

A Guide to Going Paperless

Introduction



The paperless office is being transformed from a much ridiculed cliché into a cost saving reality. Especially now it ties in with worries about the ecological consequences of endless printed paper documents and forms. One in six pages printed in the workplace is never used – the equivalent of over 1.2 million average sized trees – according to printer supplier, Lexmark. Yet a Capita survey into paper use in the UK found that 47 per cent of offices store more than 50 per cent of their documents in paper format.

Businesses that survived the dotcom crash have already taken action to cut their outgoings significantly. Yet many have also overlooked the cost of document production which, according to research done by Gartner, accounts for between one and three per cent of a company's total annual revenue. IDC says it's more like five per cent.

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If a business can cut down significantly on the amount of paper it uses, then there are obvious savings to be had on the costs associated with printer consumables and postage. That's a major advantage given that the UK's Royal Mail is moving towards a more complicated system which charges for size as well as distance from August 21st.

The hidden costs of paper-based processes

Aside from the obvious direct cost savings, it's even possible to save the office space required to store paper and on energy costs as fewer printers will be required. Gartner has estimated that it costs £15 just to file a piece of paper and £500 a year rental space for a single filing cabinet.

Another major incentive to move towards a paperless office is document retrieval. There's a hidden cost derived from the loss of productivity when it takes so long to find paper documents. A prerequisite of impending legislation with the forthcoming UK Companies Act will be that documents should be made accessible to auditors, regulators or internal staff at any time. Electronic storage will then become the only viable option.

Document security is a further risk. Electronic documents sent via email can be protected by document security including passwords and encryption, meaning that they cannot be read by an unauthorised recipient. The same can not be said for paper documents. Documents sent in the post can be intercepted by any number of people, and may not even arrive at the intended destination. Even if they do, it can only take a moment's carelessness for a confidential document to be viewed by someone other than the intended recipient.

With the increasing risks and costs involved with paper based processes, it seems that the paperless office offers a compelling alternative. How should companies embrace it?

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The benefits of document automation

There are a number of ways to reduce the amount of paper used in the office, and the cost associated with document production. One increasingly popular option is to deploy document automation software across the company.

Document automation software can enable companies to reduce the physical cost of printing, posting and storing paper documents, but it can also reduce the time spent producing and sending business documents. Companies are often not aware of the hidden costs created from inefficient business processes. For example, the Institute of Management and Information estimate that it costs more than \$50 to process and manage a paper invoice. And other business documents are likely to be just as expensive.

Consider what is involved when producing an invoice for a customer. An employee must first locate the account on the system, generate an invoice, print the invoice to a printer (on expensive company stationery), retrieve the printed document, put the invoice in an envelope, address the envelope and finally add postage, before the document is sent through the post for the customer to receive the following day, at the earliest.

Now consider how document automation software could improve on this process. With such a solution the employee simply needs to select a batch of invoices to be processed; at this stage, their intervention would then be complete. The software would then automatically extract the contact information from each individual account, merge each invoice onto company stationery and add any other important documents such as terms of business before converting to PDF or TIFF format, ready to be delivered immediately via email or fax to the recipients.



But can document automation software handle the management and archiving of business documents? The International Data Corporation claim that knowledge workers spend three and a half hours each week searching for information that is never found and another three hours recreating that lost content.

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Document automation software allows companies to store commonly used documents centrally, and also to archive sent documents to a network folder or to existing applications such as document management, CRM and ERP or accounts packages. This means that when documents are needed, they can be found quickly, which is especially useful for customer facing teams.

Security is an important consideration for all businesses. Concerns over moving to a paperless office are often based on fears of electronic documents being intercepted or manipulated. There are essentially two ways of formatting and distributing business documents that reduce this risk – fax and PDF. Document automation software allows users to decide how their document is sent, by fax or as a PDF by email, and ensures that the document is sent securely. The best solutions hook seamlessly into existing applications such as Microsoft Outlook, to automatically apply security to documents.

