Maximizing the Benefits of Inbound Document Automation

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A Madison Advisors Brief
May 2018

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Do you remember a time, not so long ago, when the document workflow for capture service providers (CSPs) and in-house shops included countless team members (preppers) to open mail, print out electronic documents, apply patch sheets for document classification and ready the documents for scanning? An organization's subject matter experts (SMEs) controlled the pace and execution of daily batches and we relied on institutional knowledge for the manual keying of data and exception processing. Very few organizations considered format changes to outbound documents that could streamline the inbound processes when the documents were returned. Then, of course, there was the second round of keying the information, either again from paper or from an image, into the systems of record. CSPs and in-house operations were proud of their workflows and the ability to achieve 75%-85% accuracy levels. At the end of the process, paper documents were assembled and tucked away into file cabinets or costly record storage to live out their useful, or required, retention life.

The results of these processes create a great deal of strain on organizations struggling to control costs, as well as increase customer satisfaction and their competitive advantage. As compliance regulations on the control of documents grew more stringent, companies invested millions to achieve document retention compliance standards for costly audits and legal actions.

Looking at archives of these processes within industry journals, all of this occurred not that long ago; and many organizations still rely on many manual steps for inbound mail processing. However, current technologies provide advanced workflows that can transition a manual workflow assisted by human processing to exception-based workflows. In addition, customer communication management strategies can include superior options for documents and forms designed specifically for the inbound capture processes.

Inbound document automation, complemented by a strategy for customer communications management, ERP integration, archiving and dashboard reporting, will bring the full value of a capture solution to an organization and provide benefits of increased accuracy, speed in document processing and a competitive advantage.

INPUT AND DATA EXTRACTION

While the amount of paper documents received by an organization is decreasing, paper documents are still inevitable and the need remains for some human intervention for opening mail and preparing the documents for scanning. With the technology available today, the capture process no longer needs to include document classification or upfront batching. Documents can be composed to include invisible fonts and barcodes that can be read by the capture technology without interfering with the overall design of the document. Likewise, electronic documents received via email or mobile (embedded or as an attachment) and even

fax documents can be extracted, batched and processed through an automated workflow.

OCR, ICR and dynamic data capture technologies are now standard "must haves" for inbound document processing to streamline the extraction process for both structured and unstructured data formats.

OCR accuracy plays a critical role in the processes of customer service, financial processing and within healthcare applications. Data import from documents with structured data has an elevated level of accuracy once the fields are "learned" by the software. Unstructured data within documents can also be learned with rule-based technology; however, the exception processing will likely be higher with these documents. High-quality scanned images and color text/field identification are two factors that can increase the readability and successful data extraction for these documents. Another consideration in unstructured documents is form density (the amount of data on the form), font size and the areas provided for handwritten information. Whenever possible, forms should be designed to allow ample space between data extraction areas and with large enough boxes to allow for handwritten input.

When evaluating technology, OCR accuracy levels should be identified for both structured and unstructured data. Structured data expectations should be 98% or higher, with certain allowances made for unstructured documents depending on their complexity.
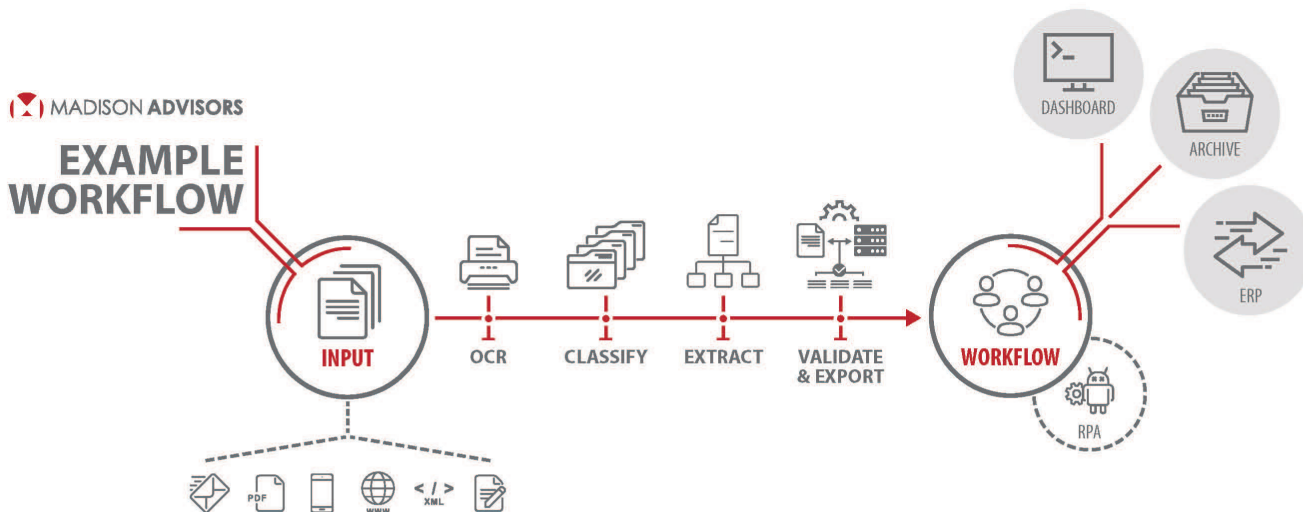
Document Automation Workflow

