High-Volume Scanning and Process Automation:

Better, Faster, Smarter Decision Making

By Laurel B. Sanders, Optical Image Technology

High-volume scanning is a pretty simple concept, but it's only the beginning of effective automation. If you're using your scanning software to capture and sort a large volume of documents, your system isn't much more than a change sorter, pulling like documents together and dropping them into the right place. Sure, having everything in one place is an important step, but it's only the beginning.

This article provides tips to help you streamline and maximize your high-volume scanning process, showing how you can use effective scanning as the launching pad to enterprise-wide business efficiency. Thoughtful preparation, combined with a high-performing, high-volume scanning solution and business process management tools lead to better, faster, and smarter decision making. Together, they give business leaders the information they need to rise from the position of competing sideliners to marketplace leaders.

Taking full advantage of the power of high-volume scanning

High-volume scanning is vital for capturing large volumes of information quickly. Combined with an efficient document management system that has robust indexing, search, and retrieval capabilities, it makes mission-critical information available to those who need it. Even if your company isn't ready to take full advantage of business process automation via digital workflow, there are several things you can do to increase the speed and relevancy of the information you provide.

If you're running high-volume scanners, you're probably doing a lot of batch scanning…but are you doing everything you can to streamline and maximize the value of the capture and indexing process? Here are five questions to consider as you map out your scanning process:

1) Are you taking advantage of sorting and indexing opportunities <u>before</u> the scanning process begins?

Let's pretend, for example, that you manage an insurance company that needs to sort and process a high volume of incoming documents such as policy change forms, coverage cancellations, policy renewals, and claims. Your company has a single mail delivery address or post office box. Mail is sorted further internally. Your staff is instructed to sort incoming mail by department and document type so papers can be organized appropriately into batches for quicker scanning.

After considering the hours spent preparing mail for scanning, your company decides to pre-address each type of outgoing form (and its corresponding return mail envelopes) with its own post office box or suite number and

Questions to ask yourself:

* Are you taking advantage of sorting and indexing opportunities <u>before</u> the scanning process begins?

* Does your scanning software integrate with your EDM software?

* Are you using bar codes to their full advantage?

* Are your maximizing your use of digital storage and line-of-business applications?

* Are you maximizing efficiency with full process automation?

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bar code. Your goal is to expedite scanning and deliver work more quickly to the appropriate people so you can offer better service to your clients and compete more successfully in the marketplace.

The post office box and suite numbers let your staff pick up and deliver pre-sorted mail destined by processing area, such as renewal forms, claims, etc. Your mailroom staff delivers the sorted contents of each post office box for batch scanning. The post office box number is used as an indexing key to instruct the system where documents should be stored electronically, how they should be categorized, and who should be notified of receipt. This reduces hours previously spent on mail sorting and eliminates manual cataloguing errors. Staff receives imaged forms quickly and directly from their desktops, accelerating turnaround and processing times, ensuring excellent customer service, and meeting your goal.

2) Does your scanning software integrate with your electronic document management (EDM) software? Does your storage system offer encyclopedic indexing that serves the needs of your entire enterprise?

The power of high-volume scanning starts with getting accurate data where it's required. Central, searchable storage is vital to finding documents and information when they're needed – now and in the future - and making data available to the right people as quickly as possible. Even scanning systems with top-quality automatic verification of accurate data and quality images can fail to reach their potential value unless you can retrieve specific files from your desktop quickly when you want them. Whether you are scanning data that you want to store, organize, or ultimately use in your accounts payable, document management, ERP, or other back-end systems, speed is the name of the game.

Although a large volume scanning operation may be restricted to meeting the needs of a specific department, it's important to consider potential uses of the information across the enterprise. How do other departments interact with the stored documents? Have you taken into consideration how different departments and users will search for the documents and their contents as you create the indexing schemes? In order to leverage the value of high-volume scanning, the granular and detailed approach to a departmental solution needs to be coupled with the long-term vision to meet company-wide needs.

3) Are you using bar codes to their full advantage?

Bar code scanning is ideal for large volumes of routine documents due to its high accuracy rate (usually approaching or reaching 100%). It also tightens security by encrypting information and only displaying clues about the content (under the bar codes) that are meaningful to staff. Finally, it has the ability to pull large amounts of information, or links to images and documents that are embedded in the bar codes and stored in the EDM system, into a very small space.

Many companies choose to print bar codes on forms that are then scanned upon return for easier and more secure routing and processing. Embedded links pull up additional data about the person and the form as needed, completing the business picture for staff in accordance with the rules you have established regarding information each person can access. Using multiple bar codes that contain data relevant to different business areas can further contribute to streamlining processing and directing work.

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Information privacy is guaranteed, since a good EDM system only allows pre-authorized staff to view the data that is encrypted in the bar codes. Data accuracy, consistency, and security are ensured, and informed decisions can be made quickly.

