

LA County Tracks STDs with Forms Processing

ABBYY FormReader Combines Excellent Accuracy and Affordability with Enterprise Support

Client: Los Angeles County, Department of Health Services

Program

ABBYY FormReader Enterprise 6.0

Average Pages Scanned Per Month

2,000

Expected Time Savings

50 to 75 percent faster than manual entry

Today's forms processing software is helping the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services manage its newest task: To track and monitor the instances of sexually transmitted diseases reported at the county's health clinics.

When the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Program started tracking every STD case in the county, county

administrators knew the sheer amount of data they planned to collect would fuel their need for a simple yet sophisticated automated solution to manage the approximately 40 new cases of STDs reported at the county's 14 public clinics each day. Each clinic prepares a two-page hand-printed form per patient—meaning the department must input as many as 2,000 pages or more each month.

"Each clinic submits a form about each new case daily, but some have special projects and each of those has its own forms as well," says Peter He, Epidemiology Analyst, Information Systems for the County of Los Angeles, STD Program.

The Problem: A Big Job

The STD program, which has more than 100 staff, is tasked with preventing and controlling 25 or more sexually transmitted diseases, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis B and others. It uses the daily statistics that it gathers to study the causes and distribution of STDs in order to help control them. The research results help the group design programs and policies and to evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, the division develops and implements new programs to promote safer sexual behaviors in populations in at-risk situations.

Despite the complexity of its requirements, program administrators needed a solution that would quickly and accurately input data into its statistical analysis system and one that would not require hiring additional personnel.

"Every public health clinic issues a report to us every day, and we wanted the software in order to save labor on data entry," He says.

The Solution: Quick Turn and Return

After researching its available forms processing options, the STD Program selected ABBYY's FormReader Enterprise Edition 6.0, partly because multiple users can share the software. Since the volume of information coming into the STD program will potentially rise as more special programs requiring additional form types are added, program administrators wanted to ensure that the software would be available to multiple workers simultaneously.

So far, we have only one start of production so there's not much time-conflict on the scheduling," He says. "Later on, we will have five or six people using this technology. The enterprise version of the software has more powerful capacity and six user stations. We anticipate we will need those capabilities soon."

Allowing multiple people to simultaneously work on ABBYY FormReader will help the department meet its time and personnel goals. "With this program, one user can set up a new survey without interrupting production scanning," says Mike Stuhley, president of FormTran, a Lake Forest, Calif.-based ABBYY reseller. "Since it is an enterprise license, users aren't locked to the same PC, and the performance is superior since one PC can be dedicated to recognition, while another is scanning and verifying data in order to increase throughput."

Once it is scanned into the system, the STD Program transfers the data into a SAS system for data analysis, and then stores it in a shared database that tracks the data for use in research projects. The format also allows the county to readily report the statistics to state and federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) bureaus.

The Results: Fast and Fabulous

The STD Program immediately experienced accuracy and efficiency boosts. FormReader cuts data entry time for the STD clinic by 75 percent compared with manually entering data for forms using check boxes and is 50 percent faster for hand written forms, says He. "As the operator's skills improve, the time needed to process forms will be less and less," he adds.

ABBYY's recognition engine delivers superior accuracy—which is critical due to the large amount of handwritten data each clinic collects.

"The computer enforces the same rules on every form which increases data integrity," says Stuhley. "ABBYY FormReader does an excellent job of using rules to perfect data from a form."

For example, if the department creates a rule that stipulates reports must communicate blood pressure as a ratio, the system will flag a blood pressure entry that contains only a single number, requesting human verification of the data, Stuhley says.

The organization worked with FormTran to fine-tune its form and create rules in order to maximize recognition accuracy despite the complexity of recognizing handwritten forms. "Accuracy is really important," says He. "In fact, it is the most important thing of all."

This additional step even further enhanced the solution's data entry process. Finally, the group determined that ABBYY's software was the most affordable choice on the market. Now, the program enables program members to concentrate on their most important task: overcoming the increasingly complex problem of sexually transmitted diseases.