

# Wood County Employs Electronic Document Management to Improve Service Levels, Meet Compliance Initiatives and Increase Accountability

## At-a-Glance

The Wood County Department of Job and Family Services in Ohio wanted to increase customer service, reduce file storage space, gain more efficiency in meeting government requirements, as well as increase staff productivity.

## Solution

Northwoods installed and configured the Compass Software® suite of document management and appointment management products including:

- Compass Appointments™
- Compass Forms™
- Compass Capture™
- Compass Print Stream Processor™
- Document Management Repository

## Benefits

- 90% reduction in paper use
- More physical space available due to electronic storage
- Client wait times limited
- Client service and personalized attention promoted
- Consistent information sharing between case managers
- Improved ability to respond to audits or legal discovery
- Increased accountability

For the 125,000 people who live in Wood County, Ohio, the Department of Job and Family Services (WCDJFS) is a safety net. Whether a family needs long-term assistance to get back on its feet or temporary help to get through a financial setback, WCDJFS is committed to helping. Currently, the 18 case managers in the department serve about 5,000 active customers.

In order to better serve its clients and to more efficiently meet government requirements, WCDJFS began researching the replacement of its paper-based case file system with an electronic document management solution. Such a system promised to increase the speed and accuracy of responses to clients while easing the burden on case managers. Replacing paper documents with secure, yet easy-to-access electronic files would help the agency meet mandated response times and requirements for sharing information with other agencies. In addition, these systems provide instantaneous access to information and save on a variety of costs, including paper and filestorage space.

After evaluating a number of vendors, WCDJFS selected Northwoods Consulting Partners, a company that partners with social services agencies to improve service and lower costs through automation. Northwoods Compass Software® suite is designed specifically for human service organizations and includes document imaging, document management and workflow, and appointment scheduling solutions. WCDJFS decided to implement the Northwoods solution for use by case managers, administrators and support staff in the Income Maintenance, PRC (Prevention, Retention, and Contingency), and Child Care units of the agency.

## WCDJFS Manages Appointments More Efficiently and Improves Client Service

Prior to the installation of Northwoods Compass Software, reception staff used three paper-based calendar/appointment logs in the Income Maintenance department. Reception staff had to notify case managers of client arrivals by phone. Now, when a client arrives at WCDJFS, the reception staff notifies the case manager via Compass Appointments, an appointment management and scheduling solution developed by Northwoods. The reception desk staff can monitor the availability of case managers, and the system will automatically notify a supervisor if a client has been waiting too long.

In addition, Compass Appointments ensures that intake appointments are evenly distributed among case managers through round-robin rotation and provides a number of ways to assign both scheduled and unscheduled appointments. At a glance, supervisors can see which workers are available to handle an appointment. Compass Appointments has reduced excessive lobby wait times and cut down on long lines, improving overall client service.

### **New System Helps Case Managers Easily Complete Forms and Find Information**

WCDJFS manages more than 300 state and county forms used in the application, benefit determination, and re-determination processes. Manually completing an average of six to eight different paper forms during each client face-to-face meeting was a time-consuming and error-prone task. Case managers were repeatedly filling out the same demographic information on each form during a meeting. Completed forms required signatures from both the case manager and client, and were then photocopied for the client. The original form would be manually filed in the appropriate section of the hard-copy case file.

In addition to other forms, case managers also produced a 40–80 page document specific to all face-to-face applications called the CAF (Common Application Form). The case manager printed the CAF through the state eligibility system, which provided no option of printing less than the entire document. The document was generated in Columbus and sent to a printer at the agency. Once the document was printed, the client would sign it, and the case manager then filed it away in the paper case file. The entire process took several minutes.

### **Compass Forms**

To reduce redundant work and interview duration, WCDJFS implemented Compass Forms from Northwoods. Compass Forms allows WCDJFS employees to effortlessly create new forms or modify existing ones so they can be completed electronically and saved to the electronic document management repository. Using dual monitors at the desks of screeners and case managers allows the workers to assist clients interactively while completing the necessary electronic forms.

To start the process, the case manager can simply enter the client's Social Security Number (SSN), name, or case number, and Compass Forms will find existing client demographic information from the statewide eligibility system to pre-populate the form. Clients can sign or initial the forms, as necessary, using a signature pad. The system saves the signed form as an unalterable, permanent record of the document.

WCDJFS has replaced the paper CAF with the help of Northwoods Compass Print Stream Processor, which automatically sends the document to the Compass Forms interface instead of the printer. The client signs the document using the signature pad, and the last 10 pages are printed as the client's verification and receipt of the rights and responsibilities. Once the document has been signed, it is automatically stored in the system without any case manager intervention. This process alone saves WCDJFS a tremendous amount of time and paper.

