

# Choosing a micrographics service bureau

South Carolina Department  
of Archives and History  
**Archives and Records  
Management Division**

## Introduction

When you decide to use a service bureau to film your records, remember that the film you receive *must* meet the standards set out in the *Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976*, Regulation 12-200 through 12-203. You can select either a government or commercial vendor to do your filming, but because not all vendors produce high-quality film, you should make your choice carefully. Choose well, and you will get film that meets the standards and preserves information. Choose poorly, and you will waste money and risk the loss of valuable information as well.

This leaflet sets out the steps you should follow when choosing a service bureau.

## Step 1

**Assess  
your needs  
to get the  
right service**

If you fail to pinpoint the kind of service you need, you could choose an inadequate bureau, draw up inappropriate specifications, receive unrealistic bids, and drive your costs over estimate. You should, therefore, analyze your needs by answering the following questions before you contact a service bureau:

- What is the extent of your filming—one-time or continuous?
- What size and type of film do you need?



- What types of copies do you want and how many?
- What volume of records do you want filmed?
- Does the document have information on one side or both?
- What type of record will you have filmed (its physical appearance)?
- What sort of targets (the informational and quality testing aids) and how many will you need?
- Will the records be filmed on- or off-site?
- What are your security requirements?
- What are the minimum quality standards?
- What will you use the film for?
- What are your delivery requirements?

### **Step 2**

#### *Identify service bureaus*

Get recommendations about micrographics service bureaus from professional organizations like the local chapters of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) and the Association of Image and Information Management (AIIM) and by contacting other local governments or state agencies, either directly or through local associations. Thumb through the yellow pages and look at other commercial advertisements to get names.

### **Step 3**

#### *Check service bureaus*

Contact the service bureaus on your list; if possible, visit their premises, talk to their staff, and inspect their facilities. Ask the following questions:

- How long has the bureau been in business? What is its reputation for service? Has it done business with another state agency or local government?
- What are the qualifications and experience of its staff?
- Is the physical facility clean and well planned? A clean

environment indicates a professional attitude and a commitment to quality.

- What are its procedures for quality control?
- How does it track a job from beginning to end? Could it lose a work order?
- Will it guarantee the work will meet quality standards? If the film is substandard, will it refile without charge or ask you to pay?
- What is its turnaround time?
- What happens if its equipment breaks down or it loses some staff? Does it have backups, or will your job have to wait?
- Can it film your records in your office or must they be sent to the bureau? If your records go off-site, can it provide adequate security?
- What services are covered by the price it quotes?

**Step 4** It is unwise to depend on verbal agreements. Once you choose the service bureau, protect yourself and eliminate the chance of a misunderstanding by signing a written agreement that includes all your requirements. Include in that agreement:

**Get a  
written  
agreement**

- The type of microfilm (silver, diazo, vesicular);
- The size and type of microform (16mm roll, 35mm roll, 105mm fiche, and so forth);
- The number of film copies;
- A description of the records to be filmed, including volume and physical characteristics;
- The dates when filming is to begin and end;



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- Where the filming will be done and who is responsible for any transfer of records;
- The security required to protect the records;
- The reduction ratio;
- The standards for density and resolution;
- The type, number, and placement of identification, quality control, and certification targets;
- A statement identifying who will prepare the documents for filming;
- A statement identifying who will pay for retakes and in what circumstances retakes will be made;
- The maximum level of residual thiosulfate.

In addition, you should make some provision for quality inspection. Although your vendor will run tests to check the microfilming or processing you contract for, you should, ideally, hire a different service bureau to spot check your vendor's work and ask both bureaus to give you a certified copy of the tests.

### **For more information**

This leaflet is one of a series issued by the Archives and Records Management Service Area of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The Archives and Records Management Service Area has statutory responsibility for advising government offices on micrographics. It also issues publications and gives advice and help on all aspects of records management and archival administration.

For more information, please contact: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Archives and Records Management Service Area, State Record Center, 1919 Blanding Street Columbia, SC 29201 (803) 734-7914. ■





**Public information  
leaflets from  
the Archives**

- no. 1 *Legal requirements for microfilming public records (1992)*
- no. 2 *On choosing records for microfilming (1992)*
- no. 3 *Service bureau or in-house microfilming (1992)*
- no. 4 *Targeting and certification of microfilm (1996 revised)*
- no. 5 *Choosing a microfilm camera (1992)*
- no. 6 *Quality testing of microfilm (1992)*
- no. 7 *Microfilm and microforms (1992)*
- no. 8 *Choosing a micrographics service bureau (1992)*
- no. 9 *Choosing microfilm readers and reader/printers (1992)*
- no. 10 *Computer assisted retrieval systems (1992)*
- no. 11 *Microfilm storage (1992)*
- no. 12 *Preservation microfilming (1992)*
- no. 13 *Optical Disk: policy statement and recommended practices (1996 revised)*
- no. 14 *Storing records in the State Records Center (1993)*
- no. 15 *The deposit of security microfilm (1993)*
- no. 16 *Disaster preparedness and recovery in state and local government records offices (1993)*
- no. 17 *How to conduct a records inventory (1993)*
- no. 18 *How to establish records retention schedules (1993)*
- no. 19 *Photographic media (to be announced)*
- no. 20 *Editing and splicing roll microfilm of long-term or archival value (1994)*
- no. 21 *Managing E-Mail (to be announced)*
- no. 22 *Standards for microfilm service bureau certification (1996)*

