



corcentric™

Document distribution: Best practice and future-proofing

Prepare for changes in document distribution by applying the best practices outlined in this white paper.

Contents

Introduction pg.3

Paper Documents – a Legacy pg.3

Email – Friend and Foe pg.4

Push vs. Pull pg.4

Legal Considerations pg.5

Improved Visibility pg.5

Security of Business Documents pg.6

Leaner, Smarter Document Distribution pg.6

Are You Ready for the Future of Document

Distribution? pg.7

Conclusion pg.8

About Corcentric EIPP pg.9

Introduction

One of the biggest threats to business success in today's fast-paced world is wasted time. Technological innovation applied to business efficiency is a response to that threat. Indeed, virtually every area of business has felt radical change from digital transformation over the past few decades.

Cost and competitive advantage drive the need for improved efficiency. Digital transformation of business processes has been shown to afford faster, more accurate, and integrated operation.

But against the backdrop of rapid digital evolution, one important area resists change – the distribution of the most critical of business documents. Many businesses still insist on delivering invoices, contracts, and all manner of legal or financial documents as paper documents with handwritten signatures.

This hesitancy is more than just human resistance to change. It's an ingrained reluctance to alter anything pertaining to the most sensitive of business processes and documents. So as the lower value-density of general communications shift to email, instant messages and beyond, the higher value-density of legal and financial document distribution remain, for some businesses, as paper.

However, change is afoot. As businesses struggle to compete, the lower cost and higher speed of doing business that electronic document distribution affords offers a dramatic competitive edge.

In this paper, we look at best practice across key areas of document distribution, as well as practical steps for businesses to modernise their document distribution, and to future-proof this investment in change.

Paper documents – a legacy

When critically appraising the relative merits of paper vs. electronic document distribution, distribution cost is one of the first points to consider. With the cost of a first-class stamp fast approaching £1 in the UK, as well as printing costs and time to stuff envelopes, it's easy to see how the estimated 52 million letters posted by businesses per day represent a significant business cost (let alone the carbon footprint of this – approximately 1 metric ton of carbon per day).

Distribution costs aside, the storage of paper documents presents a growing challenge. With legal and financial requirements often mandating the storage of business documents for a minimum of five years or more, paper becomes increasingly impractical as a document medium. To put this into context, the entire volume of the British Library could be stored on just three small hard drives, rather than shelves of documents spanning a floor-space of over 112,000m².

However, the intent of this white paper is not to explain the limitations of paper. Rather, we are offering a

strategy for how you can incorporate paper with your document distribution processes in the most effective manner. There remains a need for paper in some businesses; through customer requirements or, in rare cases, a legal requirement, such as the delivery of dunning letters in some parts of Europe.

Best practice - Remove paper from all but those scenarios where it is mandatory, but do this in a gradual and considerate manner, so as not to inconvenience customers. Paper may need to remain for certain customers, and for certain legal or financial requirements. Consider

distributing paper documents when electronic documents have either failed to get through or failed to achieve the desired response. In an ideal scenario, this paper fall-back process should be automated.

Email – friend and foe

Most businesses have some degree of electronic document distribution, via the medium of email. Sending documents as email attachments is a significant advance on mailing paper, but presents an imperfect solution for a variety of reasons:

- + Large documents may be attached many times, to many individuals' emails, and clog up email storage with duplicate attachments.
- + Email attachment limits can present an uncertainty in the deliverability of documents.
- + Emails can easily be sent to the wrong person, and just as easily forwarded to the wrong person. This presents a risk when sending sensitive documents.
- + It's not standard practice to send emails in a way that can show whether they have been received, read, or the document downloaded.
- + When a new document version is created, this needs to be sent again. Ultimately, the recipient needs to file and be aware of the latest version.

- + There is limited ability to analyse and report on document content, approval status, or deliverability and engagement with documents sent in this way.

Despite these imperfections, email is the primary communication channel for most businesses. Integrating email with any document distribution processes is essential.

Best practice – Documents of a sensitive and secure nature should be located in a secure online location (a document portal), where emails can be used to direct recipients to view and download from here. However, for less sensitive documents, the simplicity of attaching documents to emails is the appropriate solution. Where regular, or standardised, transactional documents are emailed, these should be generated and sent automatically – saving time and cost and removing the risk of human error.