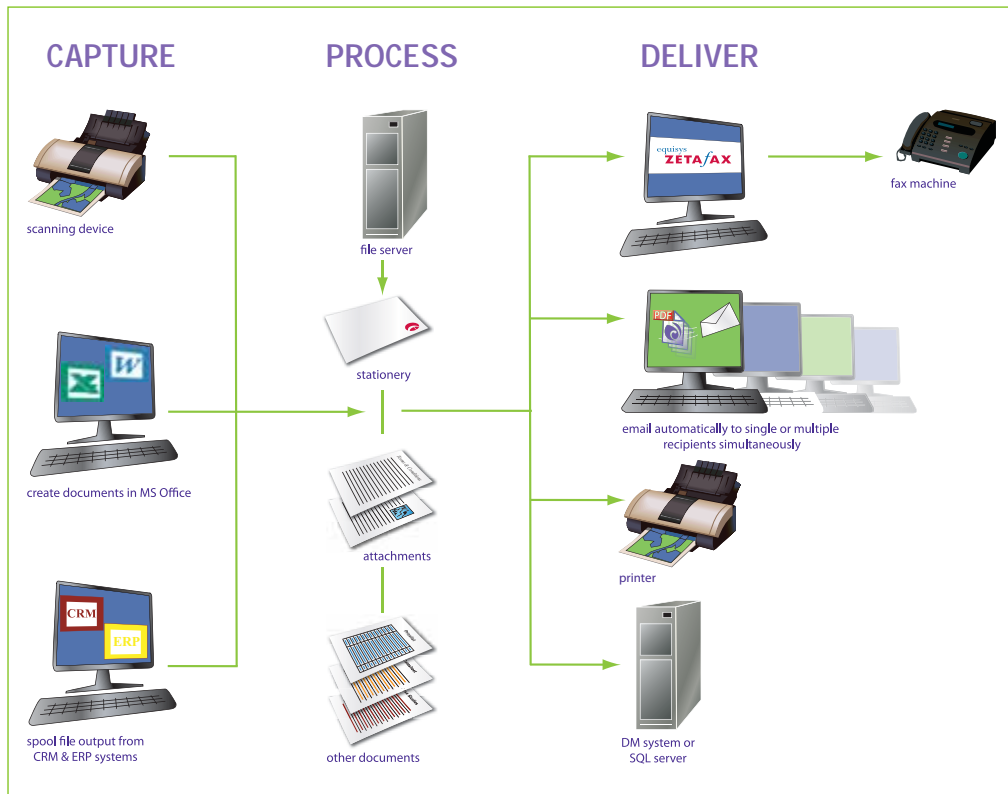
Conclusion

The reliance on paper isn't cost effective for any business. For companies to move away from paper-based processes and embrace electronic document production, we have to be sure that it doesn't just replace paper, it improves on it.

Document automation software not only removes the cost of printing and posting paper documents, it also reduces the time involved in document production, archiving and retrieval, whilst offering a more secure way to correspond with customers and suppliers.

Document automation at a glance

Paper problem	Document automation advantage
Paper processes account for up to 3% of annual revenue	Eliminates the cost of document production and generates time savings
Costs of storage and lost productivity and wasted time retrieving filed documents	Quick retrieval saves time and leads to better customer service
Concerns over document security	Document security automatically applied to electronic documents. They can't be viewed by unauthorised recipients or unknowingly amended



About Zetadocs PDF



Zetadocs® helps network users create, deliver and share electronic business documents. The simple to use user interface allows users to combine multiple documents to create a single PDF file that can be merged to company stationery and sent across mixed media: email, fax, or to a shared network printer or folder.

Commonly used documents, such as product brochures are stored centrally and can be applied automatically. Sent documents can be saved to a central document archive, CRM application or document management system for fast retrieval of historical customer data.

Zetadocs can eliminate many of the costs associated with document production and delivery. The business documents it produces have a consistent look and feel, and can be shared with other users, enhancing customer service.

Zetadocs is designed for use right across businesses – in sales, marketing, finance, operations and customer service teams. It brings improvements in productivity, efficiency, compliance and quality control.

About Equisys

Equisys produces software packages for document production and delivery, including the award winning Zetafax® network fax server and newly acclaimed Zetadocs® PDF software that creates and emails personalized PDF documents. Equisys software products are designed for small and mid-market businesses, and for departmental use at multinational companies. They stand out from the competition by being simple to install and manage, reliable and great value – backed by outstanding service and support. Equisys has over 60,000 customers, in more than 100 countries, who are served through an international partner network of distributors, VARs, resellers and ISVs.

The company's market leading fax server, Zetafax, speeds the flow of critical business documents by enabling users to send and receive faxes on their PCs. It integrates with ERP, CRM, accounting and other applications for automated faxing from those systems, providing auditable records of fax communications. Zetadocs helps users work smarter by creating and emailing PDF documents, streamlining business processes to remove tedious manual procedures and help companies improve the service levels they offer.

Equisys was founded in 1987 and has offices in London, UK and Atlanta GA, USA.

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