DIGITIZING THE MAILROOM:

A Practical Guide to Scanning, Processing, and Delivery Automation

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Information is arguably the most valuable asset of any organization, which is why monitoring its access and dissemination is a crucial aspect of delivery. Paper-based systems and systems that allow for paper to penetrate the organization beyond the gateway (mailroom) typically have lapses in their process that make proving compliance difficult. Physical paper is simply not monitored like digital assets. While auditing and tracking paper documents is, at best, difficult and, at worst, impossible, digital systems can monitor, limit distribution, and audit all access activity (an invaluable benefit should a delivery problem arise).

In this white paper, we explore best practices garnered from decades of experience deploying digital mailrooms. When properly implemented, these guidelines will help you:

- Select the best scanning method
- Remove as much paper as possible from the physical mail stream
- Optimize recipient identification and delivery
- Understand which delivery methods will encourage user buy-in and facilitate improved response time

CHAPTER 2

DIGITIZING THE MAILROOM: BASICS AND BENEFITS

Compared to the traditional, paper-based mailroom, digitization facilitates and accelerates electronic delivery, enhanced searchability, and access:

- To process incoming and interoffice mail, organizations can apply a simple workflow that includes three basic steps: scanning, classification, and delivery. The scanning process must be streamlined to achieve optimal efficiency. Classification should be flexible and easily updated as needed. Delivery should accommodate the various needs of the enterprise including options for delivering directly to an individual, a group, or specific workflow.

- Instead of rifling through a desk or mounds of paper to identify relevant documents, digitizing allows you to type in a key term to find the desired document and information. In many cases, searches can automatically highlight and route information without additional human intervention. The time required to locate needed information is significantly reduced.

- When using a paper-based system, information sharing is also slow and cumbersome, even once you have the document and information in hand. You have to type the details into an email, scan the original document, or forward the paper document, all of which are inefficient. Digitizing early in the process, in this case the mailroom, streamlines and enables widespread information-sharing.

To tackle the lowest and largest hanging fruit first, planning your digital mailroom should begin with scanning, specifically by examining how the distribution of physical mail throughout an organization may influence scanner choices.

EVALUATE COSTLY LABOR STEPS, ESPECIALLY DOCUMENT PREP

Next time you have an opportunity, take a tour of your organization's mail center, and check out the entire scanning process. If your mailroom processes a high volume of mail, you will likely see a pool of prep operators thumbing through trays of incoming mail and out-sorting exception envelopes. The qualified envelopes are then distributed to a second group of operators for content extraction and first-pass sorting. Sometimes envelopes are retained, but more often they are discarded, and a full-page separator is added between each transaction. Additionally, if an envelope contains multiple transactions, additional separators are added. Operators then determine the transaction type and place it in one of several document piles. Often, a second sorting step is conducted by yet another team to achieve a finer level of sort; in some cases, hundreds of sort types are required.

Only after these multiple sorting steps are completed can the documents be scanned. It's not uncommon for the ratio of prep operators to scan operators to be 5:1, 10:1, or even higher. Accordingly, the best opportunity for labor savings is to focus on document prep, not faster scanning.

CHANGING THE PARADIGM: ONE-TOUCH PATH TO EFFICIENCY

We recommend a digital mailroom approach that minimizes document handling by drastically reducing, or preferably eliminating extraneous envelope handling and document sorting after extraction. Also, when practical, we encourage use of the envelope itself as a transaction separator rather than adding costly transaction patch sheets. Unlike transactional mail, where the envelope image has little benefit, correspondence or general mail envelopes often identify the recipient.

Ultimately, the greatest efficiency is gained by utilizing a process that combines processing of all envelope types without sorting along with effective envelope opening, content scanning, and minimal document handling. A process that combines opening, extraction, minimal prep, and scanning all with one-touch in a seamless, continuous workflow is the most efficient, secure method available. Envelopes are automatically cut open, allowing the operator to unfold pages, remove staples, and prepare the documents for scanning. Single pages or groups of pages are then dropped onto a roller bed and automatically conveyed for imaging. Next, the envelope is dropped onto the roller bed and also imaged. After documents and envelopes are scanned, they are placed into storage trays or boxes so that further handling is minimized or eliminated.

By opening the envelope and immediately digitizing the envelope and its contents, the cumbersome steps of other digital mail workflows are eliminated. Also, the advantages gained by digitization are capitalized on from the very first touch of the mail.

CHAPTER 4

DOCUMENT CLASSIFICATION

After items are scanned, the next step in the digital mailroom is document classification, or as we like to call it, recipient identification (recipient ID). When practical, organizations should utilize a unique mail stop for each recipient, whether that be linked to a specific individual, group of individuals, or department. However, reading the mail stop automatically with optical character recognition (OCR) alone may not be sufficient to achieve a high-confidence recipient ID match. Even if the mail stop is read perfectly, it might have been printed incorrectly, been recently changed, or the recipient may no longer be with the company. Here's where Artificial Intelligence (AI) using an intelligent matching algorithm with the recipient's name – either on the envelope or on one of the imaged content pages – can be extremely valuable. Furthermore, a validation process to qualify a mail stop or recipient name and a cross-reference to another recipient (when necessary) is beneficial.

CHAPTER 5

THE LAST MILE: DELIVERY

As far as delivery itself, there is no single method that works for all organizations. Some entities already have a suitable infrastructure that meets internal security requirements with several delivery or interface points, depending on transaction type. Let's look at a few options:

- An organization currently using email to distribute information and documents securely. The organization uses a multi-function printer (MFP) to scan documents that are only occasionally received, creates a PDF on a local drive, initiates an email message manually, attaches the PDF, and finally sends the document to the intended recipient. It is simple, effective and may be the lowest barrier to implementation.

- Delivering digital assets to a document management system is a step up in complexity and functionality. It provides additional controls, the ability for multi-user access, searching capabilities, and much more.

- A simple output to write a file to a specific file share location is effective, especially if there is already an established process in place to pick up those files and move them to the correct destination.

- Delivering directly to an active work queue is also effective and makes use of existing functionality.

- While the use of web services (SOAP, REST) or other APIs does increase the complexity of any project, the integration capabilities demonstrate product flexibility and minimize the need for custom development.

People are no longer in the office five days a week, but they still need access to the information contained in their mail. In the digital mailroom, that information can be scanned, classified, and injected into the information stream with all relevant data ready to be analyzed and actioned.

When deploying a digital mailroom, it is important to work with a partner with the expertise, experience, and energy necessary to help you realize the maximum benefits and ensure the mailroom's long-term success.

ABOUT OPEX

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For more information, visit digitizeyourdocuments.com or contact us at info@opex.com

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With more than 34 years with OPEX, Scott brings extensive experience and knowledge in sales, marketing, product development, and operations within the document and mail automation industry. As the President of OPEX International, Scott oversees both the Document & Mail Automation and Warehouse Automation Divisions in Europe, Middle East, and Africa. In this role he focuses on the product roadmap striving for strategic growth throughout EMEA.

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Having spent most of his engineering career in the document processing industry, George founded Mavro Imaging in 2007 to provide optimal solutions to challenging document imaging and management problems. In light of his many innovations, George holds over 60 United States and worldwide patents relating to mail processing, document scanning, image processing, and data capture. He continues to play an active role at Mavro Imaging, as President and CEO.