Upping the intelligence quotient

With the recent launch of its new ImageTracDS 1210 and ImageTracDS 1155 desktop scanners, ibml is able to offer intelligent scanning - and therefore reduced capture costs - to whole new markets. DM Editor David Tyler caught up with the company's Sales Director, Ashley Keil

David Tyler: Is it fair to say that 'intelligent scanning' is a concept that is central to the potential appeal of your new desktop scanner offerings?

Ashley Keil: Intelligence for me in the capture world can mean three distinct things: manual, server-based or scanner-based intelligence. Manual of course means everything being done physically - inserting separator sheets, 'eyeballing' every document to validate it, and so on. With a server-based approach, users may have an IDR (Intelligent Document Recognition) engine for instance doing some of the intelligence for them (rejections etc.), but there is still a significant amount of physical things that the operator has to do. Server-based intelligence will help users to remove certain cost elements: validation costs, separator costs, insertion costs, for instance.

  Intelligence on the scanner itself means a fully automated hardware and software approach. It can do all the things that server based IDR software is doing, but it will also do all sorts of things where a server-based approach falls short: we have the ability to automatically out-sort all the cheques and valuable documents, for instance, or automatically reject incorrect transactions physically as well as electronically. This reduces the cost even more dramatically: from an ROI perspective it is very interesting to our users to see exactly how much difference intelligent scanning can make to their operations.

DT: And how has this 'intelligence focus' trickled down to your desktop offerings?

AK: Our new desktop devices are still part of the ImageTrac product line. The market has always known ibml, of course for its big, fast, intelligent scanners. The new models simply extend that range downwards, so we can offer a more intelligence-focused desktop option, with a clear upgrade path.

  Historically our conversations with customers and the channel have tended to be around implementing desktop models as a sub-system, but it is perfectly feasible to deploy the new ImageTracDS 1210 and the ImageTracDS 1155 as 'standalone' systems where appropriate. They can be shipped with a TWAIN or ISIS driver, so can be driven by

third party software - if that is the requirement that a potential user has. These new devices can offer higher speeds and higher performance (even at higher resolution) to desktop environments. And even when you start to add in some of the intelligent scanning processes I've mentioned, we can maintain those high speeds even with the additional processing overhead.

We feel with these new devices that we're well placed in terms of the position in the market, performance, leading edge technology - and frankly we're excited to see the market already accepting a desktop proposition from ibml so readily.

DT: Let's dig down into some of the detail of what makes these new scanners so interesting - what's new?

AK: As the model numbers suggest, we have a 210ppm (DS 1210) and a 155ppm (DS 1155) model. Like all ibml devices, they feature left-justified feeding, which is pretty much unique to us - it makes prep and handling of mixed document batches much more straightforward. Operators don't want to be fiddling with a pile of documents to make sure they will all line up with a central roller. Input-wise, it has a 550 sheet feeder as well as two output trays that are separately programmable. CIS cameras and LED lighting are other examples of where we are right at the cutting edge of technology in our manufacture.

In addition, we offer up to 600 dpi native capture on these scanners, so for archival users who need 400 dpi output, there is no need for interpolation. Now at the low end that may not seem like a big deal, but in the world of 150 ppm-plus scanners, maintaining that kind of throughput is actually something very impressive.

They also have a front imprinter as standard and rear imprinter as an optional extra if users need to endorse the front and back of scanned documents, for example in creating an

audit trail for selective documents.

Multi-feed detection on the new desktop scanners features up to five ultrasonic sensors. We're seeing more and more users needing to scan envelopes, either for audit trail purposes or to initiate a transaction, or to monitor 'goneaways' - so envelope handling on these devices is highly sophisticated, even scanning envelopes that are still stuffed. We can also handle long documents (up to 150cm) such as ECG's in medical records - these are all capabilities that I think are value added in the desktop arena.

As scanning has become more about day-forward than archiving, it has of course become a more technical process. Users are now far more likely to be looking for the content of an image than simply looking for the image itself, as it relates to an active business process. This relates directly to the growth in demand for more intelligent scanning and capture.

DT: What about the software side of the desktop offerings?

AK: We are able to automate more of those classification, preparation, scanning, QA, and sorting tasks precisely because of the hugely powerful software engine we have running behind our hardware. Our front-end scan client is SoftTrac ScanDS which, just as an aside, can also drive third party scanners as well as ibml: we have lots of user sites where our large ibml scanners are surrounded by Kodak, Canon or other scanners, but they're all driven through our ibml software infrastructure.

We also offer DocNetics, which works as an integral IDR engine, in that it manages OCR/OMR engines, barcodes, etc. Our whole software offering - SoftTrac - is available as a modular 'SoftTrac Capture Suite' - users can buy the functionality they need when they need it. If you only need a 2D barcode reader, for instance, you need only buy that element. This can be very useful for buyers who may need to justify costs, to

understand that all of our software pricing is scaled commercially to the size of the product - so OCR on a desktop ibml scanner will actually be surprisingly affordable! And of course, our capture software is not only limited to scanner capture, but it is fully Multichannel capable, equally as effective at taking input from Email, office documents, web and existing image repositories etc.

DT: What is the market asking for from ibml and indeed the capture industry right now, and how does intelligent scanning address those requirements?

AK: If you talk to any BPO particularly, their main business aim at present is to move away from archival scanning, and into more day-forward business. They're not just adding value to what they do, they're driving revenues as well. And everyone we deal with is moving that way; for banks and insurance companies, that is their business. What that actually means is that everyone is now developing a desire to move toward intelligent capture - because that will drive more efficiency and margin for them.

We can help those users build toward that more intelligent capture at their own pace, adding speed and intelligence as they grow. For example you can buy the new scanners as a basic desktop scanner and add intelligence as you go. You can even upgrade from 155ppm to 210ppm when you're ready.

We know better than anyone the value of intelligent scanning, and I think that the market too is now very aware of how much can be saved by automating a lot of the traditional prep and post-prep tasks. Our proposition, of building that intelligence into the hardware as well as the software, increases that value massively. It gets information into a system earlier in the capture process, it improves the ROI or any project, and it can even help with SLAs, reducing the length of approvals or validation processes.
More info: www.ibml.com