

Insight: Records Management Trends in Europe

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Digital Services were Introduced for Cultural Preservation

Due to major differences in laws and regulations in regards to document archiving in European countries, digitizing documents started in the cultural domain. Scanning was, and still is, a major tool used in preservation of historical documents. Invaluable information on fragile, historical documents was preserved through scanning and digital imaging. The cooperation between European libraries and cultural institutions has helped make digital scanning services popular.

In the commercial domain, reasons for scanning have continued to be driven by different factors, i.e., storage space issues including high rental cost, desire for quicker access to the information, and the environmental push for less paper usage or the "Paperless" ideology. The two European countries at the forefront of implementing the paperless concept are Sweden and Denmark, where the green economy has been a reality for quite some time.

Current and Future Trends

As the paperless ideology becomes increasingly important globally, more regulations involving archiving and preservation of data are being introduced. This year, the French government requires its administration to accept electronic invoices. This is a major step towards becoming paperless. Nevertheless, small and medium sized companies operating in the country will still have the right to send paper invoices and are not required by law to provide an electronic version.

The behavior of private companies towards scanning and storing documents in a digital format is highly influenced by the country's related laws, in addition to the attitude of local administrations. Due to the current job crisis and the lack of administrative personnel in countries like Spain, Italy, and France, the changing trends should lead towards the use of digital services and electronic documents.

Denmark will have the presidency of the European Union (EU) in 2012 and has already announced its ambition in terms of the EU becoming the true green economy. It will strongly encourage the paperless solutions and provide growth for companies in the digital services industry.

Electronic Information Management

Another changing trend that will become increasingly important is the shift, from massive scanning to become paperless without true information management, towards a new era of electronic information management. The past paperless attempts for many companies, without complete understanding of how to use scanned data to promote data retrieval and information management efficiency, have resulted in ineffective use of the information stored. Scanning is, no doubt, the bridge between the past and the future of information management.

Crown's Solutions to Help Meet the Changing Trends

To meet the needs of our clients and prospective clients, Crown Records Management Services in the United Kingdom (UK) recently opened a digital services center in Manchester, England. The new facility provides state-of-the-art scanning operation, with advanced technology and secured hosting capability. The facility offers up-to-the-minute digital scanning capacity and uses the latest market-leading Kofax software in order to provide advanced digital scanning and information management services. Crown UK's digital services center is built to ensure that our service offering meets all of our clients' and the industry's needs.

Frank Hopping, Crown Records Management Services' managing director, UK & Ireland region, commented on the resources available to our clients, including Crown's experts who can offer viable solutions that are customized to each individual client's needs. He said, "The Manchester digital services center complements the company's existing digital scanning center in Peterborough and represents a significant expansion of our digital business. Crown Records Management offers a range of digital solutions including remote, secure website hosting and portable, removable storage. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, we provide expert advice to clients - through our team of digital experts - headed by our Digital Services General Manager, Tony Meikle. Our digital team are able to advise clients on the best electronic scanning and storage solution to help them effectively manage their information for their business use."

Tony Meikle, digital services manager, is leading the Crown UK's team of digital experts:

"We offer expert consultancy to clients on information management strategies and advise on the best options; both in terms of storage method - converting clients from hard copy storage to digital storage where appropriate - and also in terms of accessibility. For example, Crown can recommend a range of secure hosting and storage services, and find the best solution to meet our client's requirements, which may negate the need for physical storage in favor of digital storage and secure hosting. The team is also up-to-speed with the latest UK, European and global legislation and regulations on digital document scanning and storage."

Within the last year, after the opening of the Manchester facility, Crown Records Management UK has the combined processing capacity of both facilities in excess of 70 million images per year in comparison to only 8 million images in prior years.