

# Case Study

retail

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## Auto Parts Retailer Realizes Automated Information Workflow is the One Part They Were Missing

*In order to remain a leading source for auto parts, this retailer had to revamp its digital workflows to simplify where its employees went for critical information.*

### ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

There are more vehicles on the road than at any other time in U.S. history. One retailer with a reputation for providing quality auto parts believes it has something to do with it. Customers expect guidance and expertise to find exactly what they're looking for quickly — whether it's a replacement part, vehicle accessory or service — so their cars can run efficiently and reliably.

But what happens when the in-store experts don't have the necessary information they need to give their customers the guidance and know-how to find exactly what they're looking for?

The retailer includes numerous distribution centers serving retail stores and service centers across the country. Each location needs to access critical information to ensure timely service and delivery, whether that's locating a part in inventory, dispensing billing, processing a return or simply offering advice. Just as importantly, each location has to share information quickly with other parts of the company — especially with back office workers — to meet customer demands with consistency.

### CHALLENGE

- Redundant administrative workflows compromised employee productivity
- Service center employees devoted 80% of their time searching for information
- More than 2M internal emails per month slowed work order processing and overwhelmed email infrastructure

### SOLUTION

- Engage Ricoh Consulting Services and Ricoh Professional Services
- Design digital process to capture information for fast, easy distribution between service and distribution centers
- Integrate new workflow processes into existing front and back office systems, including ECM, for continuity

### RESULTS

- By eliminating redundancies and automating processes, the company has improved productivity by 20%
- Revamped automated workflows expected to reduce operating costs by \$15M over three years
- Significantly reduced the number of internal emails which frees up more bandwidth and minimizes IT burden

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### CHALLENGE

When your car needs parts or service, you don't have much of a choice. You need to act quickly. After all, cars can't repair themselves, so the problem is only going to get worse without immediate attention.

This retailer has the resources to help. As it continues to add stores across the U.S., it's become an essential place to shop for more and more drivers. Managing that growth and the extensive breadth of parts, service, billing and more, however, has become more complex. With so much information to be shared between workers and locations, the antiquated manual workflows of the past are inadequate.

Each distribution center manages multiple core functions for every retail outlet, including sales, returns, debit memos, credits and returned goods. Employees fill out paper forms, scan the documents and send them via email to initiate work orders. As business prospered, the amount of email skyrocketed — ballooning to more than 2.1M emails every month. The bandwidth demands taxed IT resources.

Workers couldn't handle the immense email workload. As a result, critical information resided in email queues instead of with the personnel who needed it to make smart, informed decisions. Plus, there was no standard audit trail for tracking work orders.

Because the information was entered manually, work orders, credit memos, special orders and other documents were very inconsistent, with a significant percentage of them missing key information. Many times, an employee unaware that a work order was already initiated would repeat tasks, which compromised productivity even more. A single work order could potentially pass through several workers on its way to completion. Each stop marked another opportunity for it to be delayed.

When workers tried to track down information, workflow stopped. According to one assessment study, it was discovered that workers spent up to 80% of their time searching for information. Business stopped, too. Front-facing employees didn't have the information they needed to help customers quickly. Billing was delayed. Inventory was difficult to monitor. Customers and employees were frustrated. The automobile experts needed help. Fortunately, the document management experts were nearby.

The retailer needed immediate access to critical customer, billing and auto parts information, so customers would continue to choose them as auto parts experts.

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### SOLUTION

It's easy to repeat mistakes when you don't realize there are more efficient ways to perform the same tasks. Likewise, it's easy to stay in a rut when you don't realize the abundance of resources readily available.

Ricoh has partnered with the retailer for more than 15 years, providing document management equipment. When the retailer transitioned to cut-sheet printing, Ricoh worked with the company to implement devices and software to simplify operations. Then, it largely repeated the task at another distribution site. When the company planned to begin the same process at yet another center, the Ricoh team knew there was an easier and more affordable solution.

The Ricoh team approached the vice president of operations as consultants, with an opportunity to introduce a comprehensive, repeatable integration rollout that could revolutionize how the company managed information workflow — from creation and processing to output and delivery.

The Ricoh consulting team assessed information workflow processes at two facilities for two weeks. The team leveraged that information into a new electronic process designed to bypass the distribution centers and consolidate workflow functions at the service centers. Now, information generated at the store locations, such as orders and returns, is digitized and centralized at the service centers.

The company also wanted to retain its existing electronic content management system to protect investment costs, so the Ricoh team revised its integration plan immediately to accommodate the request — much to the delight of company leaders.

Ricoh offered consultative guidance and created a digitized workflow so information can be created, shared and integrated into everyday applications with fewer delays and errors.

Ricoh introduced other digitized workflow processes as well. Each electronic form included required fields that have to be populated before it can be completed and sent to the centralized service center. The metadata in each form is validated via the enterprise database automatically to ensure accuracy and availability when shared with coworkers and customers.

Each order can be tracked with an easy-to-use, cloud-based dashboard in real-time, so every user in the information chain can see the same, up-to-date information for seamless workflow. For example, workers at service centers can interact with inventory or billing specialists and discuss critical information available to both parties with a click of the mouse. Workers no longer have to search through stacks of paperwork and scores of email to find information. With all the information easily accessible, workers can collaborate to resolve conflicts and to expedite customer requests and disputes faster and more consistently.

The new digitized workflow integrates into existing front and back office line-of-business applications seamlessly. It changes how employees perform everyday tasks, without forcing wholesale changes on the company's infrastructure. Ricoh also provided implementation and training to simplify the transition for workers.

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### RESULTS

Searching for something that isn't where it's supposed to be can be frustrating. As this retailer with thousands of locations discovered, it's also expensive. Inefficient workflow processes and unreliable data cause delays, which monopolizes time that could be spent seeking other revenue-generating opportunities. It can also compromise customer loyalty.

Fortunately, Ricoh was there as a consultative partner to introduce a strategic plan to help ensure information was available when workers and customers needed it most.

#### **Making Information Accessible**

With the revamped digitized workflow processes, employees spend less time searching for information. They can find up-to-the-second information via the intuitive dashboard within moments. Every work order offers a clear, concise audit trail. Users and administrators can monitor progress and even compare and measure efficiencies. As a result, early estimates show a 20% increase in worker productivity.

By reducing redundancies and guesswork, Ricoh workflow automation processes are expected to reduce operating costs by \$15M over the next three years.

Because workers are required to populate specific fields on forms, each work order includes key details that can be used to make faster, more informed decisions or to give customers immediate feedback on their orders and returns. It also eliminates redundancies. Workers don't have to complete forms left incomplete by coworkers. In addition, there are far fewer emails overwhelming user inboxes and network servers, freeing IT staff to concentrate on other core competencies.

The automated processes are expected to reduce operating costs by as much as \$15M over the next three years.

#### **Finding New Data; New Ways to Improve**

A new process that can potentially save a company millions of dollars draws a lot of attention. It also gives the consultants responsible for the success a lot of respect. Ricoh continues to work with the retailer to identify other areas in the company where workflow automation can be implemented.

Ongoing assessments have identified additional areas where workflow improvements could either improve employee productivity or reduce operating costs.