

Think Before You Print

By Dennis R. Chase, Esq.

The longest journey begins with a single step. More often than not, when confronted with the prospect of becoming paperless, it is the lawyer who is most adamant that it cannot be done. After all, we *need* actual documents. We need to review documents, modify documents, file documents, heck, we need to execute documents . . . you get the picture? The first step, however, towards becoming paperless is a fairly dramatic change in one's mindset. The elimination of paper is not and cannot be immediate. The process is not going to happen overnight or over the span of days, weeks, or even months. In fact, the most difficult aspect of making the change is *deciding* to make the change. If one approaches the idea of becoming paperless as eliminating all the paper piled on our desks, in our file cabinets, and in those boxes sitting in our basements or attics as somehow happening in one fell swoop, than one is approaching the goal in a truly unrealistic fashion. Even if one were somehow able to wave that magic wand and eliminate all the paper in their office today, what would they do tomorrow . . . and the day after tomorrow? What would they do with all the mail they get every day, the Fedex packages, the faxes? Even if one genuinely makes the commitment to reduce their dependence on paper, unless everyone with whom they deal decides to make this very same vow on the very same day, then dealing with paper (or the elimination thereof) is a never ending project.

If the elimination (or even reduction) of paper is a never ending process, why bother even beginning the process? The answers are fairly simple . . . saving time, saving money, and saving the environment. The introduction of the electronic file to the office environment will revolutionize the way in which you conduct business. Imagine, if you will, a telephone call from one of your many clients. Now imagine asking one of your staff members to locate the client's file and being unable to do so. Not to worry, your staff will take a message and you'll return your client's call when you locate the file. Jump to the next day . . . a member of your crack staff locates the file, dutifully delivers the file to you and you conscientiously return the call to this decidedly all too important client. Unfortunately, the client is not available, so your staff then returns the file to the rock under which they found it. Now imagine this process happening over and over, day after day, with client after client. Consider the ability to locate the file with a click of the mouse and the associated time you can save yourself, your staff, and that all too important client.

While it goes without saying, time is money . . . TIME IS MONEY! Aside from the direct correlation between time and money, think about the relative costs associated with sending a letter the good old fashioned way, on paper, in an envelope, and delivered by regular first class mail versus shooting off a quick email. When first considering the cost analysis, most people only consider the cost of postage. Add however, to the ever increasing cost of postage, the cost of the paper, the cost of envelopes, and the cost of toner. Please further add the costs associated with the labor involved in typing the letter, addressing the envelope, sealing the envelope, affixing the postage, and dropping the envelope in the mail. Now add the exponential increase in costs associated with ensuring overnight delivery or the incalculable costs associated with that extremely important letter to that all too important client being lost in the mail. Now calculate the cost associated with shooting off that quick email or defer the differential cost analysis to

the full time bookkeeper you were able to hire with the money you've saved by going paperless.

Now it's time to consider the environment. The U.S. government estimates the average American office worker uses about 10,000 sheets of paper -- a stack four feet high -- every year. Paper accounts for more than a third of all municipal waste -- more than any other material, and we send 4 million tons of paper to the landfill every year. You can save .6 cents for every sheet of paper you don't buy. If you must use paper, use postconsumer recycled paper. Buying 40 cases of copy paper made from 30% postconsumer paper instead of paper made from virgin pulp saves more than seven trees, 2,100 gallons of water, 1,230 kilowatt-hours of electricity, and 18 pounds of air pollution. The same amount of paper made from 100% postconsumer paper saves 24 trees, 7,000 gallons of water, 4,100 kilowatt-hours of electricity, and 60 pounds of air pollution.

The office cannot become paperless overnight, yet how does one get started? Start by significantly reducing the amount of paper that you voluntarily introduce in to your office on a daily basis. Start by acquiring a service that integrates email with existing facsimile transmission technology. For the party sending you a fax, there is absolutely no change whatsoever. You can select a local, toll free, or even international telephone number. You send, receive, and manage all of your fax communications electronically through the internet. There's no special hardware required and no fax machine, paper, or toner to purchase. Available software allows the user to annotate, sign, highlight, zoom, forward, store, convert to PDF, or even add digital signatures in a snap. You can even have your voicemails automatically converted to files and emailed to you as an attachment. Listen to your files through most popular media players. Many services offer secure encryption alternatives to traditional fax machines so there are no more confidential faxes left sitting in the fax machine. Most importantly, managing faxes digitally saves time, trees, ink, and paper supply costs.

Paying your bills online is simply a no-brainer. Many of the companies with whom you do business, for example, for your credit cards, your cell phones, your utilities, etc., probably offer the option of not only receiving your statements electronically, but paying these bills electronically as well, using a variety of sources including an online bill-pay service, through your online bank account, or directly through the payee. While many are uncomfortable with having payments automatically withdrawn from their bank accounts, by arranging for such automatic withdrawals, you can potentially save hundreds of dollars in potential late fees and postage. If everyone in the U.S. received their bills electronically, and paid these bills electronically, together we'd save 18.5 million trees every year, 2.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases, and 1.7 billion pounds of solid waste.

Create and implement incentive programs for your staff to begin collecting email addresses for all future correspondence. Remember all of the costs associated with sending a letter and how having an email address can avoid those costs. Pass those savings along to your staff members through this incentive program. Having the ability to quickly and effectively communicate with your clients not only will impress them, but save time, money, and the environment.

This article will not make you paperless, however, maybe has piqued your interest. Start small and think big. To quote J.P. Morgan, "go as far as you can see; when you get

there, you'll be able to see farther." Hopefully, with monthly tips, you too can endeavor to be forever green . . . and paperless in the process.

Editor's Note: The author is the current Second Vice President of the Suffolk County Bar Association, a frequent contributor of The Suffolk Lawyer, and a partner with The Chase Sensale Law Group, L.L.P. The firm, with offices conveniently located throughout the greater metropolitan area and Long Island, concentrates their practice in Workers' Compensation, Social Security Disability, Short/Long Term Disability, Disability Pension Claims, Accidental Death and Dismemberment, Unemployment Insurance Benefits, and Employer Services. The author also counsels law firms in their endeavor to be forever green and paperless, too, through his next generation consulting firm, The Next Level Consulting Group, Inc.