

# Document Management Guide

A compendium of articles addressing the effective implementation of Document Management

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# Document Management explained

## How it works 'the iTunes analogy'

Can you remember a time before iTunes when all your music was on CD? You could meticulously categorise this in alphabetical order or perhaps by genre. In no time at all though the order was 'challenged' and perhaps CD's started to go missing or they weren't where you expected them to be. Then along came Apple with iTunes and everything became much easier.

With iTunes you can create a playlist of your favourite artists and you can browse in any order you like. Adding a new album is easy, you just drag it over and if you want to share your music with your other computers, you can click a setting and the computer in the kitchen can now play your music.

And back to business...

Document Management is a bit like iTunes for your everyday business information. Everything can be centralised in one place and finding a letter, delivery note or bank statement is so much easier if there is one electronic copy that can be viewed whenever you want to, within a few clicks.

Why does my business need Document Management?

Below we share just some of the major benefits but if we had to summarise in one line...

It's all about...

## Increasing productivity & profit

Think about how you create and access your company paper records now? Chances are that like the majority of UK businesses, large and small, you create physical records in paper format and these will include all customer information, accounts payable, purchase ledger, payroll detail, delivery notes, internal correspondence, job cards, despatch details, invoices etc. In short a veritable mountain of paper every year will find a new home within your business and take up residence in hanging and lever arch files, archive boxes, drawers, cupboards and filing cabinets all around your office. The National Office of Statistics calculates that for every desk in UK businesses there are three filing cabinets keeping the desk company. That's good news for manufacturers of filing cabinets but definitely not good news for the efficiency of your business.

Now consider the alternatives and subsequent real benefits if all of those documents were electronically stored.

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**SPACE EFFICIENCY** You could free up vital and expensive floor space once occupied by all this storage creating space for productive purposes i.e. revenue producing staff!

**TIME SAVING** No more time consuming trips to the filing cabinet only to find the file you want has been misfiled, is on someone else's desk or simply missing.

**ACCESS** Document Management offers significant improvements over conventional paper filing by allowing multiple users to access the same document(s) at the same time. This dramatically speeds up communication and subsequent decision making as all interested parties can view, discuss and implement actions simultaneously.

**CONSISTENCY** With paper based control and purely human input there is always the risk of documentation not being completed correctly and therefore failing to provide the data required for later reference. Document Management can be intelligently employed to enforce consistency and quality of information at the level you require. For example, no longer will consistency suffer as you add new employees or temporary staff to cover for sick or holidaying personnel. Different departments may also have different checking or approval processes and once defined a Document Management system will ensure they are followed.

**PRODUCTIVITY & PROFIT** One major and very real hidden cost that any paper reliant business faces is the amount of employee time taken to work with conventional paper filing systems. As an example lets take a £10 an hour employee and assume they take just 5 minutes to get up from their desk, walk to the filing area, find their chosen file, work with it, refile it and return to their desk. If that happens only five times a day then that equates to over 100 hours per annum – or put another way – just over £1000 per annum in wages – for just one employee. Multiply that realistically by the number of staff who access files every day in your business and the numbers are large enough to make any accountant cry! – Instant fix???

A document management system that allows staff to find and work with records but without ever leaving their desks can recoup those costs in an instant AND massively improve productivity.

**SECURITY** However you currently store your documents, electronically or otherwise, it's a good bet that you don't have adequate security or disaster recovery in place. Document Management allows you to create copies that can be backed up in a variety of ways, including off-site. This ensures that no unforeseen fire, flood, identity thief or even disgruntled employee can threaten the integrity of your most valuable data.

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## Document Scanning Software

Some business categories such as legal, accountancy and logistics as well as busy accounts departments, seem to get swamped by paper and handling all of the information coming in on a daily basis is hard work.

A document management system is the efficient way of finding information faster. It's the equivalent of running iTunes for your paperwork – all of the information is in one place, its easy to search for specific documents and it's much faster to categorise as well.

We work with a number of great solutions including FileDirector, Filehold and Therefore and can tailor to suit any given application or requirement.

