

ROCC

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PRESS CUTTINGS

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Document management

HOW THE POSTROOM BECOMES MODERN DAY LEGEND ... AGAIN

An enduring legend of the pre-computer world was the growth of public institutions and private enterprise through the dedication and skills of long-service 'cradle to grave' employees.

Before further and higher education delivered highly qualified and trained people into the workplace, organisations had to train and professionalise their own school-leavers and prepare them for a lifetime of work in a single organisation. The legend of starting at the bottom and working your way up was pervasive.

Mike Aldrich, chairman, ROCC Computers, says that there has been a mega change in this scenario. He writes:

Structural changes in the labour market brought about by rapid technological and organisational change; global markets and global competition now suggest that lifetime employment in a single organisation is history and continuous job changing, career changing and re-training has become the norm.

Messenger

The days of starting as a messenger or in the post-room and working your way up the organisation are gone forever.

Or are they? As we leave the 20th century we can see paperless plcs under development. While there may not be any completely paperless plcs in the 21st century, the most fundamental changes in white collar working since the introduction of telephone, typewriter, adding and copying machines at the end of the 19th century are now underway as business makes its most serious attempt yet to cut down on paper-pushing.

Telephone, typewriter and adding machines have been transformed by information technology. Facsimile reproduction - from copying to scanning to image processing has been revolutionised.

If the technologies are combined as integrated systems - using standardised compatible components and sub-systems - the artifacts are now in

place to reduce business paperwork to the point of elimination for most intra-organisation work processes.

Paper will still come in to and go out of organisations but on a reducing scale given fax, the Internet, electronic document interchange and other forms of communication.

We have heard it all before - for at least the last ten years. But now it is happening. Fully operational systems are producing measurable benefits. Technologies have matured and the environment in which to deploy them is far more sympathetic.

Fundamental revisions

The global market has triggered fundamental revisions to the mission, markets, organisation structures and baseline operating performance measurements of many organisations.

For example, in the re-structuring of the financial services industry, mergers and acquisitions activities and even citizens' charters and compulsory competitive tendering in public services.

With the bulk of the labour force in the 1990s employed in white collar activities and with technology available to dramatically increase white collar productivity - it is hardly surprising that serious efforts are underway to go paperless.

Redefining baseline operating performance - how to become customer-driven, defining and measuring the time to reply to a request for information, how long to take to quote for business, how to respond to a complaint, how soon to research, design and launch a new product, how quickly to respond to competition - is as much a product of ensuring business survival as it is of improving profitability. It is part of business process re-engineering at the grand level or work process improvement in the workplace or both.

Delayering of management, empowerment of staff, reduction in bureaucracy and enriched information technology support are all part of these change processes.

New structures

The resulting new organisations take on not only new management structures, but also new physical shapes, often located in different premises and different locations.

Many activities are location independent given the availability of low-cost, high capacity digital telecommunications. For example, an insurance company might consist of a single national postal address - say a warehouse complex on a trading estate - to which all mail is delivered.

There the mail is opened, scanned and converted into images, then the paper copy date stamped and filed in the warehouse (or converted into something less bulky if the paper record is not needed).

Once scanned, the mail is pre-processed by Indexers before being sent electronically anywhere in the country to be processed. The Indexers examine each document and using sophisticated processing rules, decide on the class of document, the competent authority to deal with it, routing, the standard elapsed time target for responding, the workflow process and the supervisory monitoring system to be used including compliance with regulations issues.

The Indexers thus record the entry of the document into the organisation and send it on its way for processing. We used to call this activity: the post-room and the work was done by junior people because in the main it consisted of physically sorting the mail into batches, and moving it to where it had to go.

New mailroom

The New Mailroom is different. The Indexers are among the brightest people in the organisation. They are controlling the blood flow to the organisation.

If they get it wrong, baseline operating performance cannot be achieved. The old excuse of "organisational misadventure" is no longer acceptable or even sustainable. Organisational misadventure is terminal in today's markets.

For technology providers such as ROCC Computers, there are great opportunities in the New Mailroom because of forms processing requirements. If all incoming mail is going to be scanned and electronically routed to where it is needed, this mail will include forms containing structured information for automated processing - usually transaction and/or financial data.

ROCC's SEECHECK Images software is designed to collect forms in image format (TIFF files), batch

them for audit control and subsequent storage, and convert the images of the forms into computer records and fields, either through automatic character recognition or keying from the images for onward processing by accounting and administrative systems. SEECHECK Images has powerful indexation, validation and workflow features for these tasks and can work in the New Mailroom or anywhere in the organisation.

The New Mailroom may look like a warehouse, but it will be packed with high technology and bright people. These people will have in-depth knowledge and experience of how the organisation works and it is a fair wager that several of them will make the journey over time from the New Mailroom to the New Boardrooms.

Working your way up in the organisation will have a new meaning and the legend will have returned.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT ROADSHOW HITS THE ROAD

Document management, imaging technology and workflow are changing the way organisations work (see article above).

The potential for these techniques to help bring about real improvements in productivity and customer service are well proven, but recent research by the Document Management Forum shows that the majority of companies have not yet taken the plunge.

Organisations want to know more about how to justify an investment in terms of their own business needs. They want to minimise the risk and are keen to learn from the experiences of user companies similar to their own.

