



CASE STUDY

Houston We Have a Solution

"We can never forget a life might be at risk." –The International Space Station Project, California, Texas, Florida, Brazil, Japan, Russia

A world of paperless offices may be a distant dream, but Ashok Kohli wants to draw the line somewhere. If we can't keep paper out of offices on Earth, he said, at least we can try to keep it out of the International Space Station that is orbiting the Earth.

Kohli, records management adviser at Boeing North American, Inc. in Canoga Park, California, works on Boeing's contract with NASA for the space station's vital electrical power system. Kohli views his job as mission-critical to be able to help astronauts and technicians during a mission quickly track the history of a troublesome part to avoid another Apollo 13 near-disaster.

"We can never forget a life might be at risk," Kohli said.

With a team of 15 people, he is busy scanning text and graphic and video images of anything connected with the electrical power system. The images are stored on recordable CDs so they can't be altered and can be stored safely to provide technical references for decades.

"I have to be able at a moment's notice to retrieve any document associated with a part, even if the vendor is out of business," Kohli said. "The station is going to be up there for 30-plus years. So can you imagine, with all the hundreds of suppliers and thousands of parts, how intensive that is? It is a daunting task."

The documents are already being stored on CDs for online use by the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and will also be available on CDs for use by astronauts aboard the station, he said.

So far, Kohli's team has stored more than 2 million pages of data on 60 CDs, which is about 36G bytes. The team faces a backlog of more than 5 million additional pages, which will fill another 250 CDs with 150G bytes. That many documents could easily fill a high school gymnasium. And that's only for the electrical system.

Using CDs wouldn't be practical without software to organize the documents for easy retrieval. Kohli chose Alchemy document management software from Captaris. Kohli said he looked at many software packages, all much more expensive and harder to use. Captaris Alchemy provided a faster processing time and also provided a way to drag and drop Computer Aided Design (CAD) images easily into the storage.

Alchemy software provides a document management approach to the storage of data, meaning any file can be indexed and retrieved based on its contents and not its file name or path. Every word on a document is automatically indexed, meaning if someone types "RPCM" into a PC on the data network, all the documents about Remote Power Control Modules will appear.

CDs (now less than \$1 each) are less costly than other storage systems and are easily transportable, permanent and easy to distribute, Kohli said. With the CDs, Boeing can find documents online faster than if the information systems department had to find and load a backup tape, as was the practice in the past. "Plus, this is the permanent version, while there might be five versions on tape," he said.

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