A REAL PAGE-BURNER

Software saves state a fortune in paperwork

By **Sarah K. Winn** | July 22, 2007

By one estimate, state government agencies generate about 5 million pages of financial documents every year. Those must be stored at the state auditor's office.

With each agency needing multiple copies, the page count jumps to at least 10 million, according to Daniel Carter, senior systems programmer in Charleston for Global Science & Technology Inc.

"The amount of paper stored by the auditor used to fill an entire warehouse," Carter said. "Now, 10 years' worth of electronic images can be stored on a computer the size of a typical household refrigerator."

The Fairmont-based company has developed a software program called the Audit Detail Imaging System, which allows state agencies and universities to scan their invoices and send them directly to the state's auditor's office, eliminating multiple copies and time delays.

The state Department of Transportation is the company's newest client.

Sandi Keller said her department has been using document imaging since the 1990s.

Now, with the technological push from GST, the shipping and handling of the department's invoicing is gone.

"The system never eliminates jobs," Keller said. "It allows people to do more."

GST started working with document management 10 years ago, said Carter. The company now works in 49 of the state's 55 counties, he said.

GLOBAL SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, INC.

After scanning a document, the ADIS software automatically transfers invoices and identifying information to the state auditor's office using the state's Internet network, WVNET, Carter said.

Custom Web sites on an agency's servers allow employees to view the transferred documents, he said.

A test of this new electronic invoicing system began in 2005, after the Legislature allowed higher education institutions and the auditor's office to transfer documents electronically.

Following that legislation, GST began a partnership with Fairmont State to test the company's paperless system. Success there led to another pilot at Marshall University, Carter said.

In this year's legislative session, this paperless system was approved for all state agencies, he said. GST is already working with several state agencies, and the system is being demonstrated at five more in the coming weeks, he said.

GST has a sliding pricing scale for the software, based on the number of pages scanned per year, he said. Agencies pay a yearly license fee, he said.

"The advantage of this pricing structure is that it makes it possible for even the smallest agency to afford our system," Carter said. "We haven't ignored the little guys."

The cost savings can be huge, GST estimates. In total, by moving toward a paperless audit system, the state can save between $4 million and $5 million, just by reducing paper, postage and storage costs.

"The efficiencies found in this program are just beginning to be realized," West Virginia State Auditor Glen Gainer said in a news release earlier this year.

Unlike an out-of-state technology company, Carter said, his company can offer hands-on support if the system malfunctions. Troubleshooting is normally done through a virtual private network, which allows Carter access to the agencies' computer and servers. If the hardware fails, Carter can stop by to fix the problem.

The automated system at the DOT went online July 1, Keller said. The DOT is phasing in one district at a time, starting with District 10 in Princeton, she said.

Previously, when invoices were sent to the auditor's office, the DOT had to make three different copies of each sheet — one for the main office, one for the Auditor's office and another to keep on file, said Kristy James of the DOT.

"Now, we don't have to wait on the mail," she said.

For Carter, that's just what his company was hoping for.

"We know that, realistically, we'll probably never convince every state agency to use ADIS — but that won't stop us from trying," he said.