

PAPER REDUCTION STRATEGY

DISADVANTAGES OF BEING PAPER DEPENDENT

If all of your case information and the answers you need are on paper, you're at a disaster-avoidance disadvantage. Here are some reasons why moving away from paper dependence should be part of your disaster avoidance plan.

PAPER IS EASILY LOST OR DESTROYED

Water and fire easily destroys paper and most law offices do not maintain parallel, duplicate paper files to protect against this. Unlike digital data, it's almost impossible to create a back-up of paper files. Further, since people must have possession of a paper file in order to work on it, paper files move around a lot. As a result, they are often misplaced or lost.

PAPER DEPENDENCE CAN MEAN YOU'RE CUT OFF FROM CASE INFORMATION

If all of the information you need is in a paper file at the office but you can't get to the office, then you can't get work done. Evacuations, power outages and all manner of natural disaster can prevent you from getting to your office. If that information were electronic, you'd be able to easily make copies of it, access it remotely and/or share it with others.

MORE PAPER MEANS LIMITED LAWYER MOBILITY

If you have four files to take with you somewhere and they're reasonably thick, you're going to need a bag or a cart or a box. This is unwieldy, annoying and difficult.

MANAGING PAPER FILES IS EXPENSIVE

Law firms spend a huge amount of non-billable, administrative time looking for paper files and they're rarely easy to find. For example, files might be in a lawyer's office (on the desk, under the desk, on the floor, in a cabinet or on a shelf), in a secretary or paralegal's cube or office, on a counter in a hallway, on a ledge somewhere in the office, in a filing cabinet (imagine that!), in the wrong filing cabinet, in someone's car, at someone's home or in someone's briefcase or bag. That's a lot of places to look. The cost associated with finding files can be very high. Let's say you've got 5 attorneys and they each spend 15 non-billable minutes a day each looking for files which they could otherwise bill at \$250/hour. This translates into 6.25 hours per week and at \$250/hour, that's \$1,562.50/week, \$6,250 per month or \$75,000 per year.

CREATING AND MAINTAINING PAPER FILES IS EXPENSIVE

Paper, toner, folders, labels and the labor necessary for the care and feeding of a paper-based filing system is incredibly expensive. Another area of savings is postage. Once everything is digital, documents are transmitted and shared electronically which is not only faster, but far less expensive. For example, we have a law firm client in Clearwater, Florida which reduced their annual postage expenditures from \$75,000 down to \$35,000 by creating and maintaining complete electronic files.

PAPER FILES CAN ONLY BE IN ONE PLACE AT A TIME

We all know this, but it creates problems. If I find the paper file I've been looking for, then I've "captured" it and no one else can look at it. In other words, the act of removing a file to work on it causes that file to be lost again to everyone else in my office because they don't know where it is. There may have been a few people in the office who actually knew where the file was when I found it. Now that I've taken it, they may be running around the office asking, "who took my file??" By finding and taking the file, I have unwittingly annoyed and stressed those who knew where it was when I found it and are expecting it to still be there when they go looking for it.

PAPER FILES ARE NOT SHARABLE

You can share a paper file no more easily than you can share a book you're reading.

IF YOU CAN'T SHARE, YOU CAN'T COLLABORATE

We need to collaborate with clients, experts, courts and co-counsel. If you're all paper and you want to share your file, you're spending money on lots of copies, shipping boxes and the whole process is slow.

DIFFICULTY FINDING THE DOCUMENT ONCE YOU'VE FOUND THE FILE

Once you locate the paper file, now you begin the second search - finding the individual piece of paper within that file.

PAPER FILES ARE NOT SEARCHABLE

If a paper files were "searchable," you would be able to instantly locate every document from any file in your office which contains certain words (e.g., "force majeure" or "liquidated damages") or has certain characteristics (e.g., it is an appellate brief or a Will containing a special needs trust). You obviously can't do that with your paper files. Further, paper files do not contain a table of contents and although they may have separate sub-parts for correspondence, pleadings and the like, that doesn't mean that people who deposit paper into the file have actually utilized that organizational structure. It also doesn't mean that things are actually clipped into the file, nor that the items in the file are in any kind of chronological order. In other words, the file may be (and often is) a mess. That being the case, now you have to find that ONE piece of paper you're looking for among hundreds, maybe thousands of pages, possibly in no particular order. Depending on the size and organization of the file, you may be faced with a bigger search than finding the file in the first place.

ACCESSING DATA ON PAPER IS SLOW

We're in the age of instant information. We need it and our clients expect it. If your data and case information is locked up in a paper file, you're at a significant speed disadvantage.

PAPER FILES ARE RARELY UPDATED IN A TIMELY MANNER

Almost every piece of mail that comes into a firm ends up in a paper file somewhere. Of course, those files must be found first, updated, then re-filed into a cabinet (or more likely stacked on someone's desk or the floor of someone's office). Anyone who has ever been saddled with the task of filing a pile of documents/mail/pleadings into paper files knows how unpleasant it is. If you've never done it yourself, just ask your support staff which aspect of their jobs they find the most mind-numbing, frustrating and distasteful. "Filing" is probably the answer you'll get.

Human nature dictates that if you give someone a task they detest, they will put it off as long as possible. That is usually what happens with filing. At any given time, the person responsible for filing in your office probably has a nice stack of unfilled documents sitting around somewhere. The time gap between receipt of a document and its ultimate insertion into a file in your office can create problems. During that time, those unfilled documents are effectively lost.

MORE PAPER MEANS HIGHER OPERATING COSTS

Efficiency is the key to maximizing a firm's profitability. Managing fat paper files is labor intensive and reduces a firm's efficiency on all fronts.

EXPENSIVE STORAGE

Large paper files occupy a lot of space and filing cabinets are expensive and bulky. If you rent office space by the square foot, you're paying for your filing cabinets every month. More importantly, storage for closed files is VERY expensive. Closed storage is also typically off-site and disorganized. This means that finding and pulling old files is also expensive in terms of time spent.