Age of Information: The Steps and Benefits to Going Completely Paperless

Throughout history, there have been countless ways to capture information, with each invention improving on the shortcomings of the last. The ancient Sumerians wrote on clay tablets until the Egyptians introduced papyrus which held information much more compactly. The printing press eventually allowed information to be copied en masse, but now in the very age of information, we are capturing this data digitally.

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Capturing information in this way allows us to act on it in ways we've never been able to before, automating processes, routing it across the world in mere seconds, and efficiently filtering it by any number of criteria. Most businesses have invested in capturing and using information in this way on some level. In fact, Forbes Magazine states that 70% of businesses have or are in the process of creating a digital transformation strategy. In contrast, according to that same article, 55% of companies who have yet to digitally transform believe they have a year before they start to lose market share, and 27% of companies view digital transformation as "a matter of survival." Companies that have successfully digitally transformed gain significant competitive advantages, including reduced costs, improved productivity, better customer service, and enhanced business relationships. But like all good things, a successful digital transformation must be earned through careful planning and execution.

As game changing as these benefits are, businesses still need to introduce their digital transformation in phases. An article from Workflow Magazine breaks Digital Transformation into three parts: the digitization of information where paper, PDF, or otherwise unactionable data is captured in actionable form; the modernization of infrastructure where a legacy solution such as

a file cabinet or local hard drive is replaced with a more flexible solution such as an ECM system; and the automation of processes where information is put to use to reduce touchpoints and save time.

Capturing Actionable Information:

For information to be filterable, searchable, and usable for automation and analysis, it must be in a format that computers can read. Document capture software uses optical character recognition (OCR), format recognition, and other tools to turn printed text into characters a computer can recognize. Well-designed document capture solutions are fast and accurate, work with various systems, and require as few human touch points as possible.

Capturing actionable information from paper is an intensive process on computer resources, and in a system where these resources are poorly managed, capture speed may be affected. However, a well-designed document capture system like Square 9's GlobalCapture will allow you to scale your processing power, RAM, and other computer resources to your level of need. And while your capture solution should be as accurate as possible, there is no perfectly precise system, so editing mistakes after the document is lifted should be as quick and as painless as possible.

Your document capture solution should also work with other systems you may be using. If the capture solution is lifting line-item information from an invoice, for example, it would make sense for it to not only work with an ECM solution to house the document but also with an ERP system to update the financial information housed there. Having these integrations saves you time typing out data and reduces the risk of errors.

Reducing the human touchpoints for documents during the capture process can save a tremendous amount of time as well. Capture solutions with few touchpoints can lift the information and route it directly where it needs to go. When capturing documents to be housed in an ECM solution, for example, this kind of capture solution would recognize what kind of document is being scanned, use the lifted data to index the document, and place the document in the correct repository.

Implementing a New System

When trying to digitally transform document-based processes, an Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution should be among the top systems to implement. A well-designed ECM solution will house documents in a secure and easily searchable file system and provide a jumping point for automating document-based processes.

Many documents that businesses work with contain sensitive and protected information. Because of this, storing documents securely is not only ethically responsible; it also ensures your business stays away from fines and legal trouble. Secure ECM solutions provide permission-based access to documents based on an employee's role in your organization. Secure cloud-based solutions also store and transfer information in an encrypted state and separately silo data to ensure the actions of one negligent user don't compromise the information of all. In addition,

when opting to have your information hosted off-premise, highly secure solutions like Square 9 Softworks' GlobalSearch Cloud are audited by outside agencies for compliance with regulations such as HIPAA, SOC 1, and SOC 2.

For an ECM solution to be effective, it needs to be easily searchable. Effective solutions like Square 9's GlobalSearch allow you to layer search criteria such as document type and an indexed name, for example, to easily find what you're looking for. ECM providers should also have experience and training in setting up solutions for your industry to provide the best index fields to search for your documents. Square 9 has experience delivering solutions for various industries and even provides pre-designed solutions for some based on that experience.

An ECM provider should also offer options to automate your document-related tasks to scale your investment. These options can be through integrations, but providers that offer automation options, as well as ECM solutions, typically build their systems to work with each other, resulting in powerful cross-solution tools and synergies.

