white paper:

Nine Elements of a Successful Imaging Project

1. Create a foundation for success
2. Determine the level of scanning required
3. Conduct a file audit
4. Follow records management best practices
5. Understand resourcing needed
6. Develop policies, procedures and training
7. Establish chain of custody and file tracking
8. Decide what happens to physical content
9. Maintain information access

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Why are so many companies imaging their documents and records? It's simple: easier access to critical information creates a range of informational benefits that can add up to a significant competitive advantage.

Today, companies know that imaging helps them get better at everything from access and streamlining processes to risk management and compliance.

But transitioning your physical documents and records to electronic format presents several challenges that must be overcome if the benefits of imaging and electronic content management are to be realized.

In an effort to help organizations that are in the process of imaging and/or transitioning to electronic content management software, we've put together some key points you need to consider to make your project a success.

1. Create a foundation for success

A successful project starts with the identification of which information needs to be captured (in terms of taxonomy, metadata etc.). This in turn means looking at the information in terms of things like:

- Project drivers, desired project outcomes (i.e. risk management, improved compliance, litigation)
- End-user requirements (i.e. front line, IT, business)
- Relevant legislation and regulations

So say for example you want to capture payables information and need to create some rules around that. Ask:

- Which guidelines do you need to follow?
- Who will be using this information and how?
- Which data points are critical?

Answering questions like these will help ensure you are capturing the right information accurately.

2. What Level of Scanning Is Required?

There are three levels of scanning to consider:

File level: When scanning entire contents as one image. This is typically a PDF document with Optical Character Recognition designed to streamline access to a document or data without the need to drill down to a more granular level of indexing. This level is typically employed when imaging legacy files, files eligible for archive or infrequently accessed records.

Divider/Partition level: When scanning by dividers within the file. Each document within a file would be organized, imaged and indexed under one of the categories. Consequently, each file would be electronically separated by each index allowing for expedited access to information without the need to index to the document/date level.

Document Level: When imaging every document into a separate PDF. Here, various data points for each PDF need to be considered. When making decisions on the data points to be captured, it's important to remember that each additional data point will increase the time to process a document or file which will affect the project timeline and cost as well as the required industry knowledge of the person prepping the file.

To decide which level is appropriate, use the decision criteria we mentioned earlier. Consider questions such as:

- How often do you need to access the information?
- What is driving the initiative?
- Is there a deadline?
- Who uses the information and why?
- What about legacy information?

In addition, a primary consideration, if not the most important depending on the situation, will be the cost of the imaging initiative. It is helpful to remember that the further you "drill down" the more expensive indexing and scanning becomes. A general rule of thumb for pricing is as follows:

- $0.08 to $0.10 at the file level
- $0.14 to $0.18 at the category level
- $0.22 and up at the document level

Remember too that document volume affects pricing.

Ultimately, the primary variable is not necessarily the file volume or page count but the level of indexing and how easy it is to identify required data points.

3. Conduct a File Audit

When it comes to imaging, you want to make every effort to scan the right documents, and conducting a file audit is a great way to ensure this.

Over time, documents may have been inserted randomly; there could be duplicates, non-value adding correspondence and so on.

A file audit will help make sure the content is "clean", meaning irrelevant material is removed, and the information is correct, with the right version in the right place.

The process will also help establish processing rules and guidelines such as:

- Define what constitutes an original vs. a copy
- Create signature and recording rules
- Identify required dates (signed vs. effective vs. notarized)
- Develop rules for processing less critical documents such as correspondence (emails, faxes, cover letters)

Additionally, a file audit can identify files that are missing critical documents. This gives you an opportunity to locate the missing documents and ensure that they are inserted into the file prior to the imaging process, thereby ensuring record completeness.

4. Records Management Best Practices

Imaging records is not just a question of someone standing in front of a scanner feeding documents into it.

In order to get all the benefits of imaging, it is critical to ensure that the relevant records management best practices are used during the project and transferred to the new outputs. People working on the project need to always be thinking in terms of standardizations, consistencies, classification systems and so on.

This means that project participants must be skilled knowledge workers with an understanding of both your business and records management.

5. Resourcing

Understanding the resources the project will require, and the impact that providing them will have on your organization and their core responsibilities, is an extremely important step.

Personnel Requirements
It seems an obvious point, but imaging records requires people to do the actual work. This means that the imaging process will take personnel away from their assigned tasks for the duration of the project. And depending on the volumes and indexing requirements, imaging projects can take months if not years.

And it isn't just re-focus of energy, you need to plan for the fact that any personnel involved will need to be fully trained and properly managed if the process is to be successful (as discussed in the Best Practices section).

