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Guest voice: How to save money going paperless

By K.J. McCorry

Do you know how much it costs your company per year to manage paper?

A study by Coopers & Lybrand (now PriceWaterhouseCoopers) estimated the cost of paper management to be about \$50 per document. This could include the cost of paper, printing costs, fax/copier equipment and supplies, distribution, mailing costs, courier services, filing supplies and cabinets, storage space, as well as staff time handling, managing and filing paper.

Implementing paper reduction measures could save a company more money than they think. Through simple paper reduction methods, an office could reduce paper costs by 20 percent to 25 percent. At Citigroup, implementing paperless investment statements saved millions on paper costs over the course of a few years.

CREATE CLEAR RECORD AND DATA GUIDELINES

Current estimates show 50 percent to 70 percent of an office space is still dedicated to filing and storage of documentation. The real clincher is that studies are showing more than 45 percent of those files in cabinets are duplicate information, and 80 percent is usually never accessed again.

Every office needs a reliable and consistent system to share and access data electronically. There are two primary ways: through the use of a hard-drive server, or document-management software. Either way, data-management guidelines and structure need to be established. Employees must have a logical file structure with clear guidelines including record retention and parameters of how, where and for how long data should be stored. Once a clear system is established, employees feel more secure with maintaining their data electronically and printing less.

INCREASE PRINTER EFFICIENCY

Another simple way to reduce paper cost is to increase printer efficiencies and awareness. The easier and more convenient it is for employees to print, the more likely it is that paper use will increase. A recent Xerox study found that more than 45 percent of office paper

could be discarded on the day it was printed. One way to reduce paper use is to remove individual and desktop printers.

By making printing less convenient, you encourage employees to consider alternatives that won't require them to stand up and retrieve their documents from the printer down the hall.

IT departments can also increase printer efficiency by changing defaults on copying machines to two-sided copies. In this process known as "automatic duplexing," the copier turns the paper over and prints on the backside automatically. One year after implementing this copier default, Bank of America reduced paper use by 50 percent, which saved \$1 million in total paper and printing costs.

Installing print management software such as Green Print (www.greenprint.com) is another option to improve printer efficiency. Print management software sets restrictions on printing and directs users toward the most efficient and cost-effective printer in the office.

PROVIDE TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS

To encourage the reduction of paper, it is also important to have simple technology tools available. Have an easy and convenient method to scan documents so workers can scan and e-mail documents instead of making multiple paper copies. Also offer employees a way to have faxes converted to an e-mail or an electronic format instead of paper.

Users also print data because they are not sure how to save data in another easily retrievable electronic format. Install PDF printer drivers on employee computers. This enables workers to save e-mails, Internet pages and other system data into a standard PDF format instead of printing.

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