



Document Preparation and Staging

Essential Considerations for Document Imaging Conversions

by *Bill Krautter*

As professionals we plan, design and execute processes often relying on experience to fill in the gaps. We are great visionaries when finding a technology and applying it to the real world challenges of our clients and customers. At times in the pursuit of participating in the development of a successful Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) solution, one or more of the critical success factors fail.



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Selecting the document imaging application with the highest success rate, designing efficient index and retrieval values, selecting the right EDMS software and hardware system and managing the conversion process are often considered the major factors of a successful document imaging and management system.

Although there are scores of information available on the aspects of these factors, one of the least discussed, most overlooked, under budgeted and least understood is Document Preparation and Staging. This is the most labor-intensive part of a document imaging conversion, and if provided by a service bureau, it can be the single point of failure to its profitable operations. Companies who have not performed true document preparation ser-

vices will be surprised by the time and space requirements.

At the onset of the project, a true document knowledge expert will need to be identified. This person(s) will usually come from the client's organization and will have not only expert knowledge of the files, documents, pages, and items (other than paper found in files), but also how these files will appear under the new EDMS. Service bureau personnel involved in the document preparation function must draw on all the knowledge of this person(s) and make an effective transfer of detailed, file-organization knowledge.

Service bureau personnel will need to know the EDMS application so they can visualize the files and how they are used. This knowledge will improve the training element and overall success of the conversion results. Document preparation design is the process which identifies what pages of a document become part of the EDMS application.

Many hours will be spent on the documentation of this process. All document types and versions are identified and categorized for the conversion process. Every document in the physical file whether converted or not is included in the document preparation process. Even documents that should not be in the physical files, but appear due to misfilings are in-

cluded and identified with procedures describing its disposition. The order of each document type and how it appears in the scanning process is also detailed in the conversion procedures.

For example, in a customer bank loan file EDMS application, typical document types would be customer loan application, loan / note agreement, security/collateral agreement and miscellaneous documents (photos, receipts). Documents found in the file that don't belong could be Certificates of Deposit and insurance policies. The loan application document in each file could look different due to paper form version changes, applications taken over the phone, Internet or other sources.

The collating order of these document types is important especially if the document type is not an indexed value. The collating order will maintain document uniformity throughout the conversion and appear in an expected logical order when viewed by the EDMS application user. Page order within the document type may be important and can be defined so each page of the customer loan application is scanned in order and attachments like credit reports and copies of bank statements appear in a prescribed manner.

Just when you thought the procedures could not get any more detailed, instruc-

Continued on the reverse side

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tions concerning extraction of staples, use of paper clips, removal of “sticky notes,” and when to re-copy or enhance a page for clarity becomes the next challenge to the document preparation process. A document preparation process is defined and recorded in detail for each document type in the application.

A strategy will need to be designed to prep varying paper sizes, extreme paper weights, pages requiring cropping, re-copying, repair of torn pages and paste-up of small paper swatches. A review of sample paper from each document type will determine various sizes and paper weights. If a significant volume of similar pages of different paper types warrants scanner automatic form feeding, a strategy will need to be developed to manage this process.

Part of this strategy should include tracking the page counts of each different paper type and staging scanners to accommodate the separate scanning processes. Considerations should be made to maintain the integrity of these document pages during the separate scanning processes. The process of coding indexing documents will need to be evaluated for accuracy and efficiency.

When possible coding sheets and bar codes should be utilized. Coding sheets will require more time in the document preparation process, but yield fewer errors during data entry. When used effectively, index coding sheets can be included in the document scanning process. They can also create the index values and then be discarded from the other scanned pages at the end of the conversion process.

If physical files need to be returned to their original state, then a detailed, reassembly procedure for each document type will need to be defined. These instructions need to be part of the scanning and indexing conversion process so any ex-

tra color pages or “sticky notes” to be inserted as part of the document preparation process are not scanned or indexed but still remain intact after the process.

A quality control procedure to verify the document preparation steps are followed needs to be designed utilizing independent personnel who are familiar with the application but not part of the detail preparation process.

Setting the Stage

One critical element of the document conversion process that gets “no respect” is Document Staging. Both the conversion staging and the work environment need to be considered during the planning process. The physical space, electrical outlet locations, work station surface areas, and holding areas for file boxes are necessary considerations for an efficient process work flow.

Document preparation staging can require most of the physical space allocated to the conversion process. Inadequate floor space can limit the work of personnel and cause delays in conversion schedules. The fewer footsteps between document preparation work stations and document staging areas the better. Therefore, the location of file staging areas should be close to the document preparation areas but not too close to inhibit the performance of preparation personnel.

Allow enough working space to store documents for at least one-half day of work and clearly designate holding areas next to each conversion process work area. Stackable storage containers efficiently utilize physical space and eliminate unnecessary movement of files in the staging and preparation areas.

It is a good idea to design a document staging control sheet that tracks each batch of documents in a container and label document storage containers to in-

dicate the document preparation work completion status. All staging area activities should be detailed as part of the document conversion process plan.

A detailed and well-defined document preparation and document staging plan becomes invaluable when beginning the document imaging conversion. The time spent in developing the plan will be gained back many-fold during implementation. Just like navigating a car with the accuracy of a “Global Positioning System,” a view of the document preparation activities and document staging area will quickly determine how far to go in order to arrive on time.

About the Author

William F. (Bill) Krautter is the President of Statistical Service Corporation of Austin (STATCO), one of Austin’s oldest and largest commercial data processing service bureau. He received a Bachelors of Business Administration degree from Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos in 1977, with a concentration in Accounting and Computer Science. In 1981, he received his Certificate in Public Accounting (CPA) and later the Certificate in Data Processing (CDP).

Mr. Krautter’s imaging and records management professional affiliations include membership in AIIM and ARMA. He is a past president of Austin Chapter of the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP). Mr. Krautter and his firm have provided document conversions of data and image for many organizations over the past 39 years, and most recently for clients who have proprietary imaging systems and require special imaging and index processing.

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