

MINUTES OF WORKSHOP- THE PAPERLESS OFFICE

IN ATTENDENCE

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GB - Asks the group 'What does a 'paperless office' actually mean'?

MM -In Panama and Argentina all documents are scanned. There are no physical files. Very little paper.

SK - Paper is a vehicle for carrying information, it is the most convenient method and that is why in Slovenia people print everything out. SK uses Microsoft 1note software which minimises the amount of paper.

GT - Citroen Wells was still a paper office, old habits die hard!

GS - Is it possible to have a paperless office? A less paper office is a better, more realistic goal.

AN - AN office is now paperless. It is a legal requirement in Israel and the client's demand it. They have invested a lot of money in software to enable this to happen. Their website has access for client's to review their files on line and they have no physical files. They are debating whether to scan their entire archive. Currently they use US software for their archiving.

TM - Still mainly deal with paper and no way of dealing on line with stamped and original documents. The Hungarian Court of Registration has recently begun to accept documents by email and other Government Agencies will follow.

GS - Governments can take the lead by, for example, offering on line services for Tax Returns and company fillings.

DB - We have more paper now than we had 5 years ago. We find that there are so many emails going backwards and forwards attaching amended documents which cannot be read on screen. This creates a lot of paper. So the tools that were designed to reduce the amount of paper have actually had the opposite effect. We do scan documents onto the system far more and everything is electronically stored but we have no DMS system so finding electronic files is not as easy as it should be. Solicitors like to read hardcopies of documents and it is difficult to change this habit.

PK - Different countries have different requirements. In the Middle East banks need an original bank mandate whereas in Switzerland an email will suffice.

GB - The concept of the paperless office arrived in 1990s. The benefits are fewer files, fewer printers (PWC have reduced its printer count from 2000 to 240), less storage space ('only need to look at archives to realise the benefits of a paperless office'), less couriers, postage and stationary.

Lawrence Grant have introduced a 3 stage process to implement a paperless office. The 1st stage involved secretarial, admin work and tax work. This involved secretaries and admin staff scanning every document onto the system. The 2nd stage involved all audit work being purely online and finally working papers.

Important to remember 'accountants are not librarians' so it you have a dedicated person to ensure the system is working and to enforce it.

Important to have a good document management system which suits the companies needs. Training is vital for all staff and implementation is difficult. Do not expect an instantaneous result.

Key points to consider

Capacity: Does system have sufficient capacity?

Indexing/naming conventions: Vitally important to get the system right to enable you to search easily for documents.

Storing: How to name files? date-name of client-brief description of doc

Security: Vitally important to have good internal and external security. Internal: Who has permissions to access the system? Who can delete files? Who can amend letters? Who can download files? External: Disaster recovery, encrypt attachments, back up everything and check regularly!

AD: However secure you think documents are, if someone wants to see it they can. No security software is foolproof.

Archiving: When should you archive electronic files to free up space for new file? The Microsoft system only has a finite capacity and will collapse if too much is stored on it. System must be backed up and back up must be checked. It is important that if you tell a client you are destroying his file- It must be destroyed. If not there could well be liability issues, especially accountants whose relationship with clients is not protected by privileged.

Legality/authenticity of documents: Will scanned documents be accepted as originals? How authentic are the documents being retained?

Workflow: How easy is it to store and modify documents? If a good system is in place storing and modifying should not interrupt work flow. AD claims 'you can do more in less time'.

Conclusion

£400m saving for Footsie 100 companies by introducing good document management systems.

GB- Introducing a paperless office means a change in work practices so people have to be fully briefed and sold the on the benefits. Don't expect things to happen overnight, introduce it slowly in phases and ensure everyone buys into it.

The benefits are great: decreased costs, far more efficient work environment and the ability to work from home.