

Migrating from Paper to Digital Documents

How Document Servers Integrate with other Applications

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Despite all of the network-based communications available today, companies have just begun to address the excesses of paper-based information in their daily operations. In fact, paper-based documents are still a common bottleneck of information for many applications.

With shipping processes, for example, a delivery note is typically printed by a computer system and attached to a package. As the package travels to different points along its delivery route, computers scan its various arrivals and departures, enabling the delivery company and the customer to track the package's location. However, during the times when the package is not being scanned, information such as handwritten notes or comments made at checkpoints exist solely on paper and cannot easily be retrieved.

The Paperless Page

Today, better, more affordable document imaging technologies are allowing companies to easily transform paper-based documents into accessible electronic formats. Document servers enable companies to network a standard scanner to their existing e-mail infrastructure, making it possible to instantly distribute documents to a number of users in a matter of seconds. In addition, software applications for easy archiving and retrieval allow documents to be accessed and stored from various sources.

Continuing with the shipping example, if the delivery note is first sent to a central scan station, it can take days before information is available in a customer's computer system. This is detrimental to the effectiveness of any organization's customer service department.

One way of improving the speed and efficiency of these processes is by decreasing the amount of time that the information exists only on paper. By capturing an image of the delivery note at its source, a company can easily view and access any handwritten notes and check marks, even while the package and delivery note are in transit. By implementing document capture, the goal is to instantly retrieve important paper records that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Capturing Critical Information

Although many "scan-and-capture" systems have a tendency to be complicated and require training, some are straightforward enough for employees of all levels to use with very little background or experience. Easy to use, intuitive interfaces can help ease system training requirements. In some cases, tasks such as archiving delivery notes require only a simple, one-button solution. In fact, a PC is not even required for many scan-and-capture applications.

Optical character recognition (OCR) for machine-printed characters and intelligent character recognition (ICR) for handwritten characters are useful for indexing data for easy search and retrieval. Sophisticated document capture systems can integrate OCR and ICR capabilities with databases in order to read and retrieve order numbers or delivery notes.

Companies can choose to automate the indexing of just a few fields, such as the customer name, account number and date of order, or index the full amount of text on the page. If there is a high volume of documents with a consistent format, it makes sense for companies to employ recognition technologies such as OCR and ICR. Steps to compensate for human oversight or error can also be added to verify the accuracy of index values extracted via OCR or ICR recognition.

Once the information is indexed, the captured image and data can be sent to an application or database. This integration can be accomplished through several different methods, however, it is important that the receiving application be able to easily interpret the data and determine how to continue processing it. XML (Extensible Markup Language) is supported by most archiving and database applications and is a flexible way to create common information formats that share both the format and data on paper documents.

Axis Solutions

During the past five years, Axis Communications has been a top innovator of networked document capture. The company has developed unique solutions, such as the world's first stand-alone network document server using XML for easy application integration.

With the AXIS 7000 Network Document Server and a connected scanner, documents can be captured without the need for a PC. A simple user interface keeps employee training to a minimum. In addition, the Axis device can be set up and configured via a simple description file (in XML format), which indexes data that must be inputted even before the image is captured. The manually entered index data eliminates other complicated and expensive methods of capturing this data. Axis solutions use industry standard formats, so that the image and data delivery are compatible with almost any application.

The AXIS 7000 enables fast and efficient document server integration with applications. This allows companies to efficiently access paper-based information through indexed search terms and helps improve customer service response times.

For more information about Axis network document solutions, please visit http://www.axis.com/products/document_servers/index.htm

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