

# Electronic signatures can overcome productivity blockages

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1 Dec 2015

Enterprises have already saved millions by switching their legacy processes to digital, but when it comes to actual transactions many still rely on old paper-based processes.

The challenges and costs involved with paper-based transactional processes include volumes of printing, faxing, and overnighting costs; lack of transparency in document status; and delays caused by missing signatures. There is also an obvious limitation in that paper-based documents can only be filed in one place and accessed by one person at a time.



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This inevitably leads to the filing, archiving and document retrieval challenges due to multiple copies of critical documents made and stored in different locations, which makes it difficult to keep track of changes and authenticate the originals. This inefficiency further causes compliance and security issues and the cost to organisation runs between R140 and R1,300 per document, depending on whether the document can be found and whether it contains errors.

## Complete solution

It makes sense, therefore, that businesses should consider a complete solution that utilises advanced electronic signatures to mitigate these costs and complications. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that the rate at which we need to process, store and secure information is continually increasing. For example, organisations need to provide a faster way to sign and verify documents in order to improve customer satisfaction and meet service expectations. This would also enable them to eliminate direct bottom-line expenses that arise from printing, routing and replacing documents, as well as the indirect costs that arise from delays and other productivity obstructions.

Advanced electronic signatures are intended to replace paper-based processes where legislation requires that documents are signed with a 'wet' (pen and paper) signature. The advanced electronic signature process means that a paper original with a wet signature will be replaced with a digitally signed file.

While the legislative and technological foundations for electronic signatures have been in place for many years, the only hurdle that remains is the need to implement an advanced electronic signature solution across an organisation in order to have a truly paperless process.

## Simplified process

To make this transition easier, the process needs to be simplified and potential bottlenecks identified; from authenticating authorised personnel through to maintaining the system. At an enterprise level, hundreds of employees need to manage signature files so these files must be secure and accessible on demand.

This requires that the management interface is integrated into the various applications that the organisation already uses - such as enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise content management (ECM) systems - to deliver advanced electronic signatures in the context in which they're needed.

Without the right tools to deal with advanced electronic signatures, these benefits cannot be unlocked. By having the right system in place the vast majority of internal and external process relating to customers, suppliers and the like can be fully

digitised, and there will no longer be a need for the organisation to stop the digital process to print a contract, sign each page, mail it off and then wait until it is returned.

## High evidential weight

A further important benefit of advanced electronic signatures, when compared to other signature methodologies, is that these signatures carry a high evidential weight, and the authenticity of the document to which they are attached can be guaranteed. This means that in a litigious situation, the burden of acquiring proof lies with the other party to disprove the authenticity of a signature. Just as important is the fact that advanced electronic signatures include a time-stamp, which is useful when organisations need to know the exact time of signing.

In short, a solution for digitally signing documents that can be seamlessly integrated within an organisation's existing management systems is not just crucial in overcoming productivity blockages; it is also necessary to ensure seamless compliance with the South African Electronic Communications and Transaction Act of 2002.

## ABOUT AVI ROSE

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