



Document Imaging For Any Size Company

As costs have come down, document imaging has become a viable technology for any company, regardless of size or resources.

In the past, document imaging was dominated by dedicated high-volume applications located in one specific department in an organization. In most cases, these solutions required expensive software and high-performance scanners manned by specially trained personnel. For many years, document imaging was only cost justifiable for Fortune 2000 companies that scanned huge amounts of documents and achieved large economies of scale.

With the advent of new hardware and software, document imaging became feasible for any size company, even small organizations. On the hardware side, high-resolution monitors, scanners, mass storage systems, and digital copiers are now more affordable than ever before. Additionally, the hardware's operability has also become easier and easier.

Most organizations, even small companies, have a "potential" scanner in the form of a digital copier already in their office. A digital copier can become a scan station with the addition of a scan option, sometimes costing as little as a few hundred dollars. The digital copier presents an extremely cost-efficient way to provide decentralized document capturing in an organization.

In document imaging's infancy, scanning a document tied up the only workstation equipped with a scanner, however adding multiple scanners at every workstation was cost prohibitive. Today, any office worker who wants to capture documents ad-hoc can use a digital copier. High-volume scanners for specific applications are also now affordable and easy-to-use.

New and exciting options have evolved in the software environment as well. The development is mainly driven by the concept of increasing document imaging's functionality and ease-of-use by integrating electronic document management into standard office applications. This integration makes document imaging easier to adopt and implement, for any size organization.

In their developing years, document imaging programs operated singularly. The only interfaces that were developed were for high-end ERP programs used by Fortune 2000 companies. However, both mainstream software vendors such as Microsoft, IBM, and Lotus, and the document imaging industry realized the need for integration, and interfaces between document imaging and standard office programs were developed from both sides of the table.

Today's generation of document imaging systems is seamlessly integrated with Windows-based programs, often working in the background unbeknown to the user. Documents that have been created in a Windows application can now be stored in an imaging program by the click of a button - a process as simple as printing a document. The increased functionality of this integration is what is driving document imaging to become available to any size business.

Document imaging systems are now easier to maintain and administer, because the architecture of the program is built on Windows standards. In the early days, proprietary system designs required a dedicated and specially trained imaging administrator. Today, the maintenance of document imaging solutions can be integrated into the administration of the overall IT system of a company.

In addition, the open architecture and modular programming of the new generation of document imaging products eliminates the expense of writing custom software to achieve additional functionality. In the past, when a company wanted to increase functionality, e.g., access documents over the Internet, custom software would have to be specially developed. Now, even small organizations can easily embrace new technologies by adding functions through product upgrades and additional modules.

The new generation of imaging programs is intuitive, the functions are scalable to fit the needs of each user, and many functions work in the background. The amount of user training has decreased because of the familiar Windows look and feel of most imaging solutions.

All the aspects mentioned above contribute to the fact that document imaging's total cost of ownership (TCO) is lower than ever before. TCO is the calculation used to evaluate the direct and indirect costs relating to any IT purchase. TCO calculations include the original cost, upgrades, maintenance, technical support, and training costs.

At one time, document imaging was notorious for having a high TCO because of its complexity and the constant need for customized solutions. However, the combination of low hardware costs, increased integration, open architecture, and modular components along with lower training costs turned the tide of TCO and made document imaging affordable and feasible for companies of any size. All these advances and many more to come are turning the vision of document imaging in every company into a reality.

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