

NAME OF SYSTEM:

Beneficiary Information

ORIGINATOR:

**Bureau of District Office Operations
Social Security Administration,
Baltimore, Maryland 21235**

OBJECTIVE. To design and place into operation an integrated document retrieval system that will enable the District Offices to provide the public with more accurate, timely, and useful beneficiary information.

BACKGROUND. The Bureau of District Office Operations provides direction to the nationwide network of district and branch offices that serve as the intermediary between the Social Security Administration and the public. Among its many responsibilities is that of providing information to people about beneficiary matters.

For years the district and branch offices administering the Social Security program have had difficulty in responding satisfactorily to the millions of annual inquiries. The growing accumulation of records, together with an increased public awareness about the various entitlements of the programs, has made the answering of questions increasingly difficult. There had been an urgent need for designing a system that would assure that records used in beneficiary interviews were both current and accurate.

Fortunately, during the 1960's the district and branch offices gained much experience in the use of a microfilm retrieval system for handling health insurance inquiries. It was the consensus of those most concerned with the beneficiary information problem that better response to the public would occur only with the design and implementation of a microform system. Accordingly, the decision was made to condense the beneficiary data kept on magnetic tape in Baltimore and to record this data on microfilm. It was further decided that microfiche rather than roll film would be used for the following reasons: the

updating is less costly; the shipping problems are less difficult; the look-up time is shorter; the filing sequence is less cumbersome; the reader-printer machine is less expensive.

THE NEW METHOD. The Beneficiary Information System consists of selected information recorded on microfiche. Selected data for 600 accounts is displayed on 4 x 6 inch microfiche cards. (This capacity contrasts with the normal 4 feet of microfilm roll needed for the same number of accounts in the old system.) Each microfiche has 72 frames of beneficiary information arranged into nine columns of eight horizontal rows, with individual frames containing from six to nine accounts. At the top of each microfiche is a header that shows the range of names in normal size print. Additionally, there is an index that shows the x-y coordinate location of records within each frame.

The conversion of the digital input magnetic tape information to the master or original fiche format is performed by the Bureau of Data Processing and Accounts. A Stromberg-DatagraphiX 4440 COM (computer output microfilm) recording and developing system is used for this purpose. This special camera records beneficiary data from the magnetic tape on 4-inch wide film at the rate of two to three microfiche per minute, or 1,200 to 1,800 records per minute. The data is reduced on film at a 25 to 1 ratio. The original records are recorded on silver halide roll film, developed as positives, and duplicated on Kalvar negative copies. These copies are then automatically cut into 4 x 6 inch microfiche.

The file is arranged alphabetically by name of the principal beneficiary and contains such information as other beneficiaries, social security numbers, certain historical information, and annual contribution data. The microfiche are filed in an upright metal stand holding a maximum of four or five two-sided panels. Panels are 24 inches high and 18 inches wide, with space for 440 microfiche arranged in three vertical rows. In total, a single panel may contain 264,000 individual records. The microfiche header information is readily identifiable from the file position,

and when a microfiche is removed from the file the background becomes an automatic "charge-out." The microfiche reader contains an x-y grid system corresponding to the grid identification index recorded on each microfiche. With this finding technique, most searches can be completed within 20 seconds.

In the retrieval process, the microfiche file and the reader-printer are usually located in close proximity to the work area of the user-interviewer. Copies of beneficiary records are thus available for viewing or copying in a minimum of time.

REMARKS. This Beneficiary Information System is a classic example of large masses of magnetic tape stored data that is made readily

accessible by conversion to a microform format through use of COM equipment. In this instance, the data is made available to 1,000 locations around the Nation. The system utilizes to the fullest the microform characteristics of compactness, convenience of shipment, and economy of storage and retrieval. Additionally, in the case of microfiche, the cost of the semiannual updating of the complete file is quite economical in comparison with other document storage and retrieval methods. The total file of 26 million beneficiary records is contained on about 49,000 silver halide microfiche (originals or masters) at Baltimore. The duplicates forwarded to the nearly 1,000 local Social Security offices number approximately 1.5 million.

BENEFICIARY INFORMATION

