



The Role of Electronic Document Management In Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity

by Nancy Sauer, President, D2Xchange

Vandalism. Broken water pipes. Arson. Hurricanes. Floods. Tornadoes. Terrorism. Disaster— natural or manmade — can strike at any time. It only takes a second to bring to mind the large-scale disasters we've witnessed in recent years — Hurricane Katrina, tornadoes in the Midwest, flooding along the Eastern seaboard, wildfires in the Southwest and Mountain states. The destruction wrought by these events has spurred many organizations to review their business continuity and disaster recovery plans. It has also created an opportunity for organizations to assess how electronic document management can help protect their most important asset — information.

More Than 90% of Documents Still Paper-Based

When it comes to securing company documents and data, there are three issues to consider:

- How are documents and data captured?
- Once captured, how are documents and data managed?
- How are they retrieved?

Despite the introduction of new technologies to the workplace, as much as 90% of the documents we handle each day are paper based. Unquestionably, paper documents are more susceptible to damage, loss, theft and destruction than their electronic counterparts. Capturing, storing and managing documents electronically can minimize your risks and place the information you need to jumpstart the disaster recovery process as close as your computer keyboard.

Solutions Range from Basic to Advanced

As with most business issues, there are a variety of solutions ranging from basic to advanced.

A basic approach would include scanning — or converting documents to electronic PDF or TIF images. Electronic images can then be stored on CD-ROM. You can also store your images on a secure website, which gives you the ultimate flexibility in terms of accessing information 27/7/365.

Scanning also creates a secondary benefit. In addition to protecting mission-critical paper files such as payroll records, personnel files and customer contracts, you can free valuable, physical storage space. Imagine reducing stacks of files and boxes of documents to a handful of CD-ROMs.

The Advantages of Electronic Content Management

Electronic content management (ECM) offers a more advanced approach to securing corporate information. ECM refers to software-based systems that help you store, index, locate, retrieve and maintain audit trails for documents. In addition to archiving files for disaster recovery, a robust ECM system can streamline workflow, improve business processes and increase employee productivity.

An ECM system can also incorporate value-added features such as:

- Document-level access and to control who can access information stored in your system
- Automated document routing and approval to enhance workflow
- Automatic or on-demand document archiving and/or removal
- Alerts and checklists to assure consistent work processes
- Version control
- Audit trails for compliance and regulatory tracking

There are multiple ECM solutions available on the market. They range from sophisticated, enterprise-wide solutions to systems designed for specific job functions such as H.R. and payroll. It is important to invest the time to find a solution that is best-suited for you taking into account functionality, costs, retrieval needs and the desired goals of your ECM project.

ASP or Internet-hosted document management is a cost-effective approach that significantly reduces, and often eliminates, your initial investment in hardware and software. In addition, web-based solutions are easily implemented and do not require IT resources for on-going system hosting or maintenance.

Server-hosted systems, which require an initial investment in software and hardware, allow you to host documents behind your company firewall.

Capturing, storing and managing documents electronically can minimize risks and place information you need to jumpstart the disaster recovery process as close as your computer keyboard.

Backup Media and Secure Storage Are Key

While electronic document management can reduce the volume, and therefore the risk and

expense, of paper documents, it is not a panacea. Once you have captured your documents electronically, it is crucial to assess how and where your documents will be stored. Key factors to consider are:

- The server on which your images are stored should be housed in a locked, fireproof and flood-safe room.
- Maintain at least one copy of backup media.
- Store your back up media off-site in a locked, fireproof and flood safe room.
- Ideally, you should maintain your backup media in a geographically diverse location. For example, if the home office is in New Orleans or Miami, store your backup media in Denver or Chicago.

The Bottom Line

Paperless office solutions ranging from electronic document management systems to simple document scanning and electronic storage can help you create secure archives for mission-critical documents and data. In addition to providing peace of mind, these solutions can also help you trim costs, enhance productivity, improve customer service and empower your employees with faster access to information.

Nancy Sauer is the president of D2Xchange, LLC, a Denver-based full-service document management and imaging company. D2Xchange leverages technology to help organizations with paper-intensive business processes reduce costs, increase productivity and safeguard information by electronically capturing and managing paper documents, forms and data. You can contact Sauer at 720-257-6922 or nsauer@d2xchange.com.