# How Document Management will dramatically improve productivity and profits

Over 85 per cent of the Fortune 500 use document management and they use it for two simple reasons. It improves productivity and therefore profitability. Having said that, only 15 per cent of global business in total use or have ever considered implementing an electronic document management system. WHY?

The answer is simple, lack of understanding coupled to resistance to change. Resistance to change is fine if you don't understand the benefit of making that change but KNOWING that altering the way you access and reference documents will reap massive time and cost benefits and STILL not making the change is reckless and illogical. If a recognised business guru, someone you really trusted, someone with a faultless track record told you that by changing a physical filing system to an electronic version would improve paper handling productivity by as much as 45 per cent you would probably listen and then do something about it. After all, who would not want to improve productivity by that much. No one serious about improving their business that's for sure.

There are knock-on benefits too, not least of which is freeing up expensive office space. The National office of statistics tell us that for every desk in UK offices, three filing cabinets will be keeping that desk company! With office rents in the major cities running at record levels it can be as expensive to keep a filing cabinet as it is to keep a junior employee!

So in brief the benefits of at least looking into electronic document management make a compelling argument. Save time, money, space. Increase productivity, profits, customer response times and gain a significant competitive edge.

A one hour consultation is something most document management companies will agree to if they are serious about their work so take advantage of that and go check out document management, the future of filing.

FREE one hour consultations from click2scan, the UK's fastest growing and most authoritative reference point for all things document management related. Recognised industry experts in scanner hire, scanner sales, document management software, support. call us on 0845 873 8600.

Geoff Shilton, Marketing Manager, Click2Scan Ltd

## How to save space and time whilst improving efficiency – filing cabinets onto discs

Have you considered outsourcing your document archive problems? Not to physically store but to electronically store within your server. Nearly every business in the UK has a document storage problem. Accessing filing cabinets for important information that may have been misfiled or misplaced or just plain missing being one of them. There are an estimated three million filing cabinets in the UK taking up an average six million square feet! Here is the alternative.

That is great news for manufacturers of filing cabinets but not such good news for those businesses who would rather use the space for more productive purposes i.e. revenue producing staff.

There IS a better way to store documents than this archaic, time honored method however and you are probably already aware of electronic document management and perhaps even using a system. This is where documents are scanned to disc or server giving instant access with no danger of misfiling. Archive scanning is another matter however. Some businesses we talk to will have hundreds of filing cabinets or archive boxes containing historical files going back many years in certain cases. Taking the time to unpack all of these files and scan is a daunting task, taking up valuable labour resource and taking serious chunks of time to get right.

Imagine how much simpler this could all be if you could outsource this. At the same as just scanning your archive you could also improve the way they are referenced or indexed. e.g. A customer file when physically accessed requires the person viewing to find the relevant delivery note, invoice, letter, note or dispatch advice. By indexing these sections electronically when they are scanned, you can pull up many different reference points at the click of a mouse. For example, you may want to see all handwritten notes by a certain manager or author, all relevant technical drawings for a specific building or project. Indexed electronic document management will allow you to do this.

Of secondary but equally important consideration is security. With physical storage you have no protection against unwanted eyes. Perhaps competition or a disgruntled employee. Electronic Document Management can contain layers of varying access to prevent those without a need to know, not to know!

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Finally, at the end of the outsourced scanning project you decide whether you want the originals back or, as in most cases, simply destroyed freeing up all of that valuable space that was taken by the ubiquitous filing cabinet(s). A certificate of destruction will be provided to show the audit trail and HMRC no longer require originals but are happy to see scanned copies so in very few cases do you actually need to keep the originals. Exceptions to this are the originals of legal documents such as Wills or EPA's which must be kept for a minimum 100 years.

If you are keen to move into the paperless world then outsourced scanning is a good start and highly recommended as a massive improvement over conventional filing methods.

# Document Scanning for the small business user

Document scanning and document management i.e. the ability to file and retrieve documents electronically, has long been recognised by major corporations as the only way to effectively manage the vast paper mountains that they generate on a daily basis. Smaller businesses however can benefit from all of the advantages that big business enjoys. So what are the benefits and why should a new or small business consider adopting electronic document management?