Automating Processes

Once you have established a way to capture information actionably and house it for use, you can begin automating and streamlining common tasks to save tremendous amounts of time. To automate these processes, you must have a step-by-step understanding of how they are performed. An experienced implementation team understands how your processes can be digitally improved upon and have clear insights into how these processes are performing if any adjustments need to be made.

Automating business processes guarantees fast, consistent performance. But unlike humans, computers need to be told exactly what to do, step-by-step. This requires you to look carefully at how you perform the tasks related to the processes. In a process that performs a three-way accounts payable match, for example, an employee would assume they should notify someone if there's a discrepancy and the line-item data doesn't match. For an automated task, it's important to give the system instructions for any possible scenario.

Automating tasks also allows you to improve upon how they're performed, so having an implementation team that is familiar with your industry is extremely helpful. A process that routes expense reports to a manager for approval, for example, could stop after the document is routed. This would make sense since the process it's replacing likely involved either sending an email attachment or placing the expense report on your manager's desk. In addition, a well-versed implementation team would know that other problems could be solved by sending regular email notifications to the manager about the document that is pending approval.

With whole processes digitized through automation, companies have a unique opportunity to give managers more insight into common tasks in the workplace. Well-designed solutions such as Square 9's GlobalAction give productivity statistics and visibility into where documents are in their processes. These insights help identify areas for improvement in the automation process and show managers how employees are adjusting to the solution.

Coming Full Circle

So you are now lifting information from paper documents into an actionable form, housing it in a digital system, and using it to automate document-related tasks. You are now seeing the time-saving benefits of a Digital Transformation. But what if you could eliminate paper within your business altogether? What if the benefits of automation could begin while the information is being captured? Web forms solutions allow you to do just that. With a well-designed web forms solution, superfluous user inputs are automated, forms remain actionable throughout their workflow, and the questions asked are guided by previous responses.

Web forms should completely simplify the process of capturing information. A well-designed web forms solution can remember previous inputs from the same user so that the information can be automatically populated on new forms. For example, if a form asks for a person's name, their address and phone number should be assumed if they've entered them before. Calculations, such as totals on an expense report should also be automatically populated if all the information needed for the calculation is present.

A well-designed Web Forms solution also keeps a form actionable throughout its lifecycle. Using our expense report example, if a manager doesn't want to approve a particular expense, they can edit the form to remove it rather than having the employee resubmit the expense report in its entirety.

For complex forms like those gathering tax or insurance information, it helps speed up completion time when the forms only present users with the questions that apply to them. If a user is filling out insurance information and selects themself as the policyholder, for example, a guided form would then hide the fields asking for the policyholders' information separately.

The Current Trend Towards Cloud

When looking for digital transformation solutions, cloud is quickly becoming the preferred method for many companies. According to Gartner, global cloud revenue has increased to $474 Billion in 2022 from $408 Billion in 2021. What's more, Gartner expects that over the next few years, cloud revenue will surpass non-cloud revenue for enterprise IT markets. And there's a good reason for this shift.

With a growing remote workforce, The Anywhere anytime access to information that browser-based cloud solutions provide ensures that remote employees can perform their regular tasks effectively. In addition, with properly certified solutions providers, security and compliance related costs and risks are deferred to the host company and provider who take great care to protect customer data. Security and compliance are far from the only costs absorbed by cloud hosting though, updates to the solution's infrastructure, data backups, hardware replacements and countless other costs are assumed by the solution as well.

Key Takeaways

A complete digital transformation takes time and careful planning. Digitizing your information, upgrading your infrastructure, and automating tasks may also seem like a lot of ground to cover. But by knowing what you need from your solutions and having a knowledgeable

implementation team behind you, your digital transformation can take your organization to new heights, facilitating major growth, savings, and productivity.

Square 9 Softworks is an end-to-end digital transformation provider, offering document capture, ECM, workflow automation, and web forms solutions. To find out how Square 9 can help your organization work smarter, faster, and more efficiently during each stage of your digital transformation, Contact Us or Find Your Industry on our website.

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Sam is one of the dynamic voices behind Square 9 Softworks. Delivering highly effective messaging across reseller channels, end-user communities, and outside agencies, Sam develops, drives, and executes communication plans that effectively support Square 9's overall marketing goals and objectives.

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