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Paperless Technology: Is Your Business Ready?

Can paperless content management software be a good fit for your business? Learn about one company that was able to shake their fax machine dependency by going paperless.

/24-7PressRelease/ - EASTPOINTE, MI, May 31, 2006 - What does paperless work environment mean? Could there really be an office with no paper? Not entirely. There will always be mail and memos and other documents floating around an office. A paperless work environment instead refers to a business losing dependence on documentation in traditional paper format and filed in a cabinet. An initial investment in paperless software, also referred to as Document Imaging or Paperless Content Management, could offer long-term cost-savings as productivity increases and the need for physical space and paper procurement decreases. As with any technological investment, specific business process and budget needs should be assessed. Here is some information to help you decide if paperless technology is right for your business.

B What is Paperless Content Management? _/B_

Paperless content management is the electronic capture, organization and storage of data and documentation including invoices, order forms and critical business documents. It often replaces the printed paper documentation that requires physical storage and security. This vital component of business technology can vary in functionality, complexity and cost. Generally, documents are automatically captured in electronic format if they are inbound via email, a web-form or fax machine. Those documents that are received in paper format, such as through the postal mail, will be electronically captured using a scanner. Once electronic, the documents are organized and stored securely on an Intranet, the Internet or a shared server. Users who are granted access through a unique ID and password can then retrieve, review and even update these documents from a computer.

B Who needs Paperless Document Management? _/B_

B Businesses with high volumes of incoming paper documents _/B_ need document management, such as a temporary help service receiving resumes via fax or a mail-order catalog company receiving a large number of order forms. Businesses will see a decrease in paper procurement and less physical space required for storage of documents. Those businesses using fax machines for inbound documents will also see a decrease in toner and machine maintenance. Further, employees who have access to documents from their desktop increase processing speed and efficiency.

B Offices with multiple locations or mobile employees _/B_ gain from document imaging because documents can be stored online rather than in a filing cabinet confined to a specific office. Secure access permissions can be set up using the public Internet or, for sensitive documentation, a VPN (Virtual Private Network) can be created to enable employees to access documents from anywhere with an online connection. Departments and individual employees can retrieve faxes, emails, and stored documents regardless of where their desk is located.

B Businesses who have strict adherence to government or industry regulations _/B_ such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) are required to securely store large amounts of documentation for audit purposes. Rather than maintaining large storage facilities with inefficient retrieval processes, businesses can organize and safely store documentation on a server and provide access to specific employees who can instantaneously retrieve documents as needed. Critical and highly sensitive data can be further secured through Disaster Recovery Services (DR) with a backup of documentation at a second location.

B The End of Fax Machine Dependency: One Company's Success Story _/B_

eTelRx (<http://www.etelrx.com>), a long-term care pharmacy provider in Eastpointe, MI, knows all about fax and paper dependency. eTelRx provides quality services to nursing homes and assisted living facilities by means of a highly-structured order fulfillment process that begins with a fax machine. A large customer base faxes in heavy volumes of prescription orders on a daily basis. eTelRx owner Paul Prentis found himself being buried by paper and toner costs and technicians who spent time inefficiently distributing and filing paper orders.

To decrease their paper dependency and increase productivity eTelRx integrated PECMA (Paperless Enterprise Content Management Application) software. PECMA (<http://www.e-integration.net/pecma.htm>) electronically grabs those incoming fax orders and organizes them on an internal server. Technicians can now easily retrieve orders from a queue for processing. Conveniently, orders are stored electronically rather than in file cabinets for ease of retrieval for audit purposes. The paperless integration was easy to implement, cost-effective and allows eTelRx to meet growing business needs without putting a strain on human resources.

B What do I need to know before signing up? _/B_

Contact vendors who would be willing to give you a no-cost and no obligation consultation for paperless software. Ask for a quote that would include implementation and licensing and/or Enterprise packages. To avoid unexpected costs make sure to address the following:

- Special equipment such as a scanner, a fax machine and/or a bar code scanner might be needed depending on your current processes. You might also need add-on software such as electronic signature.
- A high-speed and secure connection will be needed to maintain a quality connection for large amounts of incoming data. Additionally, know where your data will be stored. If the data can be stored at your own site you need to know that it will be safe from intrusion and physical disaster. If you will be storing large amounts or sensitive data it will probably be stored at an off-site hosting facility. Find out about monthly costs and how easily your data can be retrieved.
- Scanned documents (as opposed to electronic capture through the web, email or fax) have advantages and disadvantages. Scanning documents can be likened to taking a photograph. The benefit will still be electronic retrieval and paperless storage. The disadvantage is that scanned images are typically large and will require a good deal of server or hard drive space that may prove more costly than physical storage. Rather than scan documents you might consider changing your business process. For example, instead of receiving orders through postal mail, ask customers to use a web form or fax number to allow for electronic capture.
- Industry specific software compatibility needs to be investigated. If you are using software or applications for processing you need to determine how easily paperless software integration will be. A document imaging system might prove inefficient if you must manually update your existing legacy systems for every order processed.
- On-going maintenance and enhancement fees can be expected whether your solution is off-the-shelf or developed specifically for your needs. Discuss fees for updates and support. Also discuss the growth potential of the software you choose so that it can grow - affordably - as your business needs grow.

B How to Get Started _/B_

As with any technological investment, you don't know if it is right for your business until you do the research and tally the costs. If you are leery about hefty implementation costs or painful employee learning curves then look for a vendor who can start you out small and inexpensively with the guarantee that the system will be able to grow with your needs and your pocketbook.

And have realistic expectations about paperless software. As long as there are trees there will be paper in your office. Paperless software should be seen as an investment in decreased costs, increased efficiency and a vital component of your technological growth.

About E-Integration, Inc.

E-Integration, Inc. is a privately owned and minority certified Eastpointe, MI company offering Information Technology Services and Solutions. Web/app development, Class A Hosting, contract placement and network management services can be found at <http://www.e-integration.net>. VoIP telephony services can be found at <http://www.24voip.com>.