



Goodbye Paper Hello Freedom

IntelliChief™ White Paper Series

Paperless Customer Service



IntelliChief

Paperless Process Management

Executive Overview

Companies cannot exist for long without customers. That sounds too trivially obvious to be worth stating, but it is such a fundamental concept that it warrants emphasis.

A second point to make about customers is that, while the numbers quoted by industry analysts vary, it is generally accepted that it costs anywhere from four to 10 times more to win a new customer than to keep an existing one. Winning customers and then keeping them loyal are critical business requirements. But what keeps customers loyal? As is usual with such questions, the answer is: Many things. Price, quality, availability, previous relationship and even just the inertia of staying with a company they've dealt with for some time all play a part, but customer service is another decisive factor.

Intuitively, it seems clear that customers respond favorably to good service. But does our intuition serve us well in this case? If so, how significant are customers' perceptions of service in their ongoing purchase decisions? According to research by Accenture, a global consulting company, it is very important. In August 2006, Accenture reported that a survey it had conducted found that poor customer service had caused nearly half of all U.S. consumers to switch at least one service provider in the preceding year.

In May 2007, Accenture released the results of another survey that canvassed 1,200 technology consumers in North America, Europe and Asia. It found that consumer technology companies that offer average – not poor, just average – customer service alienated consumers and risked losing almost three-quarters of their customers to competitors. Plainly, customer service is critical to customer loyalty, hence company profitability.

After putting these stakes in the ground, one thing becomes abundantly clear, contrary to the usual assumption, customer service is not a cost. It's an investment.

Many factors contribute to customer service quality and costs. An in-depth look at all of them could fill a large book. Instead, this document focuses on just one of those factors: paper.

Despite the predictions a decade or two ago that we would by now be enjoying the benefits of paperless offices, that hasn't happened yet. Most organizations are still buried under mountains of paper. Many of these physical documents are often crucial to the provision of customer service. Yet, as a physical medium, paper-based documents carry high acquisition, storage and handling costs. Possibly worse, they hinder service quality as customers are put on hold or promised a call-back while customer service agents hunt for the necessary paperwork.

Furthermore, automating customer service functions and offering web-based self-serve options not only speeds-up customer interactions, but it can also add value to those interactions while lowering their costs. Conversely, paper documents, which must be handled manually, negate this option. This white paper examines paperless customer service options as a way to overcome these challenges and reap the rewards.

Introduction

The first question to ask when studying customer service is: What is it? To some people it is restricted to what happens after a sale when a customer contacts the company to ask a question about the purchased product or service, or to request assistance in solving a problem. Others define customer service as every interaction with the customer, including after-sale support, but not limited to it.

This white paper uses the broader definition because, after all, customers don't care how you define customer service. They want all of their dealings with your company – whether they are requesting information, making a purchase, asking for support or whatever – to be as efficient and effective as possible.

Using the broader definition, customer service is any interface with customers and, therefore, one of the greatest influences on customer satisfaction. How important is customer satisfaction to your bottom line? As the 2006 Accenture study referred to in the executive summary indicates, 46 percent of respondents said that they had stopped doing business with a company in the last year because of poor service.

This statistic may understate the problem. A 2002 Gartner, Inc. report, "Is Self-Service the Panacea?", stated that 68 percent of customers will switch brands based on a poor customer service experience.

In theory, you would like to achieve perfection in the quality of the products and services you sell, but perfection is not economically feasible and, for complex products and services, probably not even possible for us mortals. Fortunately, imperfection is not fatal when it comes to customer satisfaction. Customer service can play an even more important role in achieving customer satisfaction and retention than the quality of your products and services.

Think about the most memorable customer experiences you've ever had – the ones that left you so impressed that you, in glowing terms, told your friends, relatives and colleagues about those experiences. Chances are they were not the result of a superior product or service, but rather they were instances of a vendor going above and beyond the norm to fix a problem or provide assistance – something that wouldn't have been necessary if the product worked as it should the first time and every time and the product's functionality was intuitive and complete.

Winning new customers costs as much as ten times more than keeping existing ones, so if customer service is such a critical component of customer satisfaction and retention, why aren't companies doing a better job of it? One answer might be that they don't realize that they aren't. The Three "D"s of Customer Experience, an article by James Allen, Frederick F. Reichheld and Barney Hamilton that was published in Harvard Management Update in October, 2005, cites a Bain & Company survey of 362 firms. Approximately 80 percent of the companies surveyed believed that they delivered a superior experience to customers. But what did the customers think? They thought that only eight – that's eight without a zero following it – percent of companies delivered a truly superior experience.

Who's right, the companies or the customers? In this case, the old adage, "the customer is always right," fits. It is, after all, customers who decide which suppliers they use. They make that decision based on criteria of their own choosing.

