

AIIM E-DOC – The Green Print for Paper Saving

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Look around any office environment and it is hard to ignore the paper mountains; they quickly dispel any predictions of the "paperless office". Driven by the explosion of the Internet and digital technology, paper is ubiquitous in the office and consumption shows no signs of abating. Whether it is printing email, web pages, documents, or digital photographs, the office environment is a huge source of paper waste, and a costly one at that.

Estimates predict office paper consumption increasing by 20% per year, and on average, each office worker uses up to 50 sheets of A4 paper a day. At the same time, paper is lost on desks, left in printer trays, or even binned within minutes of being printed, often unread. In a typical office, at least half of total waste is paper. Not only does this wastage have an environmental impact, but major costs can be attributed to both the purchasing and disposal of paper, not to mention the business inefficiencies associated with paper dependent processes.

Although today information is most commonly captured electronically, paper remains an active part of a document's lifecycle for many businesses, as it is a familiar, convenient, and versatile medium. For those businesses for which paper consumption is high, (law, banking, or healthcare industries) this paper dependency brings with it high storage costs and reduced productivity associated with filing and retrieving documents. As more companies formulate green agendas to promote corporate responsibility, reducing paper consumption through a reduce, reuse, and recycle approach not only offers the opportunity to improve business efficiency and save costs, but also respond to the environmental concerns associated with paper consumption.

The negative environmental effects of paper use are complex and may not be immediately obvious to organisations where paper is an unquestioned part of their business processes. Worldwide, paper and pulp is the single largest industrial consumer of forests and the fourth largest industrial consumer of energy. Whilst sustainable forest management practices and certification such as the Forest Steward Council (FSC) are an effective way to limit the destruction of the world's forests and guarantee virgin pulp traceability, a significant amount of pulp comes from fast growing Eucalyptus trees planted on cleared rainforest land in Brazil. Moreover, if you consider the chemical process used for pulp production, the bleaching process to whiten the pulp, and finally, the pollution created through the disposal of paper in landfills, office paper consumption is anything but "green".

Paper recycling is an obvious and easy way to reduce waste in the workplace; it diverts paper from landfills and addresses some of the concerns related to the production of "virgin pulp" paper. Today there is a wide range of competitively priced recycled paper, and the quality of such paper is often indistinguishable from virgin equivalents, both in performance and appearance. Producing recycled paper uses less energy (and water) than producing virgin paper, although significant energy is consumed in the cleaning process. Also, as paper can only be recycled up to four or five times due to fibre degradation, virgin pulp must be used to strengthen the paper. Although recycling has certain benefits in minimising paper wastage, ultimately reducing paper use is the most effective way to limit the environmental effects of paper waste.

The premise of simply printing less should be the starting point for any organisation wishing to reduce its paper trail. Many organisations now are adopting a "think before you print" policy, which goes some way to build awareness of the paper wastage associated with unnecessary printing. However, when printed documents are needed, whether it is for reference or review, there are a number of easy steps that can be taken to reduce the amount of paper used. First, use double-sided printing on printers that have duplex capabilities. In fact, Energy Star, the international standard for energy efficient office equipment, has released a new rating for imaging equipment requiring duplex functionality as mandatory for colour and monochrome devices with speeds of 40ppm and 45ppm or more, respectively. Second, using booklet or n-up (multiple images per page) printing can significantly reduce printed output. Other simple steps are to use smaller fonts, and using print preview to check document layout and to use track changes for document review rather than using hard copy output. Using an application like GreenPrint can also help in reducing unwanted output. In particular, Web printing can often result in blank pages, short overruns of text, or pages with a line of legal small print. GreenPrint acts as a virtual printer, analysing documents and highlighting sections or pages likely to end up as wasted output, before they reach the printer.

To effectively print less, users need to be educated about these methods for reducing printed output. Whilst this is a good starting point, for an organisation to truly understand their print and paper usage, a rightsizing approach to the printer environment needs to be developed. For smaller companies, this may be a basic audit of print devices, but for larger companies, specialist print audit tools are available, either through companies such as PrintAudit or Equitrac, or through

the printer and copier vendors themselves. Rightsizing office equipment by replacing single function desktop printers, faxes, and copiers with multifunction devices can help paper reduction through enabling users to scan documents and send an electronic version to multiple recipients, instead of making multiple copies of the document. Rightsizing can not only lower paper consumption in this way, but also offer the added benefits of reduced energy, ink, toner, and maintenance costs.

Moving to an electronic document management system for many organisations can be a key step in tackling their paper mountain. These systems enable business documents to be stored, retrieved, delivered, and managed electronically from the desktop. As a result, hard copy output is reduced and so is the time spent on filing and searching for information. Again, the use of multifunction devices can be considered central to a document management strategy for reducing paper usage. Many multifunction printers

(MFPs) are compatible with document capture solutions such as eCopy, which take advantage of MFP scanning capabilities. This enables paper documents to be converted to secure digital documents, which can then be integrated with email, desktop, and other enterprise business applications.

There is no doubt that there is tremendous scope for reducing paper waste in offices. However, it would be foolish to chase the utopian ideal of the paperless office. The optimum office print environment has to be one where paper use is efficiently managed, and processes are in place to take advantage of today's scanning, storage, workflow, and communication technology that can transform fundamental business processes. Shifting from a "print-then-distribute" model to a more efficient "distribute-then-print" approach will not only reduce costs, but boost productivity and help reduce the office paper mountain which has never been more important than in today's environmentally aware business culture.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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