1. Viewing documents at the PC without the need to visit the filing cabinet.
2. No lost or misfiled documents, so often the case with physically filed originals.
3. Higher levels of security as access to important documents can be limited by password.
4. HMRC no longer require original documents as proof and are happy to take scanned documents as documentary evidence.
5. The ability for multiple users to view documents at the same time. e.g. sharing access to electronically scanned invoices with your accountant or bookkeeper.
6. More space efficient. Storing documents electronically frees up valuable office space that would otherwise be taken by filing cabinets.
7. A basic system can be purchased for a few hundred pounds making adoption of document scanning a very cost effective solution.
8. Expandable and scalable system to cope with growth.

There are many proprietary systems available on the market today ranging from conventional data which is saved to disc or hard drive through to cloud computing solutions where your company data is uploaded to a remote secure server.

The choices are mind boggling for those with no experience or knowledge of document scanning or document management and I would recommend doing some research to establish the credentials of an independent document management expert, either locally or nationally. Ask for testimonials and obtain two or three different quotations/proposals.

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Explain clearly what documents you wish to manage and think carefully about the information you need to extract from the page. For example, you may want to cross refer an invoice with a delivery note either by date order or by customer name or order number. This process is called indexing and every business has different requirements.

Ensure that whoever you decide to place your business with has a good track record and have been in business long enough to have a high level of specialist industry knowledge. Ask them for written undertakings of software updates or licenses and establish that these will be provided either free of charge or at cost effective pricing levels.

Finally, don't get drawn into long contracts, there is no need for this and any business who asks to tie you in to a year long contract or six month cancellation clause have no faith in their ability to keep you consistently happy.

Thanks for reading and I hope this basic guide to document scanning and document management has been useful.

# Document Management – extracting information off the page

First lets deal with some basic jargon and what it stands for and what it was designed for:

OCR or 'Optical Character Recognition' is the term used for recognising the text on a scanned page.

ICR or 'Image Character Recognition' is the term used for recognising handwriting on a scanned page.

Once a page has been scanned, the scan is an image or 'photograph' of the page and cannot be edited. This is great news for compliance purposes but many people looking to scan pages want to speed up the business process and extract the information on the page.

Here are some examples of documents where the information on the page may need to be read:

- ⇒ Delivery or despatch notes
- ⇒ Bank statements
- ⇒ Invoices
- ⇒ Questionnaires & surveys
- ⇒ Contracts

"With the right software, configured correctly, information can be processed quickly and exported into any application using CSV, XML or DLL."

## Free form recognition

Up until recently, recognition worked by 'drawing' around an area of the screen and telling the software application to read this area every time a page is scanned. This is known as Zonal OCR and it a a very efficient and highly effective way of extracting the information you need.

This works well for many documents but requires a 'template' to be created for each document. As an example, if you are scanning delivery notes for your 10 clients, each client's delivery note will look different and as a result will need a separate set of instructions.

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Freeform recognition works differently because the whole page is read and then information on the page is extracted based on a set of instructions. This means we can scan all of our suppliers invoices and then set some rules to look for the invoice number on the page – i.e. find the label ‘invoice number, our ref, client ref or invoice no.’ and then to the right, or below find a value.

With freeform, a flexible template can be created to interrogate information and then use business rules to check the likely possibility that the information we have found is correct. As an example, if we are looking for an invoice total, we can look for other values and then add them up to verify that the total is indeed the total value of the invoice.

A freeform template may require some programming behind the scenes, but once tested will be extremely powerful and allow processing of tens of thousands of documents on a daily basis with direct export in the exact format you need for your business applications.

# Document Scanning – why you should consider outsourcing?

This topic raises its head virtually every day at our headquarters. Customers will often wrestle with the economics of whether to hire or buy a scanner and factor in their own labour costs for an in-house solution before requesting a price for bureau scanning from us, not a decision that can be taken lightly.

Clearly where your own internal labour resource is not an issue it will in most cases be more cost effective to do it yourself. However it's not quite as simple as that as you also have to take into account the complexity of the scanning job i.e.:

- ⇒ Does it require indexing or complex preparation?
- ⇒ Are the paper sizes compatible with a document feeder or will you have to flatbed scan which can increase the labour intensity ten fold?
- ⇒ What do you do with the originals – archive again or destroy?
- ⇒ How long do you legally have to keep documents before destroying?