What does it take to deliver excellent customer service? There are number of critical factors, but many of them depend on putting accurate and complete information at customer service representatives' (CSR) fingertips. The range of information that CSRs require to address customer issues is vast, including data about customer purchases, shipments, invoices, product specifications, parts, troubleshooting activities and more. Most of this information exists within the organization. The question is how easily, rapidly and – to keep an eye on the bottom line – inexpensively can CSR s access it? If the information exists on paper, the answer is: Not very. Being a physical medium, paper is cumbersome and costly and its retrieval and handling is slow.

Paper-Based Customer Service Challenges

One important difference between the customer service function and most other business operations is that resolving customer issues often requires accessing information that is spread across a variety of departments.

Consider, for example, a hypothetical call. A customer telephones to complain that she did not receive everything she ordered. To ensure that the customer did, in fact, order everything she remembered ordering, the CSR first examines the original order document that sits in a filing cabinet in the sales office. If the items and quantities match, the CSR then has to verify that none of the requested items are on backorder by referring to a copy of the packing slip that is filed in a cabinet in the warehouse. If that doesn't resolve the issue, the CSR then checks the shipping documents to see if everything was shipped in one box or in multiple boxes. If there were multiple boxes, the CSR next has to verify that they all made it onto the truck and were delivered. Depending on the company's shipping policies, the boxes may have been delivered by the company's own truck or by one owned by a third-party shipping company.

This is only one example, but it is typical of the dispersal of information that CSR s often have to review in order to serve customers. When some or all of this information exists on paper, the challenges impeding the cost-effective provision of superior customer service mount.

The following are among the characteristics and costs of paper that contribute to the challenges:

- Paper is costly to store, handle, copy and distribute. Whole warehouses may need to be dedicated to storing the paper required to resolve customer issues. That paper has to be manually filed when it comes in (or is created) and then retrieved when needed. And, if two people need to work on a problem simultaneously, the necessary documents may have to be photocopied at a cost of several cents per page in material costs, plus the related labor costs.

- The storage of paper is subject to human error. Documents may be misfiled or accidentally destroyed. Hours must then be wasted hunting them down or trying to recreate lost information if the documents were destroyed. This is not a trivial cost. Research from Price Waterhouse Coopers suggests that the average cost to search for a misfiled document is \$120. In the meantime, the increasingly frustrated customers are kept waiting for an answer to their questions.
- Paper is difficult to backup or recreate. If a fire destroys the only copies of valuable customer information it would be impossible to provide customer service and other ongoing operations may also be curtailed. In addition, failing to adequately protect customer and transaction data against such destruction, accidental or not, may place your company in breach of a number of regulations.

A shift in customer expectations over the years has further increased the drawbacks of using paper to support customer service. Thanks to the Internet and other information technologies, there is now a greater expectation of and demand for rapid responses from vendors than there was in the past. Customers no longer readily accept “I’ll have to put you on hold” or “I’ll have to call you back” when they call with a question. Yet that is invariably what they hear when a CSR has to track down information that exists only on paper.

In addition, customers today often expect, and industry economics frequently demand, new alternatives for customer service, including 24x7 self-serve support options through the Internet. Paper-based information makes it impossible to offer this option.

The Solution: Paperless Process Management

The solution is to take as much paper as possible out of the full gamut of customer service operations using Paperless Process Management (PPM). PPM is not the first attempt at reducing paper. Other technologies and methodologies that go by names such as Enterprise Document Management, Enterprise Content Management, Electronic Records Management, Electronic Document Distribution and Information Lifecycle Management are used to varying degrees. But these models suffer from a common weakness. Their focus is on the document or unit of information, when it should be on the business process.

PPM differs from its predecessors in that it focuses on relieving business processes of their paper burdens, rather than considering documents in isolation from the processes that create and use them. By taking a business process perspective, PPM avoids the frequent problem of incompatible technologies that hinder processes rather than streamlining them. Instead, using a PPM approach, the selected document management technologies integrate seamlessly with the organization’s business applications.

In addition to taking a business process perspective, PPM also covers the whole information lifecycle to maximize the benefits to be gained from going paperless. This lifecycle includes:

Capture

‘Capture’ represents the conversion of paper documents into electronic documents.

Though you’ve gone paperless, that doesn’t mean your customers and vendors have done the same. You will continue to receive mission-critical documents in paper form and a PPM solution must be able to quickly scan the document, convert it to electronic format, and archive it for later retrieval and review.

That said, not all documents are manually scanned. A true PPM solution should also automatically capture and index inbound and outbound documents delivered by fax and as email attachments. Documents delivered in this manner are already in electronic format and should require little or no manual intervention.

Create

'Create' is the production of electronic documents from within your organization's computer systems.

The create component of your PPM solution allows you to work within familiar business application screens to generate documents for electronic delivery.

In addition, PPM allows your