Push vs. pull

As mentioned above, having a centralised location for documents presents significant advantages over attaching documents to emails. Common reasons for selecting this 'pull' approach to document distribution, rather than the 'push' of attaching documents to emails, are listed below.

- + Emails are smaller, taking up less space on servers
- + There is no dispute as to the most current version of a document
- + Historic documents (or versions) can be made easily available
- + Analytics can be applied to determine how many times a document is accessed, who accessed it, when and what related actions were taken
- + Documents are more secure. If the document portal requires a login from each visitor, this prevents the accidental or malicious distribution of sensitive documents.

Given a single, online location for their documents, recipients can be allowed to access, print, download, and approve documents. This portal approach can be extended further, allowing online payment of invoices, updating contact details, and other items that would normally require the involvement of customer services or support staff.

Best practice – Distribute documents via a web portal and use email as the primary method of notifying recipients that a document is available via a direct link. Provide login-restricted access and consider integrating with a broader Single Sign On platform. This ensures security and facilitates tracking which recipients have accessed their documents. The web-based document portal should

provide easy access for users across desktop, tablet, and mobile devices.

Legal Considerations

Many of the reasons given by businesses for holding on to paper-based document processes pertain to legal requirements, such as misconceptions about wet ink signatures having more legal value than easily applied digital alternatives. So extreme is the attachment to paper documents for signatures, that around 80 percent of UK businesses print documents just to get them signed. This figure rises to an alarming 90 percent in financial services and public sector businesses.

The reality is that digital signatures are easily applied to documents if the right processes are used for document distribution. These signatures are also more secure than a handwritten signature on one page of a document. Digital signatures can render electronic documents tamper-proof, or the signature is lost.

So, contracts and legal documents can be distributed and approved electronically, but what about financial documents? Again, there are many misconceptions regarding the need to preserve paper copies of documents. Globally, however, there is a shift towards digital documents. Electronic invoicing (and e-billing in the broader sense) is becoming the norm in many areas – presenting significant cost savings, reducing late

payments, and improving cash flow.

It is now a legal requirement to preserve some financial documents for as many as 10 years for audit purposes. Unless documents are distributed and stored electronically, this storage requirement can prove extremely time-consuming and costly.

To complicate matters further, the ‘right to be forgotten’ presents businesses with the challenge of retrieving and destroying specific information pertaining to individuals. Trying to meet this requirement with documents that have been delivered and stored in paper format is akin to searching for many needles in many haystacks.

Best practice – Ensure documents are easily accessible and well archived, preserving files for 10 years or more, by digitising your document distribution and storage where possible. If your business operates within one of the few countries and industries where paper documents are required for specific legal or financial scenarios, store these separately as a small archive – referenced and indexed from the main electronic archives. Apply digital signatures or other trust services for legally binding documents – easily applied via a modern document distribution system.

Around 80 percent of UK businesses print documents just to get them signed.

Improved visibility

When sending business documents, there’s invariably an interest in knowing when they have been received, and whether they have been read. A modern document distribution solution should enable exactly that. Taking the concept of visibility one step further, some document distribution solutions – such as Corcentric EIPP – can integrate document approval with distributed documents. The ability to include a legally binding ‘approval’ button in a document transforms the process of sharing updates to terms and conditions or instructions pertaining to risk-sensitive environments.

With the ability to gather insight into who has received, read and/or approved documents across a large audience, businesses can then manage by exception – focussing on the few individuals who have not responded as needed to the distributed documents.

Best practice – Ensure you can identify who has received and, where possible, who has reacted to, each document. Deploying a solution to determine individual response to documents enables better use of resources, managing by exception, to follow up on documents sent.

Security of business documents

When considering the security of distributing business documents, having a portal-based approach makes good sense. A portal secures content behind a login, with the sign-up process and login credentials tailored to strike the right balance between security and ease of use.

Should attempts be made to access content via brute-force attack (guessing a user's password), IP address (location) of the attack can be used to prevent future access without locking the user out, for failed login attempts that weren't their fault.

