A Practical Guide to Creating a Paperless Office
Although people have been talking about the paperless office for several decades, research shows that very few organizations have achieved this goal thus far.

In fact, Gartner research shows that the amount of paper companies produce is growing by 25% a year on average. This is happening despite data showing a rapid Return on Investment for paperless office initiatives, with 66% of organizations achieving full payback in 18 months or less.

Obviously, the economic, efficiency and environmental arguments for the paper-free (or at least, paper-reduced) office are powerful, so what’s stopping businesses?

The barriers along the way have not always been easy to overcome, but the reality is that none of these potential obstacles is insurmountable. In fact, some are actually very easy to address.

This short guide will examine the positive impact of the paperless office on the organization’s finances, operations and green initiatives, and provide practical advice on the steps that all businesses should take.
The Economic Argument

Studies reveal that establishing a paperless environment helps companies reduce document-related costs by 40% or more. Paperless offices mean money saved with direct benefits to the bottom-line, including:

- **Storing and finding paper documents is big money** - $25 - 35 billion is spent in the US every year filing, storing and retrieving paper. For example, a four drawer file cabinet holds 15 - 20,000 pages, costing $25,000 to fill and $2,000 a year to maintain.

- **Printing out documents consumes energy** - The energy consumed during printing ends up accounting for around 10% of total IT-related energy use.

- **Handling paper mail in the mailroom** - 40% of mail rooms (physical or digital) handle more than 1,000 items a day. The cost of operating such systems adds up, so it makes sense that 90% of companies with digital mailrooms reached ROI in less than 18 months.

- **Digital signatures have an instant impact** - Most digital signature users achieve Return on Investment in less than 12 months, with cost savings gained through reductions in staff time, paper consumption, printing costs and couriering/posting.
An AIIM market survey showed that driving paper out of the office could improve staff productivity by nearly 30%. This makes sense once you look at the evidence:

- **Interrupted processes** - 42% of processes are interrupted by the need to collect a physical signature, adding on average 3.1 days to most processes.

- **Lost time** - 7.5% of documents are lost; 15% of documents are misplaced; and 30% of documents contain obsolete information. All this adds up to a lot of wasted time.

- **Hard-to-find information** - Managers in the US spend 4 weeks a year on average searching for or waiting on misfiled, mislabelled, untracked, or ‘lost’ papers.
The Environmental Angle

The statistics are sobering: paper and printing have serious impacts on the planet. Here are some frightening facts for any company with an environmental policy:

- **Huge paper waste** - Office workers in the US generate approximately two pounds of paper every day and print approximately 10,000 pages per year.

- **40% of deforestation is caused by paper production** - 1 ton of uncoated virgin (non-recycled) printing and office paper uses 24 trees. One ream of A4 paper (500 sheets) uses 6% of a tree.

- **A third of all landfill is composed of paper** - Over half of all paper produced ends up being disposed of in landfill sites and incinerators within one year of production, making up about a third of all landfill.

- **Even recycled paper is not guilt-free** - One ton of recycled paper is estimated to release 1.6 tons of greenhouses gases.
Breaking Down the Barriers

For many organizations, complete elimination of paper in the office may not be viable – at least, not yet – but it is clear that steps towards that goal are within the reach of just about any business. The environmental, efficiency and cost benefits are a great set of incentives!

Audit workflows – Which processes ‘break out’ into paper, who is responsible, and why does this happen? WRAP’s Green Office Guide includes models to help you calculate how much the use of paper is really costing your business.

Educate employees – Teach your staff about the real environmental and cost impacts of using paper. Provide training for less tech-savvy employees who may be more comfortable with printing and posting. Identify some paperless pioneers to help encourage their teams.

Embrace automated processes – Content, collaboration, document, workflow and business process management systems have developed rapidly, with tools suited to both large enterprises and small businesses. Take advantage of them in your organization.

Ditch filing cabinets – Take advantage of online storage, records and eDiscovery systems which can reduce your need for physical office storage space. This will make your documents accessible anywhere, even from mobile devices, and easier to find in the future.
Sign on the virtual line – Since ‘wet ink’ signatures are rarely a legal requirement, you can easily start using digital signatures which are even more secure. After all, as pointed out by AIIM: “The laws on this have been standardized in most jurisdictions for ten, if not 20, years.”

Enable efaxing; reduce or centralise printers – People will have farther to walk, which may discourage mindless use. You can also encourage double-sided printing, use thinner paper and monitor printing levels with personal access codes.

Mailroom makeover - Establish a digital mail room and encourage your suppliers and customers to submit content digitally in order to reduce the volume of paper coming into the organization in the first place.

Go mobile – More of us already perform many tasks on our smartphones and tablets, without a printer in sight. Impressively, AIIM research found that 51% of mobile capture users report a payback period of 18 months or less.
About CoSign by ARX

CoSign by ARX, the most widely used digital signature solution, was recognized as “the strongest digital signature solution” in the Forrester Wave: E-Signatures, Q2 2013 report. Millions of people at large enterprises, SMBs, governments and cloud services around the world use CoSign every day on their computers and mobile devices to easily add secure digital signatures to documents in Word, Excel, SharePoint, OpenText, Oracle, Alfresco, Nintex, K2, and many other applications.

By seamlessly integrating digital signatures into existing document-related workflows, applications and services across their organizations, CoSign customers quickly transform slow and expensive signature-dependent processes into quick and efficient paper-free ones. They rapidly reach ROI through significant reductions in process times and paper-related costs, while ensuring trust, integrity, control and compliance across their business and IT environments.

Visit our web site at www.arx.com to learn more about how your organization can benefit from the CoSign digital signature solution.

Resources:

AIIM – www.aiim.org
WRAP – www.wrap.org.uk
K2 – www.k2.com
Iron Mountain – www.ironmountain.com
Gartner – www.gartner.com