4) Are you maximizing your use of digital storage and line-of-business applications?

High-volume scanning is an excellent launching pad for maximizing revenue and avoiding cost. Consider a standard "2% 10/Net 30" invoicing process. To take advantage of discounts for prompt payments and avoid penalties for late payments, you need real-time information:

- Which bills are due, and when;
- How much you can save on each invoice by paying early;
- Cash flow information to guide the expenditures; and
- Which bills should be scheduled for priority payment.

High-volume scanning makes sure billing information is available quickly. Yet without a solid document management system that enables detailed indexing, effective search, and integration with your invoicing and reporting systems, discounts are inadvertently missed and late penalties ensue. By taking advantage of data stored in each of your disparate software systems, you save thousands of hours otherwise wasted by searching for documents and data, prioritizing work, and making timely payments.

5) Are you maximizing efficiency with full process automation?

Getting information into your company quickly is only half of the equation. Getting information distributed wherever it is needed for fast and accurate decision making is just as vital.

The key to end-to-end document efficiency is business process management (BPM) and workflow software that builds on the power of your scanning and line-of-business software. BPM gets the right work to the right people at the right time, facilitating straight-through processing of information and real-time decision making. It enables efficiencies that simply are not possible without it. Some powerful benefits include:

- **Capturing and indexing documents straight into departmental queues.** Detailed indexing of documents pertinent to a specific department can be indexed in greater detail by specialists at the departmental level. This lets scanning staff focus on getting documents into the system and gives your department control over the details.

- **Scanning batches of documents directly into work queues while simultaneously routing them for storage in the document management system.** This helps you accelerate your speed at the beginning of the business process. Some companies use a single indexing key during batch scanning to indicate who will process the documents and import them directly into a workflow. This results in lightning-fast progress from receipt through delivery to work queues, making straight-through/real-time processing an attainable goal.

- **Packaging groups of related documents and routing them into work queues for processing.** Receipt of the final item in a group of related documents can instruct the system to package all pertinent documents and send them to the appropriate person to be worked on. An enrollment officer, for example, would receive a college application, financial aid information, transcript, and other needed documents in a package for processing and distribution when all documents have been received. This eliminates time spent juggling, searching for, and collecting related documents, and ensures applications are prioritized fairly based on document receipt.

- **Parallel processing of time-sensitive documents, enabling faster turnaround.** Items requiring multiple timely reviews, approvals, or signatures move quickly through the system rather than being bound to the cumbersome and time-consuming sequential decisions that a paper-based or email system would allow. Simultaneous review of insurance documents by Underwriting and Claims, or collegiate applications reviewed by Admissions, Student Aid, and the honors program areas are just two examples.

- **Enforcement of processing rules, such as hierarchical approvals.** Workflow automation within a BPM system lets you establish standards and processes that every employee has to follow consistently and ensures that the rules are followed. It also lets you establish standard processes

for routine exceptions (for example, out-of-state college applicants to state university that draws mostly in-state residents can be placed into an "exception" queue). All exceptions are handled in accordance with rules that you have pre-approved, again guaranteeing fair and consistent treatment.

- **Detailed, clear audit trails. Built-in workflow tracking in a robust business process automation system follows every interaction with documents and processes that are flowed through the system.** Answering the "who, what, when, where, and why" questions is easy, since all transactions follow the business and information governance rules you set in place. Regulations and demonstration of compliance are no longer a nightmare with BPM.

- **Real-time reporting for improved decision making. Have you ever questioned the productivity of a specific employee on a particular day, especially if bottlenecks are occurring?** Have you speculated which products consumers are buying this week as result of special promotions, wishing you had real data, or wanted to know which of your branches or subsidiaries are generating the most business? Have you wondered where the slowdowns are in your processes that you could rectify and improve? BPM gives you these answers and more, providing the knowledge you need to make smart decisions and changes now…and in the future.

The BPM lifecycle: building on high-volume scanning

High-volume scanning is the gateway to the BPM lifecycle. By understanding the pieces and parts of BPM, you can leverage the value of the mission-critical documents captured by your scanning staff and add tremendous value not only to the department(s) most in need of automation, but across your enterprise. Here's a bird's-eye view into how the BPM lifecycle works, why each stage is important, and how it builds on the value of the digital documents created by your scanning team.

Process Design

One of the most important parts of business automation is process design. It requires careful study of your existing business procedures – what documents you use, in which formats they exist (paper, email, online forms, voice mail), and the role each plays in your routine business processes – so you can streamline intelligently prior to process automation. BPM and workflow software that includes a built-in process designer allows you to create, execute, and improve processes within a single application. (Note: Effective process design requires an exhaustive drill-down analysis of every step within each process, and effective two-way communication about the steps involved. Without analysis and communication, the best designs will be ineffective.)

