

# TECH TUESDAY

## Document imaging can save time and money

Organizations that are buried under an avalanche of paperwork are turning to document imaging as a way to manage this growing problem. Document imaging is the process of converting paper documents into electronic files used with computers.

The electronic document is often just a picture of the page stored on CD or hard drive. Approximately 20,000 pages of document images can fit on one CD, and they can be used in ways that paper can't begin to achieve.

A document management system is usually built around software used for storing and retrieving document images. Paper documents are scanned with a document scanner attached to a computer and converted into electronic images.

These images are imported into the document management software and may be marked with specific information about the file, a process known as "indexing." Indexing allows for easy



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location of the documents later.

For example, a doctor's office could have charts indexed by patient's name, account number, physician's name and date. Any one of the index fields, or a combination of fields, can be used in an inquiry to search for the document. When found, the document is displayed on screen and can be read, faxed, e-mailed or printed with just a few steps.

With the right systems in place it is not necessary for your employees to leave their desks

or handle paper just to locate or duplicate a paper document. The time spent walking to the file cabinet, finding and then refileing documents, along with problems like missing pages or whole files, can thus be avoided.

In fact, these repetitive steps ultimately result in payroll costs that can be significantly reduced or eliminated. The payroll expenses that result from inefficient paper handling typically grow larger with the traditional paper filing system the longer a company is in business, and/or as the size of the company grows.

Other benefits for businesses that implement electronic document management include improved customer service and response time. Since electronic documents can be shared on a network, location of a document is not an issue, and a number of people with proper permissions will be able to use it simultaneously. Electronic documents can be selectively restricted to allow reading, but not copying

or printing, to ensure security of the information.

Copies of electronic documents on media such as CDs can easily be generated and stored off-site for disaster preparedness. Document images can be converted to editable files, such as word processing or spreadsheets, using optical character recognition technology, minimizing data re-entry. Storage, mailing and duplication of documents can be cheaper and easier by adapting procedures to utilize document imaging. There are many other advantages.

Many organizations have considered document imaging as a solution to reducing their volume of old paper documents, with the idea that they will need less storage space, saving on rent. This is not always the case, because the cost of conversion can often exceed the cost of storing the documents for the time period required by their industry. Financial advantages to using document imaging are almost always based on

saved time and improved services, and not storage costs alone.

Using document imaging requires document management software for organized storage and retrieval, and a fast document scanner (more than 25 pages per minute). It is not practical to use the typical \$200 off-the-shelf scanners with their included software for more than a few scans per day due to their slow speed and lack of enterprise-oriented features.

Businesses without the equipment, training or staff time dedicated to converting paper to electronic documents in-house will often utilize a service bureau to convert the documents into appropriate electronic format for their document management system.

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