ERP AND ARCHIVE INTEGRATION

ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) Systems

Interfacing data extracted within the document capture process to an organization's ERP system must be considered to maximize the benefits of an automated solution. ERP systems are used to manage mission-critical business activities such as accounting, project management, enrollment, procurement, etc. Inbound technology should include the ability to interface with these systems and databases to avoid duplicate data entry and potential errors that may result from this manual step. Most technologies include these capabilities; however, they may be provided as an additional module with distinct licensing requirements.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is a tool designed to automate business processes by automating repetitive tasks and interfacing with other digital systems. For inbound document automation, RPA can reduce steps needed to integrate data into other systems and free up subject matter experts to manage exceptions and/or documents requiring special handling.

Archiving

When designing workflows to support inbound document automation, organizations are wise to consider the entire lifecycle of a document including the active use, distribution, inactive storage requirements and ultimate destruction. Document retention requirements vary based on the document category and the corresponding legal and operational needs. Based on compliance standards, documents may need to be stored in both electronic and paper format along with a clear tracking on the chain of custody. Data capture can include the automated capture of retention date requirements based on the document category and that can be transferred directly into the archival system.

Document archiving and retention standards are not typically part of a capture solution; however, organizations that are routinely audited will benefit from considering these requirements as part of the overall document workflow.

REAL TIME ANALYTICS AND DASHBOARDS

Capture solutions providing analytics and dashboards supply an organization with the tools needed to maximize the benefits of the solution and the ability to identify issues in real time to address concerns and identify workflow improvements.

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Dashboard functionality should include:

- Self-service options
- Customizable reporting
- Task monitoring
- Diagnostics based on workflow rules
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measurement
- Monitoring of exception processing from start to resolution

Dashboard TAR functionality (Track, Audit & Report) provides the foundation for ongoing process improvement by providing visibility into the operational processes and the metrics captured to validate service level agreements.

The advantages of inbound document automation not only include a reduction in errors, but also, if designed correctly, can result in decreasing ongoing IT needs, better FTE utilization and a platform that is poised for growth without adding headcount. Technology solutions that provide automated input, extraction and validation will reduce the time needed to bring data into an organization for processing and increase customer satisfaction. Integration with ERP systems, archive systems with record retention standards and dashboard metric tracking can maximize the automation and cost-saving opportunities.

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Madison Advisors exists to advance the print and electronic communications objectives of Fortune 1000 companies. Madison Advisors specializes in offering context-specific guidance for a range of content delivery strategies, particularly those addressing enterprise output technologies and customer communications.

Madison Advisors offers services and expertise primarily through short-term, high-impact consulting services. With no-nonsense, quick engagements (measurable in days or weeks, not months), Madison Advisors directly helps our clients achieve very hard and specific return on investment (ROI) related to their print and electronic communications initiatives.

Madison Advisors' analysts are dedicated to technology and market research that is delivered through shortterm project engagements as well as articles, publications, and presentations. We specialize in customer communication technologies including enterprise output management, content management, customer relationship management, e-billing, and infrastructure technology.

For more information on maximizing your capture operations utilizing automation, contact Madison Advisors at info@ madison-advisors.com or call 817.684.7545.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Susan brings over 20 years of experience in consulting in the business communications and business process outsourcing industries to Madison Advisors. With an extensive knowledge of strategic account and data management, Susan is well-versed in customizing solutions for business process re-engineering and the outsourcing of business-critical back office functions using technology to achieve automation. As part of Madison Advisors, Susan has served as a program manager for a large-scale print and mail outsourcing project, coordinating multiple phases of execution and managing the associated risks with both the client and the end customer.

Prior to Madison Advisors, Susan worked as a Client Solutions Executive for EDM Americas for six years, where she oversaw new business development and project management within existing key accounts by driving business process reengineering and developing ROI's for outsourced document management services. Susan also previously served as Vice President of Active Data Services, and was Client Services Manager for Lason Systems Inc.

Susan holds a B.S. in Business Administration from University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

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