Any professional document management company should be able to answer all of these questions for you and indeed most are already answered on our website. So with an ever moving target comprising many variables is it possible to easily calculate the benefits of in-house scanning vs outsourcing? The short answer here is probably not, unless you have a penchant for spreadsheets and a keen understanding of document management in its many guises. However, the following will help you make some basic assumptions in your analysis.

## Estimated cost for outsourcing document scanning

For a quick ball park guide we will assume that the majority of your archive comprises A4 documents, not stapled or clipped in anyway and therefore ready to scan. The price per sheet for bureau scanning (where a bureau scanning company do the work for you) will be in the region of 4.2-5.5p per scan, dependant on quantity or put another way, an average a four drawer filing cabinet can be scanned for circa £375. This includes collection, secure storage whilst awaiting scanning, subsequent scanning, digital transfer (normally to disc) and final destruction of originals if appropriate (some documents you CANNOT legally destroy such as Wills or EPA's).

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The obvious benefits here are that the final product/service is being carried out by experienced professionals and operator error or loss of documents have been factored out. Your resource has not been tied up for chunky periods of salaried time when they could have been producing revenue elsewhere in your business.

### Estimated cost for in-house document scanning

This one is far more tricky and hinges quite heavily on whether, as previously mentioned, you have the resource, scanning hardware with the capability to handle the type and volume of documentation, associated software plus relevant knowledge to guarantee a satisfactory result.

Generally speaking if you combine archive scanning along with your day-to-day scanning of current documents an in-house facility will in the long run prove to be the better option. A starting point for a document management/scanning system could be as little as one small scanner and some basic training, say £1000 or so. This will cope with the average demands of a small business. Companies with heavy paper usage will require more sophisticated solutions and these can run into several thousand pounds as a total investment with added costs for support and training.

### Summary

Taking all of the above into account its really a personal choice based around need vs available labour vs cost. If an electronic document management solution with all of its space and time saving benefits is part of your company's strategic forward thinking then an in-house solution will probably make more sense.

One off demands for reduction in archive filing for example will probably be more suited to outsourcing. All companies will produce written quotations free of charge and our suggestion would be to get them to do exactly that and do the maths for you. The really good news is that document management really is within the grasp of even the smallest company and once you experience the facility to file and reference all of your documents without leaving your work station you will never want to return to the century old and time consuming tradition of trekking off to the filing cabinets ever again!

## How to achieve a truly 'green' paper-less office

We hear the word 'green' used a lot these days but how many of us really try to implement it in our daily lives other than separating the glass from tin, from cardboard come refuse day?

The 'green' office is an even more elusive holy grail and the biggest contributor to what has become the absolute antithesis of a 'green' office is the vast amount of documentation that we all produce each and every day. Walk into any office regardless of size in any town across the country and its impossible not to see evidence of it everywhere.

Very large producers of paperwork, (who would otherwise eventually run out of space to put people!), send their archive paperwork to one of the many warehouse storage businesses who specialise in physical document storage. Sadly all that's happened here is the problem has been transported off-site but with the added knock on effect of creating an even bigger 'less-green'! carbon footprint with the requirement for lorries and forklift trucks etc.

This 'out of sight out of mind' approach is certainly not a green or even efficient solution to storing mountains of paperwork. So what can be done to move towards the creation of a truly greener office?

There is an alternative and it's been available for a number of years. Sadly however, less than 10 per cent of the business community choose to use it. Its generically known as 'Document Management' and in the case of archiving involves nothing more complicated than electronically scanning the archived, or even current, documents to an electronic form which are then stored on a PC or network.

But the benefits don't stop there. We not only remove the need for filing cabinets, archive boxes, lever arch files and document storage warehousing but we are able to access all of our documents instantly on demand without getting up from our desks.

Now we're talking! Actually we're talking bottom line too as in a stroke we've increased productivity via a rapid call up of vital documents that would otherwise take us expensive chunks of time to physically access using conventional paper storage methods.

