

## **THE BUSINESS JOURNAL OF PORTLAND: GOING PAPERLESS**

### **GOING PAPERLESS: THE NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS**

Today, companies of all sizes from mom-and-pop shops to large corporations are cutting costs, increasing productivity and gaining a competitive advantage by going paperless. Oregon companies spend an average of seven to 10 percent of total revenues on documents – writing, printing, copying, faxing, storing and retrieving. Shaving money spent managing paper documents can add a real boost to the bottom line.

General Electric streamlined its accounts payable operations by going paperless, capturing \$111 million in savings in one year. Stewart Title used electronic document management to reduce paperwork, cutting the time of real estate closings to as little as 15 minutes.

### **WHAT IS DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT?**

Businesses of all sizes receive an abundance of information from multiple sources and there is an enormous need for solutions that easily and efficiently capture, index and retrieve information. Document management systems allow companies to capture and store documents electronically; thereby reducing the company's reliance on paper.

We are comfortable with paper. It's familiar, easy to take with us, and does not require training or technology. But, for many businesses, managing paper files also has drawbacks. Finding storage space, locating misfiled documents, and retrieving and distributing documents within the company are costly, both in monetary terms and employee productivity.

### **PRUDENTIAL NORTHWEST PROPERTIES MAKES THE CHANGE**

With more than 700 agents in 20 offices throughout the Northwest, Prudential Northwest Properties completes thousands of real estate transactions every year. From the time a house is listed to when a buyer makes an offer to closing, everything is documented on paper. Each transaction generates a file that averages 100 sheets of paper. Prudential Northwest Properties worked with Portland-based Associated Business Systems to streamline its paper processes.

Associated Business Systems, which specializes in document management, recommended a solution that incorporated Prudential's existing office machines and added DocuWare ([www.docuware.com](http://www.docuware.com)) to automate its entire business process. By routing documents electronically, Prudential Northwest Properties realized significant cost savings in courier services, copying, faxing and file

storage and reduced overall labor costs. Agents gained quicker access to information and were able to process information faster, yielding an advantage over its competitors. Plus, with DocuWare, there are no more lost or misplaced files. Next, Prudential Northwest Properties plans to add electronic signature capabilities to further streamline its transactions.

Document management tools can benefit almost every type of business in any industry. Serenity Lane, a Eugene-based health care provider, has converted its patients' medical records to electronic files to better manage the need to provide access to patients' medical history, while adhering to stringent privacy and security regulations. Coburg's Marathon Coaches uses electronic document management in the manufacturing of its custom coaches. As a result, they have cut two days off production time. Design Craft Doors of Clackamas used document management to scan and store its paper files. Not only did they save on storage costs, but when the family-owned business burned, all of its records were safe; making document management a valuable disaster recovery tool as well.

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

Paperless offices are a new way of doing business. Many companies know that they need it; they want it, but don't know what to look for or how to implement it. Here are a few ways to avoid the pitfalls.

"Printer, fax and copier vendors can help you reduce your dependence on paper-based processes in ways that no other vendors can," according to Gartner Inc., the world's largest information technology research and advisory firm. They are best-capable of working with smaller and midsize companies that need document records management, but often have modest requirements and limited budgets and IT resources.

Research the top three or four software products on the market. Steer away from lower-end applications, or "light" versions. Generally, these products will only do bits and pieces and do not have sufficient upgrade capabilities. Products such as DocuWare are modular, which enables you to purchase only the components you need and are compatible with many other software applications. Plus, if you decide to expand later, the top-tier applications enable you to add more tasks and features and incorporate more processes.

In fact, most companies start with a piece of their business and incorporate more departments or tasks later on. Oregon Education Association, which represents 43,000 educators working in Oregon, recently installed an electronic document management system in its legal, membership and government relations departments. They calculated a ROI of two-and-a-half times in the first year; and processes that used to take several minutes or hours, now take only four or five

seconds, improving employee productivity as well. Now, they are in the process of adding modules to include the accounts payable department.

Look for a vendor that offers individualized training. Not just a one-day workshop. Associated Business Systems, for example, offers a 90-day training program. They go on-site to help implement the program and teach employees how to use the system. After the initial three months, they are always on-hand to answer questions and provide technical support.

Partner with a reputable vendor. Go on-site and tour their offices. Ask to meet the people you will be working with. It not only lets you test-drive products, but can tell you a lot about a vendors' capabilities and credibility.

Going paperless may seem like a daunting task or cost-prohibitive or both. With the right tools, it does not need to be. Electronic document management can put your company on the path to improved productivity, lower costs and yield a competitive advantage.

- Craig Knouf, Associated Business Systems  
[craigk@associatedbusiness.com](mailto:craigk@associatedbusiness.com)