

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

Creating a Paperless Office **Discover a safer, cheaper, and faster solution**

Many businesses in lower Manhattan, New York addressed customers' concerns over lost account information by recovering computerized records from off site locations. These business managers were freed to focus energy on other important matters, without the added stress of trying to piece their business transactions together. Paperless offices with adequate back up/recovery plans prevailed.

Think about implementing a paperless system in your office

Here are some benefits of going paperless:

- **Cheaper:** Disposal costs for paper can be expensive, especially if you require secure disposal of confidential documents. Storage costs for paper are based on square foot usage. In a paperless office, storage costs for documents are minimal. Data is stored on cost effective small magnetic tapes, CD ROMS, or on hard drives located at data centers. Data can be sent daily (or more often) to your offsite backup location.
- **Faster:** Remote access to documents is not easily completed with a paper-based system. Documents on a computer system can be easy to locate and retrieve with a properly designed document management system. You can even make your data available only to authorized staff members by developing a secure data sharing web based system.

"All things considered, businesses should consider moving their forms to a Web-based system. Online forms management will undoubtedly become standard practice for most businesses in the next few years."¹

- **Safer:** There is a misconception that documents stored in a computer face a higher risk of loss than those stored in a file folder system. Actually, the opposite is true. Paper in a file folder system is very susceptible to fire, loss, and other disasters. By having an appropriate backup system in place, a crashed server can be up and running in a few hours. Data can even be stored at underground data centers, addressing earthquake concerns.

Security measures are also easy to establish and enforce in a paperless office. If a paperless office is created using a database with Internet access, tight security controls and encryption technology must be implemented and maintained to ensure the proper use of the data.

Manhattan business managers with paperless offices recovered their data from off site data centers once they were relocated to temporary offices.

"Thousands of Louisville-based Storage Technology Corp. and IBM-Boulder employees were thrown into the fray hours after the collapse of the World Trade Center towers Sept. 11, helping to salvage data from backup systems that allowed financial giants to soon resume the business of the nation. By most accounts, they were incredibly successful."²

Why aren't more organizations going paperless?

Old habits die hard: A lot of people like holding the item that they are reading. It is hard to resist the urge to print out every piece of work completed on a computer.

"The major obstacle is neither technological nor economic, but rather 'sociotechnical'; in other words, people prefer paper. [A] study found that one of the things people really like about books is the way they smell when you open them."³

Partially paperless offices don't create total solutions: Many offices consider themselves "paperless", but they actually have only a portion of their business information on computer systems and the rest in client files. These "partially paperless" offices rely on documents in customer files to complete critical parts of their business or service. Ask yourself a tough question: If you lost all computers, files, and equipment in an office disaster, could your business survive? How would you piece business transactions together? If your office contains critical items that can't be stored on a computer, make a back up/recovery plan for those items.

Poorly designed paperless systems: If your paperless system is not constructed well, it can be difficult to find the documents that you are seeking. Plan carefully to make sure the system you use meets all of your needs. . It is also important to make sure that you have good technical help available to ensure that it is running properly.

How do you implement a Paperless System?

Option 1 - Simple Document Management System:

A document management system helps you organize and manage your business' documents for easy access. There are several document management systems available for review offered over the Internet or at software retailers. Check with the product specifications and view a demonstration of the program in action to assess whether the program meets your needs. Some of these systems can even read the contents of each document and index them so that you can search for documents based on their content, much like today's Internet search engines.

Option 2 - Integrated System:

Document management systems are great for creating a paperless office, but also consider an integrated system that combines document management with the rest of your information to enhance business productivity as well. A customized database system can be created to index, manage, and link the documents on your network to other data in your system. For instance, all correspondence with a client can be linked to the client's record in your database, along with the contact, financial, and ordering information. This provides your staff members the ability get any information they need from a single source. In addition, by linking this system to your web site, you can provide secure remote access to authorized staff members in your organization. A secure web based integrated system gives access to only those authorized to work with the same information and documents, regardless of their physical location.

At Database by Design, Inc., we can help you set up an integrated document management system that is customized for your needs. Contact us so we can help you analyze your options.

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Next Month's Topic: Discover the power of a database for e-commerce.

References

¹“A Paperless Office?” http://www.nua.ie/surveys/?f=VS&art_id=894917653&rel=true

²“Data storage firms were ready for nightmare of terrorist attack”, The Boulder County Business Report, <http://www.bibr.com/display.phtml?VI=P2021&Section=News&Page=2>

³Forbes, <http://www.forbes.com/2000/08/09/feat3.html>