**“The Northwoods system has made our interview times more interactive and personal because we don’t spend all of our time filling out forms.”**

**Chris Simington**  
**Social Service Administrator**  
**WCDJFS**

## **Workflow**

Forms stored in the system are available to users through the agency who have the appropriate access privileges. Sometimes case managers or supervisors need to work with forms completed by another case manager. To address this issue, the Northwoods solution allows completed forms to trigger automated workflow processes that route an application to the appropriate case manager, eliminating the need to pass paper file folders from worker to worker. The system can also notify case managers of critical followup dates. In all, Northwoods designed six workflow “lifecycles” for WCDJFS, primarily focused on automating new application procedures.

## **Compass Capture**

In addition to electronic forms, the Compass Document Management Repository also accommodates supporting documents, like Social Security cards, wage statements, and other documents important to the eligibility process. The Northwoods solution provides several methods of importing these documents into the repository using Compass Capture, the Northwoods scanning utility.

During the interview process, screeners and case managers collect documents and scan them on document scanners capable of processing driver licenses, birth certificates and virtually any type of documentation. The case manager enters the client’s SSN and then selects a button corresponding to the type of document (e.g., a driver license) through a touch screen interface. Using the SSN as a unique identifier, the case manager is able to retrieve any additional demographic data that is available from the state eligibility system, avoiding the endless retyping of duplicate information. A document that is critical to several case managers (for example, a form indicating a change in address or guardianship) is made available to all immediately after scanning.

Clients often need to return to the agency with additional documents to provide supporting information for their cases. In this situation, reception personnel can use Compass Capture to scan documents for the case managers. Reception workers provide the client with an automatically generated receipt that includes demographics of the person dropping off the documents and thumbnails of the documents themselves. The system also stores a copy of the receipt in the document repository. The receipt process eliminates the need for reception staff to copy each document and create handwritten receipts. The system imports and stores the document images immediately upon scanning and a notification is sent to the case manager letting him or her know that they have new information available.

When case managers are working in the state eligibility system, they can access documents stored in the Northwoods repository without changing screens. A total of 32 state screens have been image-enabled, allowing case managers to retrieve documents based on information in the state mainframe system. For example, if a case manager is on a screen to verify a housing expense, they can double-click anywhere on the screen and view all documents that are related to the client’s housing expenses (rent receipts, gas and electric bills, etc.).

Supervisors use this time-saving feature extensively when reviewing a case for accuracy. The supervisors are able to review the screens and the documents associated with each screen to evaluate if the eligibility was determined correctly.

### **New System Reduces Response Times and Improves Client Service**

The Northwoods solution has made it easier for case managers to handle the volumes of files they deal with and meet requirements for both expedited and routine processing of benefits.

“The Northwoods system has made our interview times more interactive and personal because we don’t spend all of our time filling out forms. This has been a big plus as clients are more engaged and involved in the process,” said Chris Simington, social service administrator at WCDJFS. She also pointed out that the new system has significantly cut down phone time related to client inquiries. “If someone calls to confirm that a document was received, it is possible for any employee with appropriate rights to provide that information immediately by looking it up in the system.”

Because scanning the documents triggers a timer to ensure that applications are acted upon promptly, WCDJFS’s solution helps support compliance with local, state, and federal guidelines. For example, most routine requests must be processed within 30 days, but some benefits, such as emergency food assistance, must be evaluated in a matter of hours.

The solution also helps improve accountability by tracking the case history. Should documents need to be produced for audits or legal discovery, they can be accessed immediately — by date range for an audit or by case number for potential litigation. The solution also creates documentation that was simply unavailable previously, such as the receipt verifying documents scanned at the front desk.

Installing the solution has also paid off for WCDJFS in terms of hard storage costs. By reducing the space needed to store case files and copies of the state and federal forms, WCDJFS has reclaimed enough room to add two additional offices. As existing files age and are removed, there will be even more floor space available for more worthwhile purposes.

### **Northwoods Consulting Partners**

Headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, Northwoods Consulting Partners is a privately held software-development company specializing in technology solutions that help human services agencies better serve their constituents. Northwoods developed the Compass Software® suite to provide its core clientele with electronic document management, document imaging, front desk scanning, electronic forms, scheduling, and other solutions. Through standardizing and automating key processes, the team from Northwoods can help your entire agency run more efficiently and cost effectively.