### The pros and cons of off-site document storage

1. If stored off-site, accessing your archived documents is time consuming and inefficient.
2. Unless stored under ideal de-humidified conditions your documents can deteriorate over time.
3. Off-site storage is by definition subject to flood, fire, loss and/or potential id theft.
4. If stored on your own premises filing cabinets or archive boxes can very quickly absorb space that could be utilised for more productive purposes such as additional revenue earning staff.

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5. Accessing files in a physical filing system is time consuming and inefficient. The National Office of Statistics estimate that as much as 50 hours per person, per annum are spent accessing document filing!
6. Documents can be mis-filed, misplaced or simply lost.
7. Current legislation directs us to keep certain documents for anything from five years to 100 years for documents such as wills and epa's.
8. On the positive side, outsourced archive storage is relatively cheap. To store 250 typical archive boxes will currently cost about 50p per month, per box or £1500 per annum in total.

### The pros and cons of electronic document storage

1. Access to all documents is instant, literally the time it takes for the click of a mouse.
2. Removes the time wasting associated with leaving your desk and accessing the filing area, viewing files and then having to refile.
3. Multiple users can access the same documents at the same time which is ideal for multi user referencing, conference calls or discussions.
4. Promoting non reliance on conventional filing will free up valuable space and with London office rents hovering around £100 per sq feet this can make a massive difference to the bottom line.
5. Makes ID theft, disgruntled employee theft or competitor document theft far easier to control via password access.
6. HMRC no longer require physical documents as proof and are happy to view and access scanned documents.
7. Removes the need for physical archive warehouse storage which increases the carbon footprint.
8. Archive files are collected, scanned to disc and returned or destroyed with destruction certification. This process frees up your own valuable labour resource.
9. With an electronic document management, solution keeping documents or back-ups for a statutory five-100 year period is a breeze. One four drawer filing cabinet typically equals one disc!
10. Confidential documents can be password protected with access strictly limited on a 'need to know' basis.
11. On the less positive side, purchasing your own document management system will require an initial investment although outsourcing archive scanning is relatively cost effective if the volume of your physical archive is the key issue.

Will you be the 90 per cent of businesses who don't embrace this freely available technology or the 10 per cent who benefit from increased productivity, improved customer response times and no more time wasting trips to the filing area trying to find misfiled, misplaced or just plain missing records?

# Basic guide to choosing a document scanner

## Essential considerations when buying a document scanner

We recently received a call from a potential client who was new to the concept of document scanning. They had been conventionally filing paper documents in filing cabinets for years (like 90 per cent of UK business do) but were running out of space to put people! Legally they had to retain records for up to 10 years so destroying them all was out of the question. They needed to purchase a document scanner and document management solution but were confused by the literally hundreds of scanners and solutions available. "Why didn't anyone produce a simple guide that helped the 'new to scanning' business community decide on the right scanner to suit any and every need?" Good idea we thought and who better to compile it than the UK's fastest growing document management company. We hope you find it useful and any feedback, good, bad or indifferent is welcome, particularly if it's of the good variety and you would like to buy from us!

## Document scanner types (need vs speed vs greed!)

Now we're not saying that some companies will try and sell you a higher specification scanner than you actually need but buyer beware here please. First and foremost you need to establish the amount of documents you are going to scan in any given day, week or month, allowing for seasonal highs and lows. Secondly think about the size of original you need to scan, A4, A3 etc.

### Low volume

At the lower end of the volume capability spectrum and particularly for home use, there are some good scanners, Canon's excellent new P-150 for example, for just a few hundred pounds which are more than adequate for occasional scanning of bank statements, the odd photo, bills etc. No more shuffling piles of paper looking for the water rates from third quarter 2008 but everything neatly filed and indexed on your home PC. These small scanners are also highly portable and ideal too for the business person on the move, great for scanning receipts and business cards etc.

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## Medium volume

As we move into scanners designed purely for the business user the biggest effect on price will be the scanner's volume ability. Most manufacturers will quote a recommended daily maximum volume and these vary from a few hundred scans to tens or even hundreds of thousands of scans. A good quality mid range scanner should easily handle 5000 scans daily, more than enough for most types of business. Expect scanning speeds of circa 50 scans per minute and to pay anywhere from £2500 to around £4000 here.

