmartSearch paid for itself in a matter of months.

"I would recommend SmartSearch unequivocally," LaBarre said. "It quickly solved our enormous paper printing and storage problem and its very strong architecture and compatibility with our LIMS was a perfect match for our organization. Perhaps the best thing is that since we installed SmartSearch it has been completely problem-free. SmartSearch just keeps humming along—and keeps us humming!"