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For Efficient Document Management.

Organisations all over the world are faced with the challenge of document explosion, amid efforts to trim costs and boost productivity. One of the solutions is electronic document imaging (EDI), which has emerged as an ideal way to manage documents efficiently at a lower cost. The steps necessary to introduce an EDI system into an organisation are "easy. Documents are scanned into the system which stores them on a hard drive or optical disc. The documents are then indexed.

To read the documents, users use the retrieval tools available in the system. Which documents can be read and what actions are performed on the documents are dependent on the access provided by the system. Nevertheless, it must be noted that having an EDI system will not alter poor record management into a good one.

AmberSoft Sdn Bhd's business development manager Balvinder Singh says the current document management technology grows out of the business establishment where some 80 per cent of corporate information resides in documents. "Therefore, the need for better effectiveness in handling business documents to gain an edge on the competition has fuelled the quick development of document management solutions over the last few years. Document management has progressed significantly owing to the emergence of new technologies," he adds.

According to Balvinder, document management has replaced data management as the latest challenge facing information technologists. He believes that growth of "general purpose" document management solutions appears to be towards solutions which can be used equally well by different sections of a company and by companies in different sectors. Multimedia will also become part of corporate business documents.

For example, previously, users could only retrieve and access documents from their office via the document management system. However, the Internet enables users to access their documents via a Web browser, allowing instant retrieval from any location at any time, he explains.

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Challenges Of EDI

Despite EDI's many benefits, there are also problems. Having such a system requires up-front planning and design and it may not be practical in some environments where computers are not available. There is also the technology phobia issue and the need for network-enabled infrastructure. Balvinder says although the disadvantages of EDI may seem insignificant compared to the potential cost savings. organisations should not be misled into thinking they are not important.

"Some people just feel more comfortable with paper. These issues are unlikely to go away soon, but they will fade with time. In the near future, we may finally be able to make the evolution from the 'paper-less' office to the 'paperless' office environment," he adds.

Canon Marketing (M) Sdn Bhd's office system solutions division general manager Lim Kok Hin notes that almost all of the information in most businesses consist of hardcopy documents.

Lim says, a business needs an EDI system when it can no longer capture. manage and distribute all data/information in a timely, meaningful and efficient manner.

According to Lim, factors to consider when evaluating the business needs when choosing an EDI system include:

· How many documents must the system store while taking into account both the number of existing documents and the number of documents added each year? This determines how much storage space is needed, the hardware configuration and the cost of the system.

· How many users will be using the system concurrently? This determines preliminary software costs and server size.

· What departments will be using the system and will the public have access to it? This determines what specific features and levels of security will be needed.

· What serious problems must be resolved and what issues should be addressed to reduce costs or improved productivity? This determines which functions are requirements and which ought to be optional. It helps to determine whether plug-ins or customisation will be needed.

· Does one want a turnkey solution or a customised one? This determines the amount of consulting, installation, training, configuration and support that is needed.

· What type of network is currently used such as local or wide area network, etc, and will it stay the same? This determines network constraints, system configuration and workstation upgrades.