Dedicated Project Space
Your imaging project will need sufficient dedicated space that can be used for as long as the process takes. The average requirement is around 200 square feet per person, which includes room for a workstation, a file staging area, carts and all the necessary equipment.

The Right Equipment
Producing a good quality image and ensuring it is indexed accurately and distributed correctly is dependent on having the right equipment and software in place. The right software creates the ability to automate as much of the technology processes as possible and greatly reduces the "human error" component of any scanning project.

When considering equipment, ensure that you look for:

- Software with the intelligence and features to handle image enhancement, data identification and advanced processing without the need for manual input.
- Production level document scanners and maintenance capable of handling the various document formats and volumes you may encounter.

These variables will help ensure that your images meet required quality and are easily findable by the intended end user.

6. Policies, Procedures and Training

Part of using the image as an official record means having policies and procedures in place up front, outlining the specifics of the scanning process and training people on proper scanning techniques.

Your policies and procedures manual should be able to answer the question "how did we do this," establishing the rules for the imaging project as well as day-forward processing.

Take a file with a DVD or a jump drive in it, for instance. You can't scan it, so the proper procedure in this case needs to be established. Or think about oversize documents, like drawings or maps that exceed the size limitation of a standard production scanner. Are they being scanned the right way and more importantly, are they being scanned the right way every time?

Establishing a policy, procedures and rules manual with buy-in from the end users and departmental decision makers, helps maintain consistency throughout the project. It also reduces the learning curve as new team members are added and creates the blue print for a day-forward training guide. These standardizations can also help provide proof of consistency should the need arise.

7. Establishing Chain of Custody and File Tracking

The ability to establish an audit trail of the activities of a file and who touched it from the time it was picked up right through scanning to release is absolutely critical.

This accountability and control typically requires the use of a tracking system to ensure items can be found and accounted for throughout the scanning process. Using tracking software also ensures that if a file is needed and requested during the process it can quickly be located, provided to the requestor and re-inserted into the process once the file is returned.

8. Physical Content—What Happens?

Figuring out what you are going to do with the physical content after the scanning process is another consideration, and there is a lot to think about here.

Is it going to active or inactive storage? Depending on that decision, does it have to be returned in the same state?

When you consider that it can take well over an hour to return a file to its original state, which will affect the timeline and cost, then it might make more sense to put a rubber band around those files going to storage rather than take the time and money to fully de-prep a file that will rarely be accessed.

And the end user should also be factored in. While those who are comfortable with today's technology and 'screen' based review might be fine with all media being electronic, many of your more experienced users might prefer to continue accessing physical information. Understanding this variable will be a primary consideration when deciding about moving to a fully electronic solution or more of a hybrid environment.

Finally, from a compliance standpoint, in some instances for the electronic copy to be the official record, the physical record can't go back into circulation. You can destroy them or store them, but the choice has to be weighed in terms of risk management. Think for example of all the information stored on 3.5-inch floppy disks. If you didn't have a physical copy, how would you retrieve that information today?

9. Information Access

How will you maintain access to your files during the project? Scanning projects can run for months, and you need to ensure that the information necessary for daily operations is accessible at all times throughout the process. A well-defined project plan and an understanding of deadlines are required to ensure access to information is not interrupted especially when considering the due diligence requirement inherent to litigation scenarios or a divestiture/ acquisition.

Several tools can be incorporated into the project to guarantee access and full visibility for the various stakeholders, including:

- Planned department or category processing with timeline expectations
- Mass communication/notification when areas will be processed
- Project shared office that will provide full visibility into project progress, status, questions/ answers and reporting
- "Scan on demand," where a tool similar to tracking software is used to ensure seamless access to data.

Talk to TAB

We've helped hundreds and hundreds of companies image their records. Here's why they work with us:

Our Experience

We've been helping companies with records management for decades. This means we've developed a deep understanding of the records management challenges faced by today's businesses, and more importantly, how to solve them, particularly when it comes to imaging engagements.

Our Management, Knowledge Workers and Processes

Imaging records requires specific knowledge of how business in different industries works and how the information is used. Through our extensive records management experience we've developed a deep understanding of businesses in every vertical. When you hire TAB, you get:

- An experienced project management team
- Ability to provide recommendations and suggestions specific to the driving need and reason for the imaging initiative
- Knowledge workers with extensive experience in your business including document identification and the various indexing points
- State of the art equipment and software capable of handling the various document formats you will encounter during your imaging project
- Flexibility to quickly increase resource count, processing equipment and production hours to meet required deadlines
- Option to process files on-site or offsite - or a combination of both.

If you'd like to talk to someone at TAB about help with your imaging project, please get in touch.

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