

## **The Path to Paperless**

### **SMBs Gain Efficiency, Save Money**

How much money can your business save by reducing its reliance on paper?

The eight-employee Majestic Invites, an e-commerce invitations design company, saves about \$100,000 annually on paper, printing, mailing, physical storage for documents, and other expenses, estimates Alina Uzilov, president. Uzilov attributes the savings to her company's elimination of paper from nearly all processes, including design mock-ups, vendor and client contracts, purchase orders, and invoicing.

The 370-employee Suncoast Medical Clinic estimates it will save about \$1 million by replacing 80% of its paper-based medical records budget and the majority of its transcription services with electronic health records (EHR).

### **Bounty of Benefits**

Paper is a large expense that small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) can easily cut, notes Merylyn Dunn, a director at the digital imaging and documents solutions research firm InfoTrends [LINK: <http://www.infotrends.com/public/home.html>]. By going paperless, SMBs can also reduce toner, ink, electricity, and other related costs.

SMBs are going paperless for other reasons, too. "Prices for hardware and software are down and the technology has become easier to use," says Carl Frappaolo, vice president of market intelligence for AIIM [LINK: <http://aiim.org/>], the international enterprise content management association. The timing is good. Frappaolo reports that enterprises increasingly require that all their suppliers have paperless workflows, and SMBs that do not, lose the enterprise's business.

Adding to the revenue and expense advantages, other benefits of going paperless include:

**Improved operational efficiencies.** At Suncoast Medical Clinic [LINK: [http://cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns339/ns416/ns418/networking\\_solutions\\_customer\\_profile0900aecd8055c412.html](http://cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns339/ns416/ns418/networking_solutions_customer_profile0900aecd8055c412.html)], physicians review patient lab results, radiology interpretations and progress reports in real-time over the network from their office, home or a hospital. EHR lets primary care physicians and specialists who are treating the same patient review and contribute to a single, shared patient record. The process saves time, helps avoid errors, and reduces duplication of tests. Adding to the clinical advantages, billing, accounting, and other administrative functions have also been streamlined with digital processes.

**Better customer service.** Unlike paper documents, electronic files can be accessed anywhere, anytime, notes Uzilov. To quickly respond to a customer's question or need, a Majestic Invites [LINK:

[http://www.cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns339/ns416/ns418/networking\\_solutions\\_customer\\_profile0900aecd8055c485.html](http://www.cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns339/ns416/ns418/networking_solutions_customer_profile0900aecd8055c485.html)] employee can review that customer's file over the network from home instead of having to physically go to the office.

**Enhanced collaboration.** Using a shared document on the network, employees can collaborate in real time with one another or with partners or customers, wherever they're located. Such collaboration facilitates a better visual understanding among multiple parties, which is important when reviewing design proofs, Uzilov explains. She adds that online collaboration speeds decision-making and reduces the time-consuming back-and-forth communications required by paper documents.

### **Resources Needed to Go Paperless**

SMBs can reduce reliance on paper by using digital technologies that range from a simple \$100 scanner to advanced document management and other systems costing thousands of dollars.

Here are the network technology strategies that Majestic Invites uses:

- Establish an Internet Protocol (IP) network that delivers secure, reliable access to company information on projects, customers, and vendors. The data network is the foundation for Majestic Invites' IP communications, instant messaging, e-mail, and other tools, and the company plans to upgrade to a converged network.
- Build password-protected online workspaces that let customers review and make suggested changes to design proofs.
- Provide redundant, automated data backup and network security that ensure all documents are online and accessible whenever they are needed.
- Use Web-based video conferencing and document collaboration, which enable virtual meetings with suppliers in China, India, and Europe.

Uzilov estimates that Majestic Invites spends about \$25,000 annually for these and other technologies, and realizes an annual return on investment (ROI) of about \$75,000 annually by using its network to go paperless.

Alternatively, some SMBs may prefer hosted or managed services for their network document management, video conferencing, IP communications, storage, security, and other solutions. Such services are available for predictable monthly fees and provide the necessary IT expertise.

The transformation to paperless can take a business several or many months, notes Uzilov. The process requires that you enlist the cooperation of the entire organization and decide how documents will be organized and accessed; you must also map your

business objectives to the technologies needed to achieve them, and digitize existing documents.

“Don’t be discouraged by the time it takes,” Uzilov advises. “It’s well worth it.”

## **Next Steps**

Read how other Cisco SMB customers--[Tri-State Water Treatment](#) and [Citizens Memorial Healthcare](#)--went paperless.

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