Process Modeling

After you (or your vendor's professional services provider) have completed the process design that shows how your streamlined process should work theoretically, will your BPM or workflow software provide the logic to make your business process design work? Or do you have to jump between two or more design, modeling, and execution applications to move from theory to reality? Seamless communication is vital to a high-volume, high-performing BPM solution. The tighter the integration, the smoother and easier it will be to bridge the process design and execution stages and get results.

Process Execution

As the saying goes, "The truth is in the pudding," and the execution of your plans needs to be seamless so the BPM system delivers the results you anticipate. Think about the following:

- Every process has a specific, ideal (or regulated) time for completion. Can your system create alerts when a time-sensitive item is in danger of untimely completion?

- Does your system automate re-distribution of work, considering data such as employee vacations, illnesses, reassigned duties, overloaded staff, and other information?

- Does your BPM solution integrate with multiple systems, such as your mainframe and legacy systems, ERP, CRM, accounting, human resources, and other applications? You may not need all of this today, but if you overlook the possible needs of the future, you may drop behind your competitors through inefficient communications and fall behind in the race to compete.

- Companies grow, and their needs change. Is your system capable of scaling and adapting to meet your shifting needs without an interruption in your routine business processes?

- Are there clients in your industry who can quantify their success using the BPM solution you have chosen? Make sure you choose wisely.

Process Monitoring

Monitoring business transactions in real time delivers valuable information to businesses in increasingly competitive environments.

- Where are your documents within a process at any specific time?

- How many applications had to be denied today?

- How many invoices were paid late this week, and why?

- Where are the bottlenecks or slow-downs in your processing?

- Are documents routinely stuck in the Inbox of an underperforming employee?

- Which employees are neglecting to file vacation paperwork on time?

A BPM system that is integrated with your business systems provides valuable real-time insight into all of your business processes, giving you the opportunity to improve and optimize your standard procedures. It gives you the power of a chameleon, letting you adapt and make changes quickly and effectively.

Process Optimization

Nothing lasts forever. That's true of even the best and most efficient processes. Times change; regulations change; customer preferences change; and your business must change, too. As it does, you need to be able to make modifications that optimize processing efficiency, speed, and service, without interruption in your business processes. Would your processing support parallel approvals rather than sequential decisions, which take longer? Would a departmentally shared work queue that allows everyone on staff to work on incoming jobs be better for your team productivity than individual work queues, or vice versa?

If a new law mandates that exceptions to a specific process must be handled in a particular way, your system needs to be open to instant modification. If your company takes part in a merger and acquisition that adds layers of details and increases work volumes within your processes, you need confidence that your system can adapt and change.

The only thing that is constant is change. You have to be ready – and able – to adapt at a moment's notice. BPM gives you the power to make changes on the fly, letting you soar above the competition with proactive, informed decisions and quick, customized service.

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Archiving information at the end of the processing lifecycle

Every document travels through distinct phases of the processing lifecycle, determining if it needs to be stored as an active file, migrated to long-term storage for future reference, or purged/deleted in accordance with regulations. From the moment you capture documents electronically at your scanning station (or via your website or other method of capture), you need to be sure your document retention plans will respond to the regulations that govern them.

A hierarchical storage management system (HSM) that is integrated with your BPM solution removes the need for you to track

documents and manage their migration and deletion. Instead, documents follow the rules you establish, providing notification when documents will be transferred, purged or permanently deleted, or automating the entire process in compliance with your rules. Clear audit trails facilitate the audit process and eliminate hours of manual search. By integrating your high-volume scanning software with a complete BPM and HSM solution, your documents and data have a smooth journey through all phases of the business lifecycle, from the cradle to the grave.

When budgets are tight: Software as a Service (SaaS) as a launch pad for efficiency

An increasing number of imaging vendors are offering SaaS solutions for document scanning as an affordable way to capture forms and data without the client having to make the investment in infrastructure, set-up, and consulting. Although many companies prefer having direct control over their data, a SaaS vendor can scan high volumes of material using a simple indexing key or two, and send the documents straight into your document storage software or even into a work queue within your chosen workflow and BPM solution. If you're looking for power and a return on investment without the initial start-up costs, SaaS is an alternative worthy of consideration.

Summary

Smart decision making and fast response to change are the name of the game in today's highly competitive and quickly changing marketplace. High-volume scanning, integrated with intelligent business process automation, guarantees your staff plays by the rules you set in place for a winning game. It lets you make business information available securely and quickly; demand and achieve information consistency and accuracy; and push work efficiently wherever it needs to go. In the end, high-volume scanning, BPM, and HSM let you provide unbeatable service that gives you a deck of winning cards in a tough game.

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