

## **The Portland Business Journal – Office Technology**

### **UPGRADING YOUR OFFICE**

Companies of all sizes from mom-and-pop shops to large corporations are looking for ways to cut costs, increase productivity and gain a competitive advantage. Believe it or not, understanding how your company manages documents can pave the way.

Oregon companies spend an average of seven to 10 percent of total revenues and as much as 20 to 40 percent of total labor costs on documents – writing, printing, copying, faxing, storing and retrieving. Add to that the fact that the amount of information we receive is doubling every two-and-a half years, taking proactive steps to manage documents and the flow of information is critical to remain competitive.

### **UPGRADING OFFICE EQUIPMENT SAVES MONEY**

Never has there been a time when technological changes in equipment have been so significant. Many companies are operating with dated equipment, thinking they are saving money by waiting until a copier or printer breaks down to make a change. There is nothing further from the truth. Newer machines operate faster, enabling greater efficiencies and improved productivity. Plus, many require less expensive supplies and less maintenance.

Multi-function products (MFPs), for example, not only print, but also perform other imaging functions, such as scanning, copying and faxing. MFPs save time by combining print and copy functions, allowing users to make “copies” from their PCs, resulting in fewer trips to the copier. Even a few minutes per user translates into thousands of labor dollars in increased productivity. MFPs also have a lower purchase price than the combined price of single-function products and produce higher quality images. With MFPs, companies have fewer machines to manage, plus they save on supplies and space.

### **ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS**

Document management systems allow companies to capture and store documents electronically; thereby reducing the company's reliance on paper. We are comfortable with paper. It's familiar, easy to take with us, and does not require training or technology. But, for many businesses, managing paper files can be one of their greatest drawbacks. Finding storage space, locating misfiled documents, and retrieving and distributing documents within the company are costly, both in monetary terms and employee productivity.

Electronic document management (EDM) tools can benefit almost every type of business in any industry. With EDM software, companies can improve the flow of information; streamline many business processes; and further compliance with regulatory and privacy regulations, such as HIPPA, FACTA and Sabanes-Oxley.

## **GETTING STARTED**

Getting started may seem like a daunting task, but office technology has introduced a new, simpler way of doing business. Many companies know that they need it; they want it, but don't know what to look for or how to implement it. Here are a few ways to avoid the pitfalls.

Printer, fax and copier vendors can help you develop and implement solutions to manage documents in ways that no other vendors can, according to Gartner Inc., the world's largest information technology research and advisory firm. They are best-capable of working with smaller and midsize companies that need document records management, but often have modest requirements and limited budgets.

Many office equipment suppliers will assess your current systems and will recommend integrated solutions that can lead to cost savings and improve productivity and efficiency. The most successful plans start with only one or two departments. When those are up and running, then expand to others.

Research the top three or four EDM software products on the market. Steer away from lower-end applications, or "light" versions. Generally, these products will only do bits and pieces and do not have sufficient upgrade capabilities. Look for modular products, which enables you to purchase only the components you need. If you decide to expand later, the top-tier applications enable you to add more tasks and features and incorporate more processes.

## **TECHNICAL SUPPORT & TRAINING**

With today's complex IT environments, it is extremely important that vendors have adequate technical support staff and that those personnel are well-trained and experienced. Ask what certifications technicians have and how many years they have been on the job. Also, look for a vendor that offers ongoing, individualized training. Not just a one-day workshop.

## **SERVICE COUNTS**

Many Oregon vendors offer similar products at competitive prices. Service is what it's all about. When a machine breaks down, you want it fixed as soon as possible. The key is to select a vendor that not only responds to a service call quickly, but has the diagnostic tools, qualified personnel and parts to repair the equipment within hours, not days.

## **PICKING A VENDOR**

Selecting a vendor can be a nebulous task. One of the most valuable steps is to go on-site. Touring a vendor's offices not only lets you test-drive products, but can tell you a lot about its capabilities and credibility. Ask to meet the people you will be working with.

Also, research a vendor's "BEI rating." Business Equipment Information Services is a third-party statistical reporting firm that sets national, benchmark standards for the copier and printer industry ([www.beiservices.com](http://www.beiservices.com)).

Documents – paper and digital - are the vehicles by which information flows in and around and out of your organization. Taking the steps to manage how documents are created, stored and distributed can put your company on the path to improved productivity, lower costs and yield a competitive advantage.

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