In some cases, location-based IP restrictions, or access from within a specific firewall, can ensure another level of security. But if ease of access is imperative, users can be cookie'd on devices that are regularly used to access content, or a broad Single Sign On process can enable access to documents when logged into a specific platform (e.g., a work system).

When documents are actually uploaded or downloaded, Secure Socket Layer (SSL) connections are typically used to ensure hackers cannot intercept data packets and gain access to documents this way. This approach is hidden from users, but provides rock-solid security behind the scenes.

From an architectural standpoint, the document storage within an electronic document distribution system should be encrypted to prevent any unauthorised access (internal or external) being able to extract documents in a format that can be read.

Unlike paper-based document distribution and storage, there are numerous security benefits to a digital scenario. Document-level encryption and tamper-proofing (should any be successfully stolen), identification, tracking, and direct prevention of penetration/theft attempts enable control over document management. In a paper document scenario, stolen documents can be read and used with no persisting control from the author or related parties.

Best practice – For sensitive documents, limit access to logged-in users, and track their IP addresses for all engagement. Lock out specific users, and/or IP addresses automatically after login failures or behavioural anomalies. And simultaneously trigger alerts for direct, human investigation where

Unlike paper-based document distribution and storage, there are numerous security benefits to a digital scenario.

required. Extend this protection to prevent internal or external extraction of raw files (i.e., not through recipient login), through file-level encryption, to prevent many of the risks found in paper-based document distribution scenarios.

Leaner, smarter document distribution

As with all technological solutions, there is a need to deploy and maintain a document distribution system to meet evolving demands. Buying a solution off the shelf may be perfect for today's needs, but how well is your organisation positioned to deploy solutions and onboard customers. Furthermore, as time moves on, how easily can the solution be adapted for changes in integration or delivery requirements and scaled to meet changes in your business needs?

Managed services or outsourced solutions have become the norm in many areas of business for the

Outsource the development, integration, and maintenance of the document distribution system to an expert partner.

reasons stated above. Document distribution is no exception. In the early days of electronic document distribution, considerable time and money was ploughed into custom solutions for businesses – often tying up IT resources and related systems for months – before it became apparent that even large corporations with deep pockets were outsourcing this work to expert partners.

This leaner approach to document distribution technology reduces the burden on IT teams, enabling businesses to capitalise on the benefits afforded by the latest technology, with none of the internal development lag. By outsourcing the development, integration, and maintenance of the document distribution system to an expert partner, businesses can focus on more profitable activities, where they are the experts.

Best practice – Outsource the development, integration, and maintenance of the document distribution system to an expert partner. Don't saddle your IT department with the task of becoming document distribution experts to build and maintain this internally. Consider the total value of the solution, not simply the cost. If purchasing departments are involved, they need to evaluate the long-term value of the solution to the business.

Are you ready for the future of document distribution?

Future-proofing any investment in technology is a major challenge. With document distribution, consider the following points when setting out your long-term strategy. Working with an expert solution partner such as Corcentric ensures you offload the responsibility for staying current with technology considerations and focus on maximising the business opportunities you'll now have time for. Having a portal-based approach makes good sense. A portal secures content behind a login, with the sign-up process and login credentials tailored to strike the right balance between security and ease of use.

Structured data standards

As governments and regulatory bodies set standards for e-invoicing across the world, businesses quickly fall in line. Significant developments have been seen throughout Europe (following EU Directive 2014/55/EU), APAC and the US (adopting the PEPPOL network and associated XML standards) over the last few years, with plenty more to come.

E-invoicing as a requirement

Electronic invoicing is now mandatory for B2B transactions in much of South and Central America, with a growing number of European countries (e.g., Italy, Hungary, etc.) bringing this into law, too. This shift to electronic invoicing is likely to continue and even accelerate as early adopters show savings and other benefits. Electronic invoicing is already becoming a requirement for public sector procurement across a growing number of European countries. In parallel, it is expected that many businesses will mandate electronic format invoices (of a specific format) to reduce processing costs.

