

## Electronic Document Storage v Paper

Does your business still store hundreds or even thousands of paper documents in filing cabinets and boxes? If so, how much information would your company lose if there were a fire or natural disaster? We all know that it is effectively impossible to back all those documents up by making copies. And let's assume for a moment that if we could make copies of thousands of documents, where would we store them? The cost of continually copying files and physically transporting them off-site could quickly become more expensive than the fire itself.

And how much space does your company devote to those paper documents? I've personally seen entire floors of building be devoted to the task of simply storing paper. And as your business grows, its storage space requirements will grow too. If your company hasn't gone so far as to clear entire offices for paper storage yet, don't be so sure it won't happen a few years from now.

Let's not dance around the real issue here. Why would any company need to store documents in the first place? For access at some later date. I don't want to be the guy that has to climb over a mountain of insurance or loan forms in search of a client's application from eighteen years ago. By the time you find the application the loan would have been long paid off!

So to make access a little easier, you might start using some categorization system. You might design a way of categorizing documents that seemed brilliant in 1983 when your company had only sixteen thousand clients. But now that your company has grown to one hundred and ten million clients, sorting applications by their five digit application number probably won't work anymore. So now you've got a problem. How do you take a few million paper documents sorted using an obsolete numbering system and re-sort them in a way that makes sense in your company's current climate?

It might be time to hire a librarian. Or maybe an army of them. Now you've got to find room for their offices and maybe even some sort of triple reference card catalog system. These things aren't cheap. You could save money by using an electronic card catalog system. Now wouldn't that be ironic? I've seen it before.

Electronic document storage solves all these problems. You could have stored all those loan applications on a single file server. Electronically backing up your data is trivial. You can't even compare photocopying a document one page at a time to dragging a file from one folder to another using a mouse, and getting all the pages with one fell swoop. How can you compare the same for 150,000,000 documents one page at a time? And you can reduce electronic document storage back-up to the press of a button with a little automation. Electronic document storage makes accessing your data fast and easy no matter how much data you've got. Just look at the World Wide Web. There are some 4 trillion or so web pages (or something like that), but finding the one you want is still as simple as going to Google and typing a simple query. And keep in mind that the World Wide Web isn't categorized at all. Not even a little meta-data is built in. Yet electronic document storage makes the job fast and simple.