

Why the 'digital' is still missing from your digital transformation



We live in a digital age where analog processes cost time and money, make working practices cumbersome and inflexible, and lead to needless waste.

Although many organizations have adopted digital systems more broadly across their operations, there are still some outdated practices which linger.

While in the past these legacy practices may have just been an inconvenience and something to be gradually replaced over time, the fallout from the pandemic means any delays are no longer an option.

From implementing internal remote working to creating new methods of interacting with customers and clients, they had no choice but to accelerate their digital plans at a pace many of them were simply not prepared for. It was a seismic wake-up call.

By quickly integrating cloud infrastructure and digital applications into their existing business practices, they were able to remain operational in ways that would not have been possible even 10 years ago.

Despite this added urgency, some companies are still persevering with

antiquated ways of doing things: such as employing paper-based processes and data storage. According to [one report](#) published in association with Adobe, 38% of employees still have to use paper processes, even with the availability of faster software-based alternatives.

When paper documents have to be signed, this creates yet another barrier to productivity, with business processes being halted completely until the correct physical signature can be collected from the right person and the document faxed, mailed, or hand-delivered. In a world where staff are increasingly no longer in the same office or where face-to-face interactions with customers are not always possible, the potential ramifications for business are huge.

If organizations wish to truly adopt digital, outmoded paper processes must be phased out — and indeed, there are great opportunities to be had provided that they do.

The future of work

Even before the pandemic struck, businesses were starting to embrace new ways of digital working, from the use of flexible office space designed to free companies from being tied to

any one expensive city centre HQ, to videoconferencing which helped save spending on business travel.

There was a clear, strategic shift away from the old ways of doing things where companies were highly centralized. Tech which enabled the sharing of data across an organization was becoming more and more important.

Despite the recession, spending on digitizing document processes will increase on average by 57%

The pandemic greatly accelerated that pace of change and firms were forced to quickly embrace the digital revolution. Those that did not struggled, and those that did knew there was no going back. Arguably the most visible impact is how staff are distributed across organizations. With more employees working from home, the work/life balance implications have led

to a rise in the number of people who no longer want to work full time from one big office.

One report found that [73% of employees](#) wanted to continue working from home at least some of the time after the pandemic ends, while a [survey of European companies by Forrester](#) found that respondents thought 38% of their employees would continue to work from home after the pandemic. Being able to facilitate a distributed workforce will require changes to how organizations create, store, sign, and move documents.

Correspondingly, the same Forrester report revealed 39% of respondents said their firm was planning to expand or upgrade its use of digital document processes capabilities in the next 12 months. Of that figure, 17% said they would be implementing it for the first time.

The report stated: “So, despite the recession, spending on digitizing document processes will increase on average by 57% over the same period, demonstrating the importance of these capabilities in enabling business continuity, as well as improve CX and EX.”

The fact so many businesses anticipate a continuation of distributed working, while also anticipating investment in digitization, reveals both to be central pillars of the new way of post-pandemic working.

Productivity and waste

Digitization is not just about dealing with a future where not everyone is in the same office, but can also have an immediate practical and quantifiable impact on a company's resources, time, and the financial bottom line.

Businesses may often put off a decision on changing how they do things because they are concerned about cost or disruption, but such changes have enormous potential to streamline processes and cut waste.

Indeed, according to a [survey](#) of data professionals by IDC, respondents spent more than a third of their working week just looking for the information they needed to do their jobs.

Consider the amount of time taken up trying to find a certain report or a set of statistics filed away on a different floor, or even in a different building, before

getting it signed off by the right manager and transported to where it needs to be.

It is not just the impact on productivity to consider either, but also waste.

One report found that in the UK alone, before the pandemic struck, the average office worker used [10,000 sheets of paper a year](#), but a staggering 6,800 of those sheets were wasted. The issue is global, and costly. According to [Corp Magazine](#), businesses in the US waste \$8 billion annually on paper. It costs an organization an average of \$20 to file a document, \$120 to find a misplaced document, and \$220 to reproduce a lost document.

There are a plethora of reasons for this type of waste, such as printing out emails unnecessarily, jotting down notes that could be recorded via other means, or sending multiple copies for manual signatures.

The potential costs go far further than paper and include things such as printing hardware and transport, as well as the vast amount of ancillary supplies needed to keep them running like ink and toner, not to mention stationery.

Reputation and regulation

As well as adapting to the future economy and ending needless waste, there is another hugely significant impact of digitizing processes.

[A study](#) by the Reuters Institute revealed that climate change is something that matters to most people. The same goes for employees, with [another survey](#) finding that 60% of staff said they were more likely to work for a company with strong environmental policies.



The green agenda is no longer just the concern of environmental activists, it is increasingly forming the foundation for corporate strategies the world over. Businesses which do not take it seriously risk falling foul of regulations and suffering reputational damage with other firms, clients, and their own employees.

Sustainability has a big impact on how companies are viewed by the general public, customers and [investors](#).

Companies will have to handle increasingly stringent regulations too, with countries the world over committing to tighter environmental controls. The European Union, for example, has introduced the European Green Deal, which aims to make the bloc carbon-neutral by 2050. The move toward carbon neutrality is heading in only one direction, and it is something companies cannot ignore.