## High volume

Those who are more heavily reliant on paper records and have higher throughputs i.e. accountants, lawyers, government bodies, large manufacturing companies etc, will certainly be better suited to higher volume scanners with capabilities in the region of 50,000 scans and upwards per day. Scanning speeds of around 100 scans per minute and typical prices range between £12,000 to £15,000.

## Scanner productivity- document feeder vs manually feed

For profit conscious businesses today the game is all about revenue vs cost. NOTHING wastes more time in any office environment than constant trips to the photocopier or filing cabinet. Accessing documents at your PC is therefore a major benefit, as is scanning them to your PC or server. It's important therefore to make sure that your scanner has the right productivity features. You definitely do not want to be buying a flatbed scanner without a document feeder knowing that you need to scan several thousand documents a month. Feeding that amount of documents manually, sheet by sheet is definitely not going to help the bottom line. There will be applications however where only a flatbed scanner will do, technical drawings or generally anything larger than A3 and the flatbed comes into its own. Most document feeders will handle somewhere between 50 and 100 sheets of paper.

## Resolutions/image quality

Nearly all scanners today will offer you 600dpi (dots per inch) resolution. To put this into perspective, most magazine photographs are 300 dpi so the quality of finished scan is extremely high. You may however only need to scan black and white text where 300 dpi is more than acceptable. The ability to offer both is built-in to most medium and high volume scanners.

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## Scan both sides at the same time

One of the most impressive features of a proper document scanner is the ability to scan both sides at the same time. In addition, most scanners will have a blank page removal setting as well and to make sure you do not scan two pages at the same time, Ultrasonic Double Feed detection will stop the scanning if it thinks a page has been missed. This allows really accurate scanning which is essential for compliance.

## Do I need additional software?

## Are scanners difficult to set up?

Generally no as every scanner will have some form of pre-loaded software package installed by the manufacturer and the great majority are USB interfaced, plug and play straight from the box.

There you have it. A basic guide to scanner choice. Not comprehensive by any means but enough to ensure you don't fall foul of buying totally the wrong scanner. Thanks for reading.

# A brief history of Document Management

## *The past, the present and the future*

A document management system is a computer based software and hardware application that is used to store, track and retrieve electronic information which originated, in most cases, as a paper based document. Available now for nearly three decades the origination and originator(s) of electronic document management is the subject of much speculation. In order for someone to create something entirely new there generally has to be a identifiable and justifiable 'need'. In the case of document management the 'need' for electronic storage and retrieval of documents and images was first identified back in the 1970's. The dawn of time as far as computer technology is concerned!

Regular trips to the filing cabinets or archived storage areas of a a busy office were both time consuming and as inefficient back then as they are today. Efficiency equalled speed of both storage and retrieval which in turn meant more productivity. The 'need' for something faster than the labour intensive walk to the filing cabinets was born.

Several software design studios and hardware vendors claim to have created document management but the truth is that it evolved through a number of applications from many different companies. The first recognised true document management appeared in the 1980's when it was possible to purchase document management systems that catered for the electronic storage and retrieval of paper based documents, photos and prints etc.

These were in the main stored on local user file systems so were not that flexible for multi users in multiple locations. They were collectively known as document imaging systems mainly due to the main capabilities which were the storage, indexing, capture and eventual retrieval of image file formats.

The industry software standard for document management these days is either PDF or TIFF format (Portable document format and tagged image file format).

**TIFF** was invented in the mid 1980's by the Aldus Corporation to create a standard file format for storage of scanned images. Now controlled by Adobe there have been no major updates since 1992.

**PDF** was invented by Adobe in 1993 for the purpose of facilitating portable document exchange between systems and applications. It's been developed and updated over the years and there are now three types:

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- 1. NORMAL** The most common form of PDF and usually created from a document such as Microsoft Word. It exhibits the full range of text from the original page with coding to define specifics such as font sizes etc.
- 2. IMAGE ONLY** This is a PDF that has been created from one or more images – usually by scanning a document either directly to PDF or by converting a scanned TIFF image to PDF.
- 3. SEARCHABLE** This is an ‘image only’ PDF that contains a hidden lay of text generated by an OCR program (optical character recognition). This enables the file to be searched in the same way you would search a normal PDF and text can be copied and pasted.

