Many organizations purchase document scanning devices as a first step initiative to convert their paper-based filing system into an electronic one. Their second step may involve the acquisition of a document management system but because of effort and cost implications there is a common tendency to try managing with the free organizer software that comes bundled with the scanner. An affordable and more effective alternative is to use structured file naming. When using this approach there is no need to input metadata for each document or have to rely on visual identification to locate a specific document. The file name is sufficient. Structured file naming can be done manually of course but for speed and precision, it is best to use a tool such as eXadox™ that enables semi-automated structured file naming and advanced search.

Structured File Name

A structured file name consists of multiple segments where each segment provides specific information about the document. The quantity and type of segments employed is dependant on the type of documents and the business activity. A general purpose file name structure used within eXadox that can handle most requirements consists of the following segments:

SUB-FOLDER NAME_REF ID LIST_REF-ID_DOC TYPE_ DOC NAME_VERSION_[TRACKING]. EXT

The following are some examples showing how this structure can be used:

GLOBAL_GENEXPENSE_P76328_INV_090125_[BOX4].PDF
SMITH-J _SUNLIFE_367450_POLICY_EXP120215.PDF
LAGOCONDOS_PPELEC_5786_SUBCON_H&L.DOC

In the examples above, each segment can convey different types of information based on need. The following provides some insight on how to exploit each segment in the structure:

 SUB-FOLDER NAME is the primary entity (e.g.: clients, suppliers, employees, projects, etc…) for which/whom we are filing documents. A sub-folder should be created for each entity name. If the list is available from a CRM or business system, eXadox could auto-create all the sub-folders instantly. The sub-folder name can automatically be injected by eXadox as a prefix for easy document identification. This segment is especially important if the documents are mobile.

REF ID LIST is a list of possibilities that can logically categorize the primary entity or perhaps the type of documents involved. For example in a HR department, employees may be divided based on work classification or perhaps department. An insurance brokerage firm may offer insurance protection by different companies based on the type of insurance required. The resulting list is used by eXadox to ensure consistency and to help auto-populate the segment.

REF-ID - is a free-text segment used to help identify a specific document or a group of related documents. For example in an accounts payable department this segment can be the supplier invoice number. A legal firm may use it to input a case number as a provision to enable the grouping of case specific documents.

DOC TYPE is a list of possible document types (e.g.: invoice, letter, contract, policy, accident report, etc.). Because this is a list, eXadox uses the entries in the list to auto-populate the segment as per user needs.

DOC NAME is a free-text segment used to provide specific information on the document content or purpose (e.g.: type of statement, invoice date, type or purpose of a report, etc…)

VERSION is a free-text segment that is used for version control. The entry gets auto-incremented when a document with identical name exists in the same folder.

[TRACKING] is a list driven segment that can be used to track the status of the document or where the physical document is located (e.g.: BOX 235, SHREDDER, PAID). eXadox uses the list to auto populate the segment and/or embed the tracking info into the PDF.

SOME GENERAL TIPS

- Focus on the part of the business that is the most paper burdened and that could bring the most value.
- Start with current incoming documents immediately and work on old documents as time permits.
- Make a decision on whether you wish to save or destroy your physical documents. If you wish to maintain them you may pack them chronologically (based on scan date and time) in numbered banker boxes destined for storage.
- Use suitable structured file naming conventions for each business activity.
- Get consensus with coworkers on a suitable file name structure in collaborative work environments.
- To maintain policy adherence, accuracy and minimize keyboard input, consider semi-automated structured file naming.

 For more info refer to: *eXadox White Paper: Semi-Automated Structured File Naming and Storage*

About the Author: Vince Santaguida is CEO and Founder of MultiCIM Technologies Inc. He has been involved with automation for over 30 years. He actively promotes business process automation and paperless office practices as a means to increase productivity.