

Darcy Hammett



Darcy Hammett and Ian MacDonald (R)

# EFS: Cooperative Efforts Create Electronic Filing for BC

In June of 1998, after some discussion here at the Land Title Office (LTO), our then-Director and visionary Malcolm McAvity wanted our customers to decide if electronic submission was something we should even consider. Through the BC Law Society, a group of “blue ribbon” lawyers and Notaries agreed to meet. This group consisted of two lawyers appointed by the Law Society, two lawyers appointed by the Canadian Bar Association, and two Notaries from The Society of Notaries Public.

The very first question was: *should we create an electronic filing system (EFS)?* The response was a conditional *Yes*. The conditions were set out in the form of guiding principles. Here are some of those principles.

- The scheme will be consistent with existing common law and statutory rules concerning the creation and transfer of estates in land.
- The scheme must not materially change current conveyancing practice, including the submission of applications to the Land Title Office by the purchaser’s solicitor or Notary.
- The scheme must not increase the cost of doing business with the Land Title Office.

From that point forward, the group agreed to continue on an ongoing basis to make project decisions and provide advice and assistance throughout the project. They became known as the Electronic Filing Committee. The group still meets

and provides valuable advice and direction on project issues and concerns.

The main driver at the time for the Land Titles Office was our staff attrition forecast. In future years, the branch was going to go through a period where large numbers of long-term trained examiners would begin to retire. We needed efficiencies that would free up clerical staff to be trained as examiners and the excess examiner capacity to provide the training.

The other driver was that the project would fit within the strategic objective of the branch to decentralize services through automation. EFS would provide the same level of Land Title services, no matter where you lived in BC. For lawyers and Notaries, there would be reduced time and costs for submitting documents.

Early on, a decision was made that EFS would be a voluntary system. This decision drove much of the design. From a design perspective, if clients were not partial to a component, it was unlikely that component would be designed into the

system. Every aspect of the design was considered against how customers might react to it.

In 2001, when Malcolm passed away, Ken Jacques took on Malcolm's duties, which included chairing the Electronic Filing Committee. Even though Ken has now left the Branch, he agreed to continue to chair the Electronic Filing Committee.

### Going Forward

Going forward presented many challenges, such as the following.

- Developing the conceptual architecture
- Finding a forms package that would meet our requirements and deciding whether EFS would be a desktop or a Web application
- Developing the business case
- Defining and deciding the technical and business rules for digital signatures
- Procuring a systems developer and negotiating a contract
- Developing the legislative framework to support EFS (largely done by the EFS committee)
- Designing and developing the electronic funds transfer process

We held a number of client design sessions around the province, which provided us with key information on what clients wanted and needed. These workshops helped us make the decision that EFS should be a desktop application rather than a system whereby customers must be continually "signed on" with an Internet connection. While EFS is not a Web application, it doesn't require custom software other than the off-the-shelf Adobe product.

### Starting to Design and Build EFS

In January of 2002, we began work with MacDonald Detwiller (MDA) to create the electronic filing system.

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The first task was to establish the teams and a working structure for the project. Once that was done, we started work. The main task was to take both the conceptual business architecture and the technical architecture down to a level that would allow programmers to begin to build the system. This required literally thousands of hours of effort over many months.

Working with MDA, Denis Thomas was responsible for the technical architecture of the project, while Ian Macdonald, Program Analyst, provided business knowledge and was substantially responsible for the business design.

MDA was well organized with a project manager and project engineer and other qualified professionals. We needed to put together the resources on our side. I became project director. Several others were contracted to assist with the project:

- Nancy Carleton, quality assurance on project management;
- Ian Montgomery, quality assurance and risk and control advice. Ian was also responsible for developing the Certification Practice Statement in

conjunction with the Law Society; and

- Denis Thomas; our Systems Architect. Together with Ian Macdonald, Denis took on a much greater role in the project, from design to testing.

The project also had many stakeholders and linkages. MDA was the systems developer but that included two subcontracts: Sierra Systems and Fujitsu, both of Victoria. The Electronic Funds Transfer was developed in partnership with the Provincial Treasury Branch of the Ministry of Finance.

The property transfer tax form was developed by the Property Taxation Branch of the Ministry of Provincial Revenue. Access BC, the company responsible for the operation of BC OnLine, was a partner throughout this project, with various roles and responsibilities. The Law Society is the certification authority for the digital certificates, which also required a systems linkage.

Once the system was designed, programmers began to build; we began to write test cases. Test cases may sound like a small task but to give you a sense of scope,



Land Title Branch Staff, September 15, 2000

*Standing, from left to right: Malcolm McAvity, Director of Land Titles; Denis Thomas, Technical Advisor, for EFS; Ian Macdonald, Program Analyst; Nora Anderson, Office Assistant; Nancy Carlton, Project Manager; Teresa Ferguson, Administrative Assistant; Susan Allen, Financial Manager; Dave Nonen, Business Support Administrator; Rob Sarrazin, Programmer*

*Seated: Margaret Olson, Administrative Assistant; Jill Robertson, Financial Manager; and Darcy Hammett, Director of Operations*

each of our EFS forms has about 1200 test cases. These forms look simple—that was the objective—but the software behind them is very complicated. Ian Macdonald is mostly responsible for this effort, including the follow-up testing.

The work is in the details. Every aspect and detail of the design had to be considered against system and business requirements. Even the simple process of defining field lengths on forms might require system queries of existing data and other business considerations.

Testing is a major part of any systems project. For the uninitiated, this is a very complex and detailed task. Testing must be methodical; every problem must be repeated and documented, then fixed and tested again. Denis Guy, an examiner in the New Westminster LTO, and Julius Karpati, an examiner in our Victoria Land Title Office, assisted with the testing effort. Two BC OnLine staff, Susan Dziadyk and Drew Ellen, also assisted us.

Once satisfied with the testing, we were able to move into the production pilot. This part of the project was

extremely valuable; it uncovered a few problems, identified training needs, and gave us feedback on tweaks and enhancements. We owe a great deal to all the firms who participated in the pilot.

The next step was developing and delivering training through CLE.

The project will continue for some time as we add forms and functionality to the system. This article is a very high level view of the EFS project; it only touches on the various tasks that had to be done to make this project a reality.

More information on the project can be obtained from the project Website. Please go to <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/landtitle> and click on the EFS link. ▲

**Darcy Hammett is Director of Registry Program Standards and Policy and is currently the Project Director of the Electronic Filing system. Before being assigned to Land Title Branch Headquarters, he was Deputy Registrar of the Kamloops Land Title office. Darcy has also worked in the Victoria, Prince Rupert, and Nelson Land Title offices.**

With over 30 years' experience, Darcy has worked in every capacity and level within the Land Title Branch. From 1993 until implementation in 1996, he was the Business Architect for the development of the Automated Land Title Office System (ALTOS) and the imaging sub system.

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- Geared to Notaries, lawyers, and support and technology staff
- Dates: October 4, 5, 6, 2004

Check the CLE Website this Summer for details: [www.cle.bc.ca](http://www.cle.bc.ca).