



**This guide contains:**

- Background on document management**
- Features and functions of document management products**
- How to find the right document management system for your organization**

This independent guide was written to help you understand the basics of document management, and how to help you find the best document management system for your environment. While we do provide document managements products and services, we want you, our potential client, to get the straight facts so that you can make fully informed decisions. So you can be confident that all of the information in this guide is based on independent and unbiased resources.

In a nutshell, **Document Management** is the process of handling documents in such a way that information can be created, shared, organized, and stored efficiently and appropriately.

### **Background on Document Management**

Whether your company is a small organization or on the Fortune 500 list, today's highly dynamic and competitive environment demands that your company efficiently organizes and manages the flow of information- both internally and externally. In this digitized information age, a common challenge for many companies is how to manage its paper and electronic documents. One of the tools available to help almost any business address this challenge is known as a 'document management system'.

A document management system takes many forms, but the core function is to provide a systematic method for creating, categorizing, storing, locating, and retrieving documents. A good document management system can benefit a company because it facilitates collaboration, sharing, and secure distribution of documents, and helps the organization reduce filing and distribution costs, improve and protect access to information, comply with government regulations, and improve operational efficiencies.

### **Features and Functions of Document Management Products**

Document management systems were created to convert paper documents into digital form. The typical document management system uses a scanner to create and store the image of the document. The electronic version of that document is given a unique but recognizable name (sometimes containing the date of that the document was created, or other pertinent information). The document is then **indexed**, by which additional 'tags' that can be used to retrieve the document later are assigned to the document. As an example, a document's index fields may include a person's name, an account number, an ID number, a product name, a vendor name, or other information unique to that document that will aid in efficient retrieval later.

Some document management systems have an advanced function called 'optical character recognition' (OCR) built into the scanning process. As the document is scanned, the OCR software 'reads' the page (by recognizing the shape of the individual letters and translating them into words) and stores the text for future retrieval. Once a document has been scanned, the document management system will store it in

some organized fashion by associating the stored image with the tags or index fields. When someone wants to retrieve a particular document, they can find it by performing a search on one of the tags.

Although document management systems were originally designed for digitizing paper documents, good document management systems will have the ability to process electronic documents in a manner similar to paper documents. The digitizing process is not the same, but the result is that the document is now stored along with the digitized paper documents for potential retrieval in the future.

There are three main functions to all document management systems:

- Digitization;
- Document management; and
- Document retrieval.

The key component of any document management system is the software that runs each function and aligns them into one coherent system. Document management software will control text, form and image scanning, OCR, editing, storage, indexing, and integration with other applications – software that your business might already be running. The choice of which document management software to run will be based on your document management needs, which will in turn drive your choice of document management hardware. Here is an explanation of the hardware options available for each main function:

### **Digitizing Your Documents**

When converting paper documents into electronic documents, you have your choice of a scanner (the most popular), a multifunction product (MFP), or a digital sender. The choice of which component to choose is largely dependent on the volume of paper documents that you need to convert. At the low volume end of the spectrum, you can get a manual feed scanner (or MFP) that can handle a few documents per day. Midway up the volume spectrum are scanners and some MFPs that have automatic feeders and can scan documents at 15-20 pages per minute and can handle two-sided documents. At the high end of the volume spectrum, there are scanners and MFPs that can scan 25 or more pages per minute. For documents that are already in electronic format, you can use digital sender units that are attached to your network to send electronic files directly into document management software for processing.

### **Managing Your Documents**

Once your documents have been scanned and digitized, you need to determine how and where they will be stored. Typical hardware options for document storage devices include local file servers, web servers (ASP solutions), and specialized storage servers. The choice of where and how to store your documents should be closely tied to your workflow processes and other network assets. Your document storage devices should be backed up on a regular basis.

## Retrieving Your Documents

Digitizing and storing your documents does little good unless your organization has effective distribution and retrieval methods. Good document management systems create a structure under which documents are organized and stored logically; they also include a search feature (similar to a search engine) to help find documents based on the 'tags' or index fields that were associated with a given image file. A user can find the document by looking in a particular known location on the network, or can use the search function to find the document.

One of the key policy decisions that will have to be made about any document management system is how to manage and control distribution of the collected documents. Some of the key terms involved in the document distribution include:

*Workflow*- how electronic documents are certified and/or electronically signed, as well as how they are routed through the organization.

*Policy Control*- this describes who is given access to which documents, and you can set policies that define who can access, view, print or forward any particular document or group of documents.

*User Logs*- user logs are set up to track and provide evidence of which users have accessed which documents, and what action the user took with the document(s).

## How to find the best document management system for your organization

Clearly, the choice of the best document management system for your company will be based on your organization's particular situation, needs, and budget. The place to start in your search for a document management system is with an in-depth analysis of your document management needs. Don't just try a 'fix' if your current system is broken- dig a little deeper so that you implement a solution that aligns with your current and future needs. Some key questions to ask include:

- How many documents does or will your company process per day?
- How large are the documents you currently or will process?
- How similar are the documents, particularly in terms of size and content?
- How many locations (offices, workgroups, individuals) will be adding documents to the system?
- How many existing documents will you need to import into the document management system?
- How many users will need to access documents within the system?
- What type of access controls need to be in place to protect sensitive documents?

Put your needs and requirements into writing so that you have a road map that you can share with others in your organization and with potential document management companies. Keep in mind two key points as you define your requirements:

- Verify technical compatibility with any existing network infrastructure.



Solutions

*“The Document Management People”*

- Each component of the document management system should be scalable so that you can implement more resources when and if your document management needs change.

Shopping for a document management system online is a good way to start researching and comparing several different document management providers to make sure you find what that will work for you based on your organization's needs. Once you have a grasp of some of the issues we've addressed previously, it's time to start doing your research online to find a few prospective document management providers.

As you research and compare document management system companies online, pay attention to what aspects of their service they promote. For example, do they stress their low prices or the value of their service? The overriding message that they convey through their web sites should give you an insight as to how they view themselves and is often an indicator of what type and level of service to expect.

To go a step further in finding the right document management system for you, ask your colleagues and industry peers if they have had any experience- either good or bad- with specific document management systems or companies. In addition, you should find out if any of the document management systems has earned the endorsement or certification of any legitimate, third party entity. Finally, you may consider reputation as a criterion for selecting your solution provider. Generally, the best-known and most successful businesses are those that do a good job, earn repeat business, and earn a good reputation over time.

Finally, we hope you have found the information in this guide useful. We understand that there is more to document management products and services than what is included here, and we suggest that you use this guide as a starting point in your search for the right document management system for you.