

The Inefficiencies With Paper Documents & Need For Paperless Offices

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Swingline, one of the leading manufacturers of automated paper shredders for workplaces recently published a study that highlights the impending risks with data security at workplaces that still rely on paper documents. The study found that close to 89% of the surveyed employers still use hard, paper copies for record keeping. Although nearly two-thirds of these respondents noted that it was important to shred these paper documents as a means to protect sensitive business information, 26% of the respondents admitted to have sometimes thrown away sensitive data without destroying it first. According to Christopher Zybert, a spokesperson for NEdocs, a document scanning and management company, the costs of maintaining paper documents can easily escalate to hundreds of dollars a month. Speaking to MainStreet, he points out that even if a company is producing just 50 critical documents a day, and it takes five minutes to file and manage that, the time spent on this can add to 250 minutes per day. If the employee is paid \$15 per hour, file handling costs can easily escalate to \$15,000 a year.

According to a Pricewaterhouse Coopers study, the costs associated with paper documents can be much higher than just those incurred in handling them. Their report found that nearly 7.5% of documents get lost on an average with another 3% routinely getting misfiled. The overall costs, including those incurred in printing documents can add up to \$224,800 a year. The study makes special mention of the ink costs (which is normally as much as \$2130 per gallon). In terms of overall costs, the PWC study points out that printing is the resource a company spends most money on; even higher than air conditioning/heating.

These studies clearly point to a future where offices are totally paperless and digital. However, there are still challenges in getting there. A study commissioned by Adobe has found resistance and disorganized leadership as reasons for the slow evolution to paperless offices. One of the main areas of concern for employers is the need for digitally authenticating business documents. Although a vast majority (82%) of the surveyed managers knew that e signatures for financial services and other business transactions were legally binding and close to 64% would prefer to sign electronically if they didn't have to remember passwords, there were concerns that resisted the evolution. The study found that the biggest hindrance to wider adoption was the fear that others won't accept them.

Regardless, the obstacles to moving towards a paperless office seems to be the classical chicken-and-egg problem. 22% of businesses not using esignatures cite the lack of acceptance by other businesses as the reason. In addition to this, 19% of respondents expressed concern over the legality of such transactions with another 19% citing doubts over the security systems. Given that a wide majority of documents that are still in paper-mode at workplaces are those that are managed for legal purposes, esignatures appear to be the missing link to migrate towards a paperless office. But for that to happen, greater awareness about the ease, legality and security of these systems is key.