

# Why You're Approaching Workflow Automation The Wrong Way





# Is Your Efficiency Sluggish?

Think about your business and its employees. How many tedious functions and tasks still require you to be physically involved or present? Submitting invoices. Shuffling through folders. Perpetually bugging your manager to finally approve an expense? These types of time wasters are a real problem that often go unaddressed.

Why?

- Because “it’s how we’ve always done it.”
- Because “we’re unaware or uneducated on the solutions available to us”
- Because “it’s all we truly have to work with”



# You're Wasting Too Much Time

In fact, employees spend less than 40% of their time at work doing actual strategic work.<sup>1</sup> Instead, they find themselves burning the clock – and productivity – on activities not always directly tied to advancing personal or company growth.

19%

searching and gathering information

14%

communication and collaborating internally

28%

reading and answering email

It doesn't have to be this way. And it shouldn't. Not for your small business. Not for any business.

<sup>1</sup>International Data Corporation (IDC); McKinsey Global Institute analysis





# Overcoming the Fear

But yet, intimidation, fear of the unknown, and a lack of time often keep small business owners at bay when it comes to implementing a technology solution that automates their menial tasks. And worse yet, the idea of implementing an actual workflow automation system creates fear of costs, compatibility with existing infrastructure, and actual employee adoption rates.

But data is pointing to a seemingly inevitable need for automated workflows:

- **More than 70%** of today's businesses that would fail within three weeks if they suffered a catastrophic loss of paper records due to fire or flood.<sup>1</sup>
- The digital universe is **doubling in size every two years**, and by 2020 the data we create and copy annually will grow by 10x – reaching 44 zettabytes, or 44 trillion gigabytes.<sup>2</sup>

This compounds the stress for small businesses when deciding what they need to do.

<sup>1</sup> Facts About Paper: The Impact of Consumption. (2013). Retrieved January 14, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Source: IDC iView " The Digital Universe of Opportunities: Rich Data and the Increasing Value of the Internet of Things," April 2014, sponsored by EMC.

A photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A man in a light blue shirt and glasses is pointing at a laptop held by a woman in a dark blazer. Another man in a light blue shirt is standing to the left, looking towards the laptop. The scene is brightly lit, likely by a window in the background.

# What's in a Name?

Whether it's data overload, continual technology advancements, or an antiquated inefficient system, most businesses will find the need to turn to some form of automated workflows in the not so distant future.

And whether that form - or name - is workflow automation, workflow optimization, document-driven workflows, or personal workflow management, one thing is clear: the solution inherently means different things to different people.

This of course creates counter-productive discussions to get everyone on the same page as well as general confusion as to the correct approach of actually implementing a system.

And confusion drives up ink, which as you know isn't free.

# Understanding Workflow Automation

So, what **does** it mean for your business?

It means ripping you away from the manual data entry you once adored



Ensuring information makes it into your systems, allowing you to optimize your investment in those systems

It means no more waiting on others to give you the information you need



Giving you greater visibility into your processes, while removing bottle necks

It means no more coffee-stained and misplaced files while working remotely



Allowing you to access and share critical business information anywhere, anytime, from any device

Workflow automation means streamlining the flow of your information – capturing, managing, and transforming it along the way where and how you need.

This **gives you time back to focus on the strategic elements and functions of your business.** Take the menial tasks off your plate and spend the newfound time improving ROI and increasing revenue. It's what really matters after all.



# The Biggest Mistake

But when it comes to figuring out how and where your business can benefit by automating workflows, there is often one common mistake that many make: the belief they **need** to change their processes – particularly the back end of a process.

Businesses have a tendency to make a large technology investment and process overhaul. Swapping out the ERPs and accounting software. Upgrading the tech and storage hardware. Reassigning responsibilities among staff. This all can lead to poor adoption rates and added, unnecessary costs to name a few.

Even worse, the solution you put in place might actually **require extra steps** be added to the process because you're attempting to shoehorn technology with the false promises of better reporting, management, oversight and/or meeting some sort of tax, regulatory and compliance use case.

This is a trap you can't afford.



# Doing it the *Right* Way

So, the lesson becomes: If it isn't broken, don't fix it.

Keeping your existing technology and processes largely in place, businesses should instead focus on the front end or beginning of workflow processes, specifically regarding digitization.

That's because paper documents are slow, complex and expensive. They also put your information and your business at risk. A swift gust of wind or curious eyes can easily "misplace" your files. But **digitizing** information gives you:

- The ability to leverage your information throughout the entire process without the need for manual intervention along the way.
- Better visibility and alerts to potential problems and outstanding activity ahead of time – flipping the management of the process from reactive to proactive.
- A documented, formal structure and procedure that workers previously didn't have keeps processes smooth, accurate, and up-to-date.
- Provides/helps in meeting security and governance rules and regulations.





# A Digitally-Fueled Workflow

Think about your business for a second. The files. The people. The decisions.

Do you see the connection?

**All things documents, turn into all things data, which turn into ALL things for your business.**

Meaning, in the end, the success of your business is rooted not just in the value of your information, but the **format!**

Let's break it down:

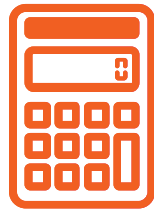
- Paper documents are valuable and actionable pieces of information for your business
- Automated workflows drive that valuable information along the way, improving your business' performance
- Digitizing documents before they enter a workflow accelerates processes by reducing steps, manual labor, and print spend, thus further enhancing workflow ROI

Sounds good, right?

Here's what that looks like.

