



And How to Avoid Them

By Brett Rodgers of ibml

The best strategy for helping your staff overcome their fear of change is to let them see the technology run firsthand. Once they see that the scanner detects double-feeds and counts documents, as examples, they'll recognize the impact it will have on document preparation.

Recent studies have shown that document scanning remains one of the top technology priorities of organizations, regardless of their size or their vertical market. Little wonder: when properly deployed, document scanning solutions deliver a tremendous payback – in terms of cost savings, faster turnaround, better quality, streamlined compliance and more. But mistakes during system implementation can undermine even the strongest business case for a document scanning solution.

To help keep your document scanning project on the right track, here are the 10 most common mistakes that organizations make when deploying the technology – and how to avoid them.

1. Not buying enough scanning capacity. Too often, organizations use their average document processing volumes when determining scanning capacity. But organizations must also consider variables such as peak daily volume, required or contracted deadlines for completing work, and the effective throughput (not the advertised speeds) of the scanners that they are considering buying.

In one case, a firm that had originally modeled its scanning capacity based on its average volume discovered that it would require another nine scanners to handle the peak daily volumes that it received every Monday and Tuesday. With only 15 scanners in its solution design, the firm would have needed to add a second shift to complete its work, in turn, obliterating its business case.

2. Not including all stakeholders – both business and IT – in the requirements definition. In some cases, the IT department will unilaterally choose the organization's scanners, in turn, saddling operations with scanners that don't meet their requirements or are not easy for operators to use. In other cases, an operations team will select scanners without the IT department's involvement only to discover that the organization's legacy systems and/or infrastructure can't support the scanners.

This is a common mistake for business process outsourcers (BPOs), where IT departments try to standardize on one type of scanner. Because these decisions are typically made based on past experience with a scanner, the BPOs end up with a fleet of inefficient lower-volume scanners.

To avoid these scenarios, business and IT stakeholders should meet early-on during the process of selecting a scanning solution to determine critical business requirements, and identify any potential infrastructure considerations (such as additional IT support, larger network pipe or more PCs).

3. Buying a solution without conducting a proof of concept. Organizations should never purchase a scanner without first seeing how it processes their documents. Too many organizations buy document scanning technology based on what they read in a brochure or see on a trade show. They need to test whether the scanner fits their business requirements and processing environment. Organizations also want to have some of their operators run the scanner to test usability.

Instead, organizations should determine where they can have the biggest impact on their operations with the least amount of change; they shouldn't break a process that isn't broken. With an initial success under their belts, users should similarly prioritize the next phases of their implementation based on their potential benefits.

For instance, one company was enamored with the idea of prepping and scanning documents in the same step, believing that this approach would reduce its number of full-time equivalents (FTEs). However, a proof of concept showed that the company would actually have to add staff and a significant number of scanners if it deployed this type of system. By conducting a proof of concept, the company avoided this misstep without incurring significant out-of-pocket expense. A proof of concept also is an ideal time to test a scanner's image quality: end-users can visually inspect images generated by scanner, or even run them through their downstream applications.

The good news: users are typically welcome to bring work to a vendor's offices for a proof of concept. In some cases, a vendor may be willing to deliver a scanner for testing at a customer site.

4. Making decisions on front-end and back-end systems separately. An organization's front-end scanning and capture solution must work in concert with its back-end workflow technology. For instance, organizations must ensure that their document scanning and capture solution can output images and data in the format required for back-end systems, whether it's flat files, XML files, Excel spreadsheets or database output. In one case, a BPO purchased a scanning and capture solution that could only output images and data in one format. This resulted in the BPO spending a lot of time and money reconfiguring the output to the various formats that its customers required.

To avoid this situation, organizations should ask vendors how their scanning and capture solutions integrate with back-end systems, and whether their architecture is "open" or proprietary. An open architecture will typically output data and images in any format that the end-user requires.

Organizations also need to ensure that their back-end systems are fast enough to keep up with their front-end solutions otherwise they will experience bottlenecks in the "hand-off" of images and data. We've seen delays as much as 35 to 40 percent between front-end and back-end systems.

5. Not coordinating software and hardware vendors during system deployment.

No one wins in this scenario. A lack of coordination typically results in wasted effort, finger pointing and delayed implementations. We've seen many cases where front-end and back-end solutions providers get their systems up and running at a customer site, but there is no integration because the vendors and the customer never discussed critical issues such as: what data needs to be passed from one system to another, the image formats required for back-end systems, and how data should be routed.

To ensure a tight integration between systems, as well as a smooth implementation, it's important that end-users bring together all of their vendors and internal stakeholders early in the process to coordinate the system deployment. And don't allow individual departments, such as IT, to manage parts of the implementation, or you may also have miscommunication and missed hand-offs.

6. Not using a phased implementation approach. In their drive for fast results, too many organizations bite off more than they can chew when implementing a scanning solution. Trying to deploy an entire system at once can overwhelm internal resources, and draw out the deployment, in turn, putting the entire project at risk of getting shut down. Instead, organizations should determine where they can have the biggest impact on their operations with the least amount of change; they shouldn't break a process that isn't broken. With an initial success under their belts, users should similarly prioritize the next phases of their implementation based on their potential benefits.



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7. Letting "fear of change" take over. Too many organizations are close minded when it comes to re-engineering their processes, falling back on the way they've done things for the past five or 10 years. For instance, some organizations manually count every document that they scan, and write a number on the first page of each batch. This process was necessitated by older technology that was prone to double-feeds or didn't have automatic document counters. However, there is no need to do this with today's scanning technology, and continuing to do so, creates needless, not to mention costly, work. The best strategy for helping your staff overcome their fear of change is to let them see the technology run firsthand. Once they see that the scanner detects double-feeds and counts documents, as examples, they'll recognize the impact it will have on document preparation.

8. Not thinking LEAN. Organizations should always be looking for ways to do more with less. For instance, organizations shouldn't automatically purchase more of their legacy scanners as their volume grows; there may be other scanners available that enable them to consolidate hardware. Similarly, most organizations can do a more efficient job of document preparation; there's no need to tape small documents to 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper, or to use multiple separator sheets for scanning.

9. Not cutting the paper cord. Many organizations use unique transaction separator sheets for each type of work that they process, creating an enormous breadth and volume of paper. Today's document scanning solutions are an opportunity for organizations to rid themselves of this paper, automatically separating transactions based on documents (e.g. checks or envelopes) within a batch. The technology also allows organizations to insert generic separator sheets that can be re-used; one company has re-used its generic separator sheets for the past five years, saving significant money.

10. Not sharing – as in shared services. With the economy still struggling, and capital budgets tight, organizations should look to consolidate multiple scanning functions on a single platform.

Properly deployed, document scanning solutions deliver tremendous results. But mistakes during implementation can undermine even the strongest business case for the technology. Avoiding the 10 mistakes described above will help ensure the success of your organization's scanning project.