The challenge for business leaders

The reasons for digitization are clear, but there are a number of challenges businesses face when they introduce an overhaul in the way they work.

These can include:

- **Resistance.** Staff may be resistant to change, especially when processes are long established.
- **Fear of risk.** Businesses abhor uncertainty. Sometimes they may feel it is better to persevere with an inefficient process rather than try something new.
- **Cost.** Introducing new software can incur costs, at least in the short term.

Fear or risk is a major barrier because many companies are understandably concerned about what they perceive to be the unknown. A study by [Harvard Business Review](#) found 47% of business leaders questioned said their company was risk averse.

Employees can also be resistant to change, especially if they have been doing things the same way for a long time. A report by [McKinsey](#) found that

cultural and behavioral challenges were the biggest obstacle to digital transformation, while a report by [Gartner](#) found a lack of skills was also a barrier.

Bringing about change is not easy, but in a fast-changing world the potential short-term challenges pale into insignificance compared to the long-term gains.

The paperless revolution

The challenges of maintaining legacy paper systems are extensive, from lost productivity and waste, to corporate reputation and cost. But what is the solution? Put simply, the answer starts with using digital technology to replace today's manual or paper-based processes.

Thanks to cloud technology, a company no longer needs to have handwritten paperwork which may have to be signed and transported across different offices, nor does it need rows of filing cabinets, folders, printers, and stationery with all the potential for lost information and general waste that goes with it.

Using digital technology like Adobe Sign, Acrobat, and Adobe Document Cloud, digital forms can be created, processed,

signed, sent, and stored instantly — and securely. By organizing everything in a document library, these forms can be stored and accessed by anyone with permission, no matter where they are based — whether it is at another office, another country, or at home.

Impact of paperless processes

Saving money, streamlining processes, and improved efficiency are just some of the benefits of going paperless.

Every company is different, but one study found this type of digital working can provide [potential combined benefits](#) of £7.4 million over three years. It also found users saved 65 hours a year using Adobe Acrobat DC with Microsoft 365 apps by digitizing paper-based tasks.

One example of real-world cost savings is the [State of Hawaii's](#) governor's office, departments, and agencies, which changed the way they work with Adobe Sign.

So far, the state has processed more than 400,000 documents, including travel forms, authorization forms, spend requests, accounting forms, and

acknowledgements of pay stubs for 40,000 people every pay period, with all signed documents saved as PDF files.

The process has reduced the amount of paper printed across the state by 24,000 pages every day, saving Hawaii \$5 million over 2.5 years by reducing paper, ink, printing, and employee labour costs.



The answer starts with using digital technology to replace today's manual or paper-based processes

As well as reduced costs, increased efficiency is also something which moving from paper to digital helps to achieve. According to [Forrester](#), solutions like Adobe Sign make business cycles up to 28 times faster.

While paperless processes and electronic signatures can massively speed up internal business processes, they are also absolutely vital to any interaction with clients where customer signatures are required too.

Making a purchase that involves a contract is just one of the many ways where customers are required to add their signature to a form, but the pandemic put a stop to many in-person interactions, which created a major headache for businesses.

One company which managed to overcome such an obstacle was Lookers.

The car sales company had previously used its online presence more as a catalog where customers could view vehicles. Customers could look, but they still had to visit branches to sign documents to make the purchase official. But with its 140 dealerships closed due to lockdown restrictions, Lookers had to get creative.

With Adobe Sign, the Lookers team was able to roll out e-signatures, store all of Lookers' deal files in a compliant, digital format within SharePoint, and simplify the sales process for remote customers.

One week after going live in April 2020, Lookers was able to process 8,000 vehicle orders and deliver them to their new owners, putting it back on track and setting the pace for a successful transition to digital commerce.

Secure processes

Another vital benefit is security. In an age where the protection of client and customer data is paramount, it seems almost inconceivable that such precious information can be left lying around on paper. But that is the reality of any situation where the digital production, movement, and storage of documents is not utilized.

Having digitized documents means they can be stored securely, rather than left lying around on desks or in filing cabinets.

Documents can also be encrypted, with only a select number of people granted access — essential for satisfying data security compliance.

Adobe Sign also allows for the management of user identities, authentication, and access control, for the certification of document integrity, the verifying of e-signatures, and the maintenance of audit trails.

All in all, it makes the whole process of creating, signing, storing, and sharing documents far more secure than paper alternatives.

A digital transformation complete

While many companies may claim to be digital, until something as antiquated, inefficient, and costly as paper is largely eliminated from their internal processes — can this ever really be true?

Consider the case of the car sales company, Lookers, which invested in a sophisticated web presence to advertise its stock but, until adopting Adobe Sign, was unable to actually complete sales of those vehicles, requiring old-fashioned “wet” signatures instead, a situation made virtually impossible during the pandemic.

Other companies have embraced digital ways of working during the

pandemic — they had no choice if they wanted to survive — but that road to full transformation should not stop now.

Embracing technology like [Adobe Sign](#) is a simple and effective way to eliminate waste, embrace the green agenda, and streamline business processes to finally become a true, fully digital business.

From SMEs to enterprise clients, regardless of a business’s size and needs, there is a bespoke solution that can place it on the path to a successful digital future.

To learn more, visit the [Business Moves CIO.com](#) site or contact [Adobe](#).

