

Securing electronic records for the Evidence Act

Taking control of the quality of your electronic data through reinventing the workflow design

An ongoing series

For 20 years, PwC has been a Certifying Authority authorised to certify document imaging systems as an “approved process” for the purposes of Section 116A(6) of the Evidence Act. This is a series of articles to share its experience in this very niche sector of document digitisation.

To view our other A Closer Look pieces on Evidence Act, please visit <http://www.pwc.com/sg/evidence-act>

Highlights

- **Benefits and challenges to the centralised and decentralised approach to digitising documents**
- **Key considerations on the appropriate approach to digitising documents**

Digitisation, the 21st century buzzword, usually comes hand-in-hand with the digital transformation journey that most companies are undertaking these days – given its many merits, which include reducing costs of storage and automating workflow for better efficiencies and effectiveness - to name a few, it is not surprising to see the increase uptake amongst businesses. However, the “simple” act of digitising your documents and ensuring you extract the most value out of the process requires some re-thinking about the workflow in your organisation.

To centralise or decentralise... that is the question

It is tempting to put a few scanners in each department and tell people to scan all their papers into the system, because this seems to be the most convenient and least disruptive approach. This is the decentralised approach, but what are the challenges?

For a start, how do you control what goes into the document repository and the image quality of the documents that are scanned in? I have come across organisations that have taken this approach and all seem to share the same fate - quickly finding that their repository system has become a junk yard where there are too many copies of the same document, too many versions, too many obsolete and unwanted documents, and... simply too much junk!

And from a user-experience perspective, if you input a query into a system and it comes back with a few hundred, if not thousands of matches, sooner or later, you would conclude that the system is completely useless.

Maintaining data’s “good quality” – the essence of the matter

As part of complying with Evidence Act, the good quality of scanned images must be maintained but this would be difficult to attain with a decentralised approach. “Quality” here includes ensuring that the document is complete (i.e. every page is scanned) and that images are sufficiently clear for the purpose of the business. The Quality Assurance (QA) process is a challenge – how do you enforce quality control in a work environment where scanning of documents is just a chore, not a part of the mainstream operations?

Taking the above into consideration, many organisations have come to the same conclusion that centralisation is the better answer. Centralisation means setting up one or more satellite centres where document scanning takes place. This implies a change to the workflow, where documents have to be re-routed, and time lags in processing should be provided for. However, these are probably acceptable costs to avoid the chaos in a decentralised approach.

At these centralised scanning centres, documents would go through a production line to be digitised. They would be checked for mistakes, quality assured for completeness and usability, and properly indexed and recorded. Exception handling process would ensure that outliers are correctly treated. Additionally, digital signatures could be applied to secure the documents and confirm that the documents have gone through the process.

That being said, there have also been successful implementation of the decentralised approach, but these happen only in very specific environments. For example, a bank had all its branches scan a specific type of documents. There is an application system that enforces the workflow in the branches, and the branches have a culture of performing proper maker-checker (QA) checks based on very specific guidelines. This has worked well. Therefore, before committing to the approach, either centralised or decentralised, you should carefully

evaluate your options and understand how best you can take control of your data.

Four key considerations before deciding on a centralised or decentralised approach:

- ✓ How would you control the quality of documents?
- ✓ How would you eliminate “junk documents” from the system?
- ✓ Is your work culture better suited for a centralised or decentralised approach?
- ✓ Is there an impact to your current workflow and how would you manage it?

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