# Look Familiar?

This is your hypothetical accounts payable process. And because your office is the financial hub of your also hypothetical company, all the AP-related invoices, receipts, etc. from other locations are sent to you to manage and process.



- 1 Employee at location 1 receives an invoice
- 2 Scans the invoice as a PDF
- 3 Emails the document to finance
- 4 Finance prints out the invoice
- 5 Manually fills out the rest of the information
- 6 Re-scans the invoice as a PDF
- 7 Saves a version for record keeping
- 8 Sends payment to the appropriate vendor
- 9 And finally enters the transaction into the accounting system

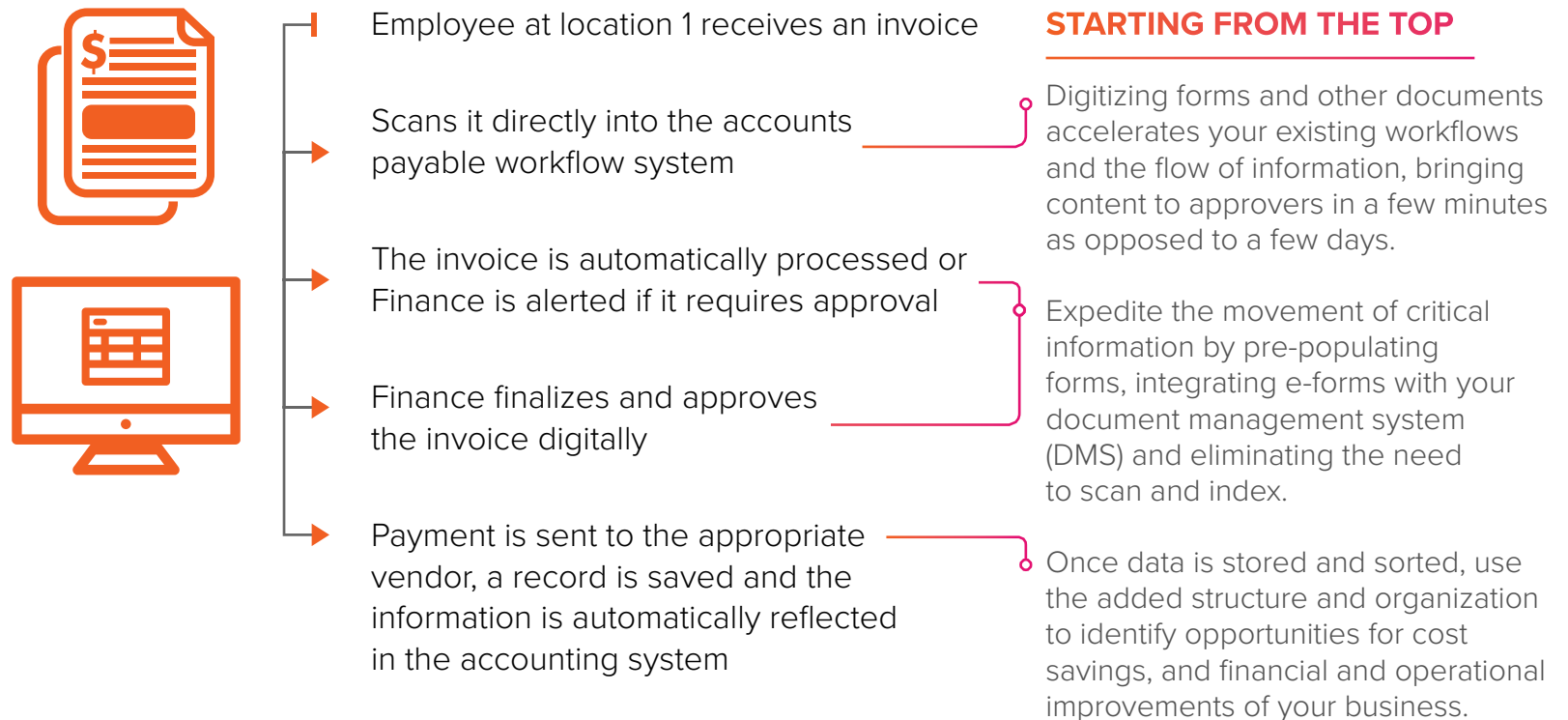
## TAKEAWAYS

- 9 steps
- Printing and re-scanning required
- Manual entry to systems



# Optimized Workflow

And here's what your workflow looks like when you optimize the front end with digitization. The positive ripple effect it has includes cutting steps, removing manual intervention and increasing accuracy.



## TAKEAWAYS

- Only 4 steps (!)
- Digitizing invoices leads to faster, more efficient processing
- Automated approval, distribution, system input

Still struggling? **Learn more** about upgrading your AP workflow.



## Getting Started

No more hypotheticals. Chances are your business can optimize or automate its workflow processes. The question is where and how.

Use this simple checklist to review your business:

- I'm concerned about the security of my information and potential loss of data associated with paper documents (fire, flood, theft, natural disaster, etc).
- My office is in the habit of printing documents too frequently.
- Data overload is becoming a problem for my workers.
- Too many employee hours are spent [re]scanning, printing, and filing documents to complete a task.
- Approving and sending documents to the next person requires too much waiting and nagging.
- My company or specific department doesn't have a documented process for tasks.
- We invested in workflow automation, but workers aren't adopting it fully.
- We invested in workflow automation, but the ROI isn't apparent.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it might be time to get – or enhance – your workflow processes.

**No one wants to do the paperwork, they want to do the smart work. Get started.**