## The present day

Demands from business are already ‘pushing the envelope’ for document management and the advent of cheap cloud storage and relatively inexpensive internal and web applications now mean that document management is affordable for even the smallest business user. OCR for example is already playing a very large part in the future of document management as the demand for digital formatting increases. Many health records, financial statements and legal documents are already being handled and accessed digitally. Current innovation in ebooks for example are producing a strong demand for digital formats together with digital publishing and downloaded distribution. However we are still a long, long way off a truly paper less business environment.

## The future

The ultimate goal has to be ‘paperless’. Statistics say that it takes two dozen large trees to make one tonne of paper. Stack that paper on a conventional pallet and you have about a ton in weight. Imagine now how many trees are felled each day, even allowing for recycling, to supply this planet with the paper that we currently all use in our daily business lives. For this reason alone electronic document management as a total solution will be a major contributor in replacing conventional paper formats in the future. We will eventually run out of trees, its that simple.

Experts predict that eventually everyone will carry an extremely light and cheap document reader that will allow us all to synchronise, update and distribute documents to colleagues or customers. This will change the way we handle a lot of what we currently take for granted and without consciously thinking of the impact we are having on the planet. For example, instead of large corporations spending millions of pounds producing coupons and advertisements that are mailed to customers, we will be able to receive them on demand via digital processing and publishing networks or email. This currently is underway but is still in its infancy.

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Businesses in the future will become more de-centralised with off-site workers communicating not through trips to the filing cabinet but via online document management access and advances and improvements in on-line security will make it easier for all of us to receive and store documents electronically. Banks already offer paper less statements as an aid to improving efficiency and cutting costs. Other sectors of business will surely follow in time. A unique key access protocol will provide the vehicle to enable this massive sea change to become a reality. We already utilise pin numbers for bank cash machines. In the not so distant future accessing statements, reports, health records, legal documents and even theatre or travel tickets will all be electronically motivated in the future. The world of document management is about to get a whole lot more interesting with the added benefits of improving the one commodity we all only have a finite amount of time.

## Scanning Wills and EPA's – the legal admissibility

Guidance – the consensus on electronic scanning,  
storage and destruction

We were recently invited to meet with a large south west based law firm who wanted to explore the options available to them for the secure and legal management of thousands of Wills and EPA's.

They had been advised by one document management company that the best and cheapest option was to scan to disc and destroy the originals. Naturally the senior partner was horrified at this suggestion but it did raise some important questions that are answered here:

Is a scanned image of a Will or EPA legally admissible?

A scanned image of a Will is a back-up and not a substitute. It can be used where an original has been lost or destroyed i.e. through fire etc. The Law Society requires solicitors to keep original Wills "as if people had reached 100 years old". So many probates now become disputed and this is often because of the provenance of the wills themselves - signatures of the deceased and their witnesses become vital evidence together with any issues of tampering (removing staples, seals, opening sealed envelopes etc).

Can I copy a Will and then destroy the original?

Absolutely not. Keeping originals safe is one of the key code of conduct rules. Knowingly destroying them could result in you being struck off!

What is the best way to store originals of Wills and EPAs?

Storing originals of Wills and EPA's on open shelving or non fire proof safes is certainly not recommended. Imagine losing all of your clients signed and witnessed originals through theft or fire? The consequences really don't bear thinking about. The Law Society of England & Wales, Standard's and Guidance

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Committee's view is that storing of deeds and other legal documents for clients is a professional service. The loss or destruction of such documents could, therefore, give rise to an investigation by the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors on the basis of inadequate professional services.

Storing Wills off site can also be risky as witnessed by the 2006 warehouse fire of a London based storage company. Hundreds of thousands of legal documents including Wills were destroyed. A fire proof safe is the safest option and ideally not stored high up in your building.

Can I store certain other legal documents photographically or electronically and destroy the originals?