The Document Management Roadshow, now in its fourth year, will be tackling these issues, bringing advice and solutions to first class meeting venues across the UK. Attendances last year were up 75% on 1994 - and this year's event has been extended to *seven* days.

The venues range from Glasgow, Newcastle, Bristol, and Earls Court and run through most of April.

Details: iTX Marketing Services, tel: 01905 613236; fax, 01905 29138.

Mike Aldrich, chairman of ROCC Computers, explains the scanning technology which is changing the way the financial sector works

SCAN AT SOURCE - WHO DARES WINS

The earliest preserved written records in the form of hieroglyphics are around 5,500 years old. The earliest modern written records are around 2,500 years old. Man's pre-disposition to record and communicate with pictures and ciphers could be said to be culturally ingrained.

a big back-office papermill for bankers. Now it is beginning to look like a car showroom. The back office has vanished and the front office is broken up into cosy selling zones. The paper has increasingly gone electronic or it has gone for a time into paper factories on trading estates where it is being auto-

mated into oblivion. Customers may continue to use paper to communicate with the bank, but in future the bank will not be processing the paper.

Recognition software

The IT revolution used to produce more paper, but now it is

Trying to stop using paper seems like a doomed venture, but that attempt is at the heart of the most revolutionary change in office work for 100 years

Paper has been used for recording for over 2,000 years. As a communication medium it is the first record that most babies ever hold. As a commodity it is used for many things. There isn't a more ubiquitous manufactured product than paper.

Thus trying to stop using paper seems like a doomed venture. But that attempt is at the heart of the most revolutionary change in office work for probably a hundred years. After a decade of hype about office automation and paperless offices, organisations are now getting serious about working without using paper.

If in any doubt, take a look at your typical High Street bank. It used to consist of a small banking hall for customers and

March of the scanners

One of the earliest business uses of scanning was in market research where masses of data had to be taken from forms. Timesheets were another area where relatively simple form-capturing software was used. From recognition of lines, ticks and crosses, software then became capable of recognising particular typed characters and finally of guessing characters. More advanced software can now recognise hand-written characters (but not if they are joined up). Even if the software cannot recognise written characters, they can always be reproduced on screen as 'pictures' so that the computer operator can interpret them.

The financial sector's most experienced users of scanning are insurance companies. At least half a dozen large insurers are processing claims in this way. Some very talented people now work in what is in effect the mailroom, examining, routing and indexing material that arrives in the post.

Banks and building societies are beginning to capture data electronically, though few are as advanced as the insurance companies. The initial uses are in mortgage and loan applications.

Use of desktop scanners is forecast to grow at around 40 per cent per annum for the rest of the century

'eating' it using scanners. Scanning is one stage on from facsimile. Instead of reproducing a document at a distance as in fax, computers store and manipulate the image of the document.

With scanning, documents are stacked in a hopper, a button is pressed, the documents pass through the scanner one at a time, the image is captured and then, unlike fax, recognition software is used to recognise what is written on the document so that the information can be electronically manipulated. The recognition software, or intelligent character recognition as it is known, enables documents to be processed automatically by referring to what is written on the document.

Indexing and routing

The image is indexed and routed by networks to where it needs to be processed. Thus instead of physically moving paper around, white collar workers move images electronically. The image contains the logical content of the document. The paper from which it originated is just a physical shell that may have to be kept for a time for legal and administrative reasons but doesn't have to be carried round the organisation.

White collar workers

Scanning is entering the white collar workplace at two levels. Firstly, there is the new mail-

room where high capacity, expensive, production-oriented scanners can devour enormous volumes of paper.

The second level is at the desktop, where convenience scanners are being used as general purpose input devices. Connected to PCs, convenience scanners are for casual users who want an easy way to capture information from forms and documents. It has taken PC users a decade to discover that data input is a bore and a chore and now they want something better.

Use of desktop scanners is forecast to grow at around 40 per cent per annum for the rest of the century, which even by IT industry standards is explosive growth. Low-cost data capture software that meets the requirements of most PC users is becoming available now.

With production and desktop scanning forming a pincer movement, eliminating paperwork becomes a very practical proposition.

Paperpushing has its own organisational structure and decision-making hierarchy. Take away the paper and the structure and decision-making can be streamlined by re-thinking the rules system that governed the old paperpushing system.

This is one of the reasons why insurance companies can reduce proposal processing time from a

month to a few days. They are no longer pushing paper. They are pushing electronic images around at previously unimaginable speeds, based on rules designed to give customers a better service while still protecting the integrity of the transaction for the company.

The basic law of scanning is 'Scan At Source'. Some paper will be around forever, but if you capture the image at the earliest feasible stage in the process cycle you will eliminate needless copying and multiple filing.

Scan at source is the gateway to the world of information technology. Once you have the image, you are on information highways and superhighways with the power to outperform paper-based competitors. Volume paperpushing in business can rarely compete with scanning and processing images in terms of service provision and economics.

Scanning revolutionises office working and leading organisations are implementing systems and gaining significant benefits. It is a case of who dares wins.

Winners are scanning at source.

Mike Aldrich is the Chairman of ROCC Computers, makers of information capture software SEECHECK, which is designed for both mailroom and desktop environments and works on UNIX, Novell and Microsoft software platforms.

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