

### **Tighten Security, Improve File Access By Creating An Electronic Database**

To develop a compliance plan, Akins Ford sought the help of Walter H. Hopkins Co. (Atlanta), a records management and storage VAR, and Positive Solutions for Interiors (PSI) (Alpharetta, GA). Complying with the regulations poses challenges for businesses because the federal government doesn't mandate specific actions. As a guide to develop a plan for Akins Ford, Walter Hopkins referred to ISO (International Organization for Standardization) standard 15489, which outlines procedures to improve records systems. "I use the ISO standard to determine the steps needed to comply," says Jerry VanLoozen, director of integrated document solutions for Walter Hopkins. "These government rulings tend to leave businesses in a gray area where they need to figure out how to comply. If a business faces a civil lawsuit, one of the ways it can defend itself is by showing intent to comply. If you have a policy in place that combines procedure controls and an audit plan, you should be in good shape."

Akins Ford, which stored customer records in traditional file cabinets, had taken preliminary steps to secure files by locking its records room. Salesmen and other employees who needed customer documents had to ask an authorized employee to unlock the room and retrieve the files. To improve access to files, Akins Ford worked with PSI to design a secure file room. Walter Hopkins also recommended that the dealership designate a full-time records manager to retrieve and file the records. PSI added a layer of security by installing a key card system for unlocking the door to the records room. Only authorized employees - including the records manager, service managers, and office administrators - are supplied with key cards. Records management products from Smead Manufacturing Co. (Hastings, MN) and Spacesaver Corp. (Fort Atkinson, WI) are the most important components of Akins Ford's compliance plan. The Smead system includes an electronic database, a color-coded indexing system, high-density file cabinets, and a bar code scanning system. The Smeadlink Express File Room program allowed Walter Hopkins to create a database containing essential customer information needed to track files. In the program, each customer file is assigned a sequential number that is associated with the customer name, deal number, and other data. By inputting that data, the records manager is able to find the file number needed to retrieve a specific document. A password is required to access the database.

Based on the information in the database, a label for each customer file is printed. Each color-coded label includes the sequential file number, the customer's name, and the VIN (Vehicle Identification Number). The color-coded indexing system reduces the time it takes to retrieve files and helps misplaced files stand out. The dealership's traditional three-drawer file cabinets were replaced with high-density, open-shelf Spacesaver cabinets. These storage systems take up half the space of traditional file cabinets while doubling storage capacity.

Studies by ARMA (Association of Records Managers and Administrators) show that color-coded, open-shelf filing systems speed up the filing and retrieval process by 35% to 50% while reducing the number of misfiled documents. In the final piece of Akins Ford's record management system, a bar code scanner is used to track files. When an employee requests a customer file, both the bar code affixed to the file folder and the bar code number assigned to the employee is scanned. This enables Akins Ford to track how often each file is accessed and which employees have requested the file. It also provides an audit trail to identify potential fraud.