When "Do Nothing" is the Right Choice – and when it isn't.

By: Floyd Bjorgan

Background

Although I'm now immersed in the document management business, I was educated as an engineer. I vividly recall being taught in university that the "Do Nothing" option to solving a problem must always be considered. The reason is that sometimes the cost of solving the problem is greater than the cost of living with the problem. However, I've observed that sometimes people choose the "Do Nothing" option just because of inertia, or a lack of knowledge about alternatives.

In the document management business I see many people struggling with deciding what to do about the growing volume of paper being created by their businesses. Assuming they can't just get rid of the paper, they are faced with choosing between document storage, scanning in-house, or hiring a vendor to do the scanning. I would like to take a moment to provide some insight into the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Document Storage

There are two approaches to document storage: storing the documents at your business, or sending them out to a document storage company. Most companies choose to send archived documents out to a document storage company because they have better use for their office or warehouse space than using it for storing documents.

The chief advantage of document storage (which I think of as the "Do Nothing" approach) is that it is low cost, unless documents need to be accessed with any frequency. However, there are some significant disadvantages which are not usually considered, such as:

- It is difficult to ensure physical security of confidential documents. Think about how many people have access to the file storage areas.
- Misfiling a document will make it impossible to find.
- Documents are still subject to risk of loss through fire, theft, or flood. I see documents stored in basements all the time – and basement flooding is a common and frequent thing!
- Documents may be difficult to retrieve if needed, and may not be returned in a timely fashion, making them inaccessible to others
- Paper documents are not searchable other than by spending countless man-hours to find what is needed.
- The volume of documents may simply continue to grow, which makes each of these disadvantages get larger and more significant.

In-House Scanning

Let me just cut to the chase on this option. Unless the volumes are small, or so large you can afford to create an in-house dedicated department with industrial equipment and domain experts, this is just a bad idea. Without proper training, equipment, procedures, and quality control steps in place the outcome of this approach almost always includes:

- Negative employee morale
- Expensive wear and tear on equipment
- Interruption of normal business activities
- Poor quality or missing images
- Prolonged project timelines, resulting in higher than expected costs

It's not uncommon for companies to start down this path only to realize it is far more effective to hire the professionals. It is almost always better to find a vendor who understands imaging standards and can tailor a solution to your specific needs.

Professional Scanning

Although "scanning" seems like a single task, it is actually a process involving several tasks:

- Document preparation: removing fasteners, moving post-it notes that cover text, unfolding pages, etc.
- Scanning: Using the equipment to convert the paper to digital images.
- Quality Checks: Reviewing the image quality to ensure documents are legible, did not double feed, etc.
- Re-scanning: Correcting images which did not scan properly and fitting the re-scanned images into the proper place in the proper document.
- File naming: Providing proper file names to each document.
- Finally, secure document destruction.

The proper conversion of paper documents to digital files provides several advantages over storage of paper documents, such as:

- With good IT backup procedures, it is highly unlikely that documents will be lost due to fire or flood.
- Documents can be stored with encryption making them more secure than physical documents.
- Documents can be text searchable, making it easier to find documents relevant to a particular topic, or to access the part of a document which is of interest.
- Retrieval of documents is accomplished in seconds rather than days, which accelerates both the speed and the quality of decision making.
- If desired, documents can be kept indefinitely as computer storage costs are low, and declining.

- Documents can be easily shared internally as well as with appropriate external parties.
- And of course storage costs are eliminated and storage space is freed up for other business purposes.

At Consentia we have experts who can provide specific advice and the detailed information needed to make a good decision. Simply call us to ask for some advice. We can help you decide if "Do Nothing" is the best option for you or not.

Floyd Bjorgan, P.Eng.
President

Whether your goal is to go entirely paperless, or you just need that stack of archived documents out of your way and made useful again, Consentia has the professional, secure, and timely service to fit your needs. For any questions, information, or a quote please reach us at:

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK.

Mezzanine Level, Harley Court Building
10045 – 111 Street NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2M5
T: 1.866.619.7226