



Do More than Store

by Jo Day and Kevin Day

If you are thinking about or are in the process of implementing electronic document management (aka the “paperless office”), then listen up!

If you approach electronic document management simply as a replacement filing system, then you are destined to miss the boat. If your goal instead is to streamline workflow, you will end up with an entirely different design to your system with wildly more successful results.

What do we mean? Let’s look at some eye-opening insights into how innovative firms, with an altogether different agenda for implementing electronic data management than most planning firms, are using their systems to do more than store.

Automate Time-Consuming Processes

Automating a time-consuming and tedious task is a big win for busy firms.

Like many planning firms, generating quarterly reports was always a labor-intensive process for Wingate Financial Group in Lexington, Massachusetts. To effectively tailor the information delivered to clients, Wingate combines data from dbCAMS and an Access database to produce 500 consolidated reports for about 2,000 accounts. Sheila Bienemann and Anita O’Brien, (the firm’s IT director and director of operations respectively), were determined to streamline this operation by electronically collating and automatically filing their quarterly reports.

Wingate now has a streamlined process that enables them to create, review, file and send quarterlies quickly. The first step is to

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run a batch report from dbCAMS and the Access database. Then he runs a process to electronically collate the reports.¹

“Next,” says Bienemann, “I put [the compiled reports] on the network—[the advisors] can look at electronic copies or they can print them out...if there are any adjustments, I may need to just replace one page or two.”

Upon final approval, reports are batch printed and sent to the client along with a quarterly letter. Once the reports are out the door, Bienemann runs the second part of her process, the “Auto Filer,” to file reports into Wingate’s electronic document management system. The information is then immediately accessible to everyone in the firm if a client calls with a question.

Having used this process for two quarters now, O’Brien estimates they have already recouped the project cost of \$6,500. Where the manual collating process used to take three or four days using a dedicated employee, the automated process now takes four or five hours.

Automating is great, but how can you also use the document management system to help overcome compliance hurdles?

Streamline Compliance

Using the language of self-help guru

Stephen Covey, fulfilling compliance requirements is one of those tasks that are “important, but not urgent” (until the next audit). To ensure that your office stays on top of compliance requirements, the process needs to be simple and easy.

For Molen and Associates, a financial services and accounting firm in Houston, Texas, fulfilling compliance requirements was a time-consuming and tedious task.

Molen’s broker/dealer requires them to maintain and submit a detailed log of compliance-related documents each week. This includes information such as the client’s name, type of document and document date. Molen must also supply a copy of the first page of each compliance-related document.

Under their old filing process, Molen was forced to file the documents to the appropriate place in the client’s paper file as well as an additional copy to a “compliance” file. They then typed each document’s information into the log.

Streamlining this process was an important consideration in the overall design of their electronic document management system. According to financial planner Emmet Scott, “We’ve cut our time to do compliance from one hour [per week] to ten minutes.” Scott outlines the process:

1. Each compliance-related document is filed into their document management system using predefined templates.

2. Scott's assistant, Jacob Irving, performs a weekly search for new compliance-related documents, exports the list to an Excel template and e-mails it to their broker/dealer.

The next piece of the process Irving plans to implement is encryption and electronic delivery of the actual documents to the B/D.

With their new process, Molen and Associates scans and files the document once, with no additional copies for compliance reporting. Scott says the process has other advantages as well. "Sometimes the B/D might misplace a week [of information]. When they get ready for an audit, they would ask us to resend a week. Previously, we'd have to search the documents to find what we needed—now it's real easy to resend anything they want."

If you go paperless and all you do is get rid of filing cabinets, then you've missed out on the real benefit these systems can provide to your firm. The next few examples illustrate how to maximize the benefit of using "virtual" employees.

Outsource

Accessing client files from anywhere is an obvious advantage of electronic document management, but what about hiring someone to scan and file remotely?

Roni Laskin, CPA, and Ben Tobias, CFP, share office space and clients in Plantation, Florida. Last year, they embarked on a plan to jointly implement an electronic document management system so they could more effectively share joint client information. With an office move pending, Laskin and Tobias were equally determined to scan and file all their historical client documents to save on office space when they relocated.

Says Laskin, "I did not want to bring boxes into the office [to scan]. The storage facility is near my house, so I brought the old files home." Laskin also brought a

laptop and scanner home from the office and hired his son and another high school student to scan and file documents.

That way, says Laskin, "I can supervise their work and they can scan any time they want to—first thing in the morning or on the weekends." Even better, says Laskin, is he does not have to drive his son into the office to do the work. Now, when Laskin goes by the office once or twice a week, "I just 'check in' all the documents from my laptop. Last time I stopped in the office, I checked in 475 files," says Laskin.

As evidenced by the above examples, not only can you hire someone to do the filing off-site, but with encryption techniques, you can securely provide information electronically to broker/dealers and third-party vendors or back-office personnel. The next example even describes how to use a document management system to streamline services from your system administrator.

Get the Help You Need

Because you rely on a robust suite of software and technology to help run your practice, an easy-to-use process that helps you get timely support from your system administrator can make the difference between mere frustration and a missed deadline.

Here's a simple process for both your staff and your system administrator: Using a Word template, an employee creates a support request with a detailed description of a problem along with screen shots of any error message(s). We like a product called Snag It for copying and pasting screen shots (www.snagit.com).

Next, the employee files the support request into the document management system. (Many such systems allow the user to attach a virtual index card to a document). For Support Requests, the employee fills in the problem type, requestor and priority; sets the status field of the index card to "open"; and e-mails an attachment of the request to your system administrator.

After troubleshooting the problem, your system administrator updates the original support request by documenting what they did to fix it, changes the status field to "resolved" and e-mails the requestor the revised support request. The requestor confirms the issue has been resolved either by changing the status to "closed" or resubmitting it.

By capturing support requests in the DMS, everyone can check on the status of a request, users are given an opportunity to say whether an issue has been resolved, and the firm develops an online knowledge base to aid future troubleshooting.

It's not just what, but how you implement a document management system that makes the difference between mere storage versus mega-streamlining. Go for the goal of streamlining, and you will be thrilled with the results!



Endnotes

1. While each of the firms interviewed for this column use Worldox document management software, the workflow processes may be replicated using other document management applications. The authors work with document management software applications, including Worldox.
2. In our last article, "Moving Forward, Backing Up," we did not cover off-site backup options. We have heard from a number of planners who are using these services, and have compiled a list of service providers at www.trumpetinc.com/rs_articles.jsp.

Jo Day and Kevin Day are principals of Trumpet Inc. in Phoenix, Arizona. They provide technology consulting and services to financial planning firms via the Internet. They can be contacted at info@trumpetinc.com or <http://www.trumpetinc.com>.