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Document Management is the term used to describe the capture and management of documents within an organisation. Traditionally this involved the management of paper records using a structured filing system and registry process or microfiche records and off-site archiving. In recent years it is more commonly used to describe computer based systems controlling the management of electronic documents, scanned paper records and multimedia files and embraces their imaging, storage, indexing, workflow and retrieval.

Both electronic and traditional Document Management systems should address key decision points such as document organisation, storage location, version control, security, disaster recovery, retention and distribution. More sophisticated electronic Document Management systems offer the possibility of integrating documents into enterprise wide workflow systems to automate the information and data recording elements of business operational processes.

Poorly managed document management can lead to duplication of work, reduced efficiency through wasted employee time, and increases the risk of regulatory or statutory non-compliance through lost or inaccurate information, poor retrieval and ineffective audit trails. The impact of the new and developing information and communication technologies is a massive increase in data within organisations which exacerbates the problems of poor information management of and this trend seems certain to continue in the future.

Good document management should improve access to valuable information, making it available across the organisation as and when needed. In doing so it should deliver reduced costs, increased operational efficiency, cheaper and more demonstrable compliance, and may provide the organisation with a competitive edge over less organised rivals. Leading Document Management practitioners claim significant savings in space and a major reduction in paper and waste in addition to operating efficiency benefits. While few will claim to have achieved the "paperless office" there are a number of well documented case studies which appear to validate the promised savings. However the cost of implementing a new Document Management solution can be very high.

Considerable time and effort must be invested in the proper capture and understanding of the organisations information processes, the design of new processes and their capture within a system is crucial and must facilitate interoperability with other business systems. Implementation will involve time consuming capture and set-up activities and the cost of new software, hardware and associated equipment must include adequate training for everyone involved.

For more information: The annual conference and exhibition Information Management Solutions 2008 will take place at Olympia on 2-4 December www.ims-show.co.uk and Document Manager magazine has a useful Resource Guide available for download at www.document-manager.com