

Scanning Innovators Team Up to Continue Breakthrough Strategies



Kevin Keeler, new vice president of R&D at The Crowley Company.

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You and Jeff Helm have both been part of major new developments in scanning. Can you tell us anything about the new horizons you may be focusing on now?

We have a number of new products and technologies under development. Product areas of future interest include the scanning of unusual objects or surfaces and products that enable high-volume user access to historical image archives. An example would be a product that gives access to the library of engineering drawings and manuals, test records and change histories via a common user interface using office and mobile devices.

Can you talk about some of the ways in which you and Jeff Helm complement and play off one another's strengths?

With my system and software knowledge and Jeff's mechanical design, we make a very strong combination. Jeff Helm is the chief mechanical designer of Crowley's Mekel Technology division and has been with the company for more than 30 years. Together, Jeff and I bring fifty plus years of microfilm scanner design experience to our current development programs.

How can the products you develop serve the nuclear industry, especially in this post-Fukushima era?

There are literally thousands, if not millions, of engineering and construction drawings and other important records on microfilm, fiche and aperture cards that need to be digitized for easy access in the case of emergency, for information sharing and to meet regulations. All of our microform scanning products, from the low-volume UScan and C400 to the production-level Mekel MACH and Wicks and Wilson Scanstation series, not only offer efficient digitization, they allow the end-user to enter the information into a myriad of workflow and content packages. We

In the mid-1980s, Jeff Helm of Mekel brought the world its first microfilm and microfiche scanners, and in 1993 Kevin Keeler was the first to bring Wicks and Wilson scanning products from DOS to Windows 3. Now the two former competitors have joined forces on one team to work on scanning breakthroughs together. They will be playing to the strengths of each brand and capitalizing on technology that is either in its infancy or still just a mindseed. “We expect that bringing these two creative minds together under Kevin's strategic leadership will lead to an unbeatable team,” said Christopher Crowley, president of The Crowley Company. As Crowley's new vice president of research and development—overseeing R&D for both the Wicks and Wilson and Mekel Technology product lines—Mr. Keeler will work directly with Mr. Helm, Mekel's lead engineer. Mr. Keeler talked to the NIRMA Newsletter about this team effort, scanning advances, and the nuclear industry's scanning needs in the interview below.

continue to look at the ECM and records management programs the industry uses, and constantly update our hardware and software systems to ensure compatibility with the market's most current requirements.

How did you acquire the expertise to move the Wicks and Wilson line From DOS to Windows 3, since you were among very few qualified to do so?

DOS-based PCs were a common controller device at the time when I was first a freelance software and electronics design engineer specializing in the development of production test equipment. When MS Windows 2 was launched, I trained myself in the new user interface and later used these skills in the development of production test equipment for missile fuses. From there, it was an easy jump when I moved to the world of front-end capture hardware.

Can you describe what inspired your recent product, UScan Universal Scanner—and explain why it is one of your biggest sellers to date?

We saw that many traditional analog viewer/printers were aging and out of synch with the latest technology, creating a gap in the microfilm scanning market. Having manufactured a very popular production-level microfilm scanner, it was a relatively simple step to downsize for volume and physical space while retaining our updated technology. UScan development still continues with the recent launch of UScan+, and the planned update later this year of the next generation of UScan.

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