The always connected, always on generation

Before long, business users will expect access to everything, at any time. As a generation who instinctively google via their smartphones when

anything is beyond their ken, so too we need immediate access to our documents at the touch of a screen. Making documents easily accessible, irrespective of location and device, will be considered a basic requirement before long.

Knowledge is power

As mentioned in the section before this, document data will be used to generate competitive advantage. Consider the fact that most recent 'big businesses' are information businesses, and you'll appreciate the potential value dormant inside your business's documents.

Best practice – It's difficult to set out best practice for future-proofing. Suffice it to say that the more advanced, and typically successful, users of document distribution take electronic invoicing as a basic standard by doing the following:

- + Host the majority of customer documents on cloud-based storage for at least 10 years
- + Enable full access to historic documents for customers
- + Thrive on at least a basic level of analytics applied to document distribution processes.
- + Consider how your systems will stack up over the next few years to your competition.

Conclusion

With businesses defining competitive advantage based on the strength of their document distribution solutions, it's a smart move to define the potential value to your business. There are two strands to this:

- + **Reactive** - which behaviours put businesses at risk
- + **Proactive** - what to embrace now to achieve competitive advantage

Reactive considerations range from the impact on cash flow from paper-based invoicing through to security and the challenges of fulfilling legal obligations via paper document distribution. Looking a short distance into the future, e-invoicing will become an expected offering from any business. Those who cannot meet their customers' requirements for easy and secure document access will lose market share and find new opportunities harder to land as time goes on.

Proactive use of document distribution to carve out competitive advantage points to tapping the potential of insight from data within distributed documents. Starting with semi-structured data, such as invoices or other transactional items, analytics can yield immediately actionable insight that informs business decisions.

Beyond structured data, the analytical potential from the unstructured data of the majority of business

documents has the potential to propel businesses beyond their peers over the next decade and beyond.

But change is costly and challenging. Seeing the value of more powerful document distribution is the first step, but planning the integration and management of organisational change holds many businesses back.

Working with an expert partner such as Corcentric can be a solution to many of these concerns. Outsourcing the development, integration, and ongoing maintenance of a document distribution solution removes the vast majority of IT labour and risk, yet retains control over the solution specifics.

An outsourced document distribution system from an expert partner can enable your business to immediately benefit from things like a highly secure online portal, available across a range of devices from anywhere.

Looking a short distance into the future, e-invoicing will become an expected offering from any business.

Furthermore, this will immediately present the opportunity to measure, report, and act on individuals who need direct attention.

Reading this, it's likely that you're not contemplating whether to look to improvements in document distribution, but rather how to do this. It's rare for a business to have the internal resources to develop, integrate, and maintain a solution to deliver the competitive advantage possible through document distribution. So the next steps after reading this paper may well be to establish the range of desired features in a solution, and critically evaluate potential partners to deliver this. Let us help you kick-start this process with a [short discovery call](#) today.

About Corcentric EIPP

Corcentric EIPP is a managed service dedicated to streamlining, automating, and enhancing business invoicing, from delivery through to payment. Corcentric EIPP ensures accurate and efficient delivery of invoices to your customers in the medium which suits them.

Beyond saving time and cost through invoice automation, Corcentric EIPP enables a risk-free and seamless shift towards electronic invoicing, reducing errors, and driving down DSO.

Corcentric EIPP also removes the classic challenges of document storage and retrieval for auditing and compliance. Businesses depend on Corcentric EIPP to provide secure online access to their document distribution history, facilitating ease of reporting, performance analysis, and proof of delivery along with a range of other document management functions.

Headquartered in the United States, Corcentric helps more than 2,000 of the largest companies leverage smarter technology and services to reduce operating costs, improve cash flow, and unlock the hidden value within their enterprise.



15 global office locations - US and Europe



\$245 Billion in invoices sent each year



2,000+ customers and growing

Spend smarter,
optimize cash flow,
and drive profitability.

Corcentric is a leading provider of procurement and finance solutions. We help companies reduce costs and improve working capital by optimizing the way they purchase, pay, and get paid.



CONTACT:
E-Mail: eipp@corcentric.com
Phone: +44 20 3868 0216

corcentric.com
Copyright © 2021 Corcentric, LLC.