The much anticipated *"paperless"* office is still a *"paperfull"* office. There are two sources of paper in the office: the internal and the external source. We should be able to deal with the former but why the onslaught of inbound paper from external sources and what can we do?

Why so many paper documents?

- In spite of technological advances, wet signatures continue to be required on most official documents. Wet signature is synonymous with paper.
- Supporting documents or attachments (e.g. certificates, permits, and receipts) are generally on paper unless a scanned copy or PDF version exists.
- EDI has been around for over twenty-five years but it is quite expensive and has not had widespread adoption. As a result: invoices, shipping docs, POs and payments are still predominately paper-based.
- Banks, public agencies and utilities communicate using their de facto standard means: "paper".

The solution?

As a rule, we should make an effort to generate less paper; but we may have little or no control over paper documents from external sources (e.g. suppliers, clients and government). To minimize the negative impact of inbound paper documents, the solution is to digitize them ASAP. They may be scanned in the mail-room entry point, in the business unit or at the departmental level. Once scanned, they should immediately be indexed to facilitate search and retrieval. They will thereafter be transformed from a paper burden to a valuable digital document asset.

Some benefits:

- Improve business processes workflow.
- Increase productivity via document sharing.
- Eliminate filing and searching for paper documents.
- Protect important data through encryption.
- Ensure disaster recovery and business continuity.
- Adhere to regulatory compliance.
- Save office space, reduce storage costs.

Many already benefitting

Most of the larger enterprises have been scanning and indexing there paper documents for years. They were early to recognize the benefits in productivity gains and reduced operating costs due to higher efficiency. They were able to realize a fast ROI thanks to shear volume in spite of high initial investment costs as early adopters.

SMEs should get started

Today, imaging solutions are within easy reach of the smaller businesses also. This is in large part due to substantial price reductions and vastly improved scanner hardware technology. Document management software is also more affordable because of competitive pressures although sometimes still unnecessarily complex. One must still be careful because there can be significant additional costs due to demanding infrastructure, installation, customization and training. These costs can present a source of business practice resistance due to a more significant investment and risk.

Seek an affordable and simple approach

The truth is that for most business operations there is no need for highly complex or sophisticated document imaging and management software. What most of the smaller firms or departments require is a convenient means of scanning their paper documents and an intuitive method to store and retrieve them. Digital document filing should be less complicated than paper filing! It just has to be extremely flexible, efficient and most importantly less error prone. No matter what the solution it is best to take advantage of packaged solutions that involve a fix cost that includes a scanner, software, installation, training and personalization.

A low cost effective alternative

Document indexing can be accomplished in several ways. Most conventional document management systems commonly require manual entry of metadata or keywords for each document. An innovative and simpler approach is to use structured file naming as a basis of document indexing. The concept involves structuring the filename into descriptive segments that provide all the information necessary to search, retrieve and identify the targeted document. For more info visit www.exadox.com or refer to: **eXadox White Paper: Semi-Automated Structured File Naming and Storage.**

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