Original documents, such as deeds, guarantees or certificates, which are not your own property, should not be destroyed without the express written permission of the owner, Where the work has been completed and the bill paid, other documents, including your file, may be stored for example on a CD rom, computer system or microfilm and then destroyed after a "reasonable" time. In cases of doubt the owner's written permission should always be sought.

What is the evidential value of a photographically or electronically stored document where the original has been destroyed?

This one is a bit of minefield and there is a dearth of judicial authority on this topic and, until the law and practice on the subject of microfilmed or electronically stored documents are clarified, it is only possible to provide general guidelines. The Law Society advises that:

(a) A microfilm of any document in a solicitor's file will be admissible evidence to the same extent, no more and no less, as the document itself, provided that there is admissible evidence of the destruction of the document and identification of the copy.

(b) Written evidence of the destruction of the original and of identification of the copy will enable the microfilm to be adduced in subsequent civil proceedings (under the Civil Evidence Act 1968) and in criminal proceedings (under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984)

## Can I destroy documents once I have held them for the relevant period?

Before deciding to destroy a file it is essential to consider who owns which documents (see opening paragraph of this article) No documents should be destroyed without the prior consent of the owner. You may always invite clients to take possession of their own paper, balancing the potential saving of space and expense against a possible loss of goodwill.

Note: This article has been compiled using a combination of Law Society of England & Wales guidelines and the views of a practicing Legal Industry professional. As such Click2Scan accept no responsibility for any actions resulting from advice given here. Independent clarification should always be sought and is advised.

## A convincing case for electronic document management

Even though a 100 per cent paperless office might not be a realistic possibility, using document scanning and digital storage should be the goal for every business from both an efficiency and eco friendly standpoint. Document scanners allow for the storage of data and conventional paper records with NO physical and expensive floor space requirements; an important consideration with today's high sq ft office rentals. Many offices have entire rooms devoted to paper file systems and in some cases, such as legal offices, the original document is the only one that matters. But in any office all documents can be stored digitally and be instantly accessible at the PC.

Document scanners can be used for sending faxes by email or over the internet. When used in this manner, the fax may be scanned from a paper document, sent electronically, read by the recipient, who stores that information on their computer without the need to produce a paper copy. Because so many people carry PDA's today, many documents can be scanned and made available to employees even when they are away from the office.

Directly scanning a document to be saved electronically, stored and retrieved at a later time, is a super efficient method of retaining copies of documents for information and archival purposes. This storage method can result in huge savings for businesses each year in paper costs, actual storage space within the office, and in time spent by employees handling paper documents through the process of filing, retrieving, and later re-filing once a task is complete.

By using our document scanning services, office staff can call up an image of any document with a few key clicks and put it away with even fewer clicks.

With the huge hard drive and CD storage space available today it makes sense to keep digital copies of documents even if you still prefer to keep the hard copies on site.

## Preserving old photos by Photo Scanning to disc - great for TV slide shows or PC

Photo scanning, the act of preserving old photo memories to disc or memory stick is big business in the UK. Estimates of half a billion photos languishing in old boxes, cupboards and drawers are probably about right but who really knows? One thing is for sure though and that is we all can lay our hands on old photos which capture some memory of times gone by. I recently had some old Royal Navy photos from 30 years ago scanned and to see them in large format on my 42 inch TV was a revelation. Details I had never noticed before came bouncing off the screen.

There are very few, less than three, companies in the UK who can offer scanning to disc for photos, slides, negatives and videos (to DVD) but Google will help you find them. Typical prices are about 10p per photo upto 40p for slides and a typical video will be about £10 to transfer to DVD.

Try to find a company who will arrange the whole process for you, from secure collection through to secure delivery back to you. Ask them if they are using trackable couriers or trusting them to the royal mail. Couriers are by far the most reliable of the two and if you are trusting your precious photos to anyone it should be an organisation that take security and trackability seriously.

In terms of resolution you can ask for 300 or 600dpi, obviously the latter being a higher quality. The costs of 600 dpi usually carry a 50 per cent surcharge. Don't bother with the higher resolution if you are only copying old black and white photos with a grainy image as its a total waste of money. 300dpi would be good enough for those oldies.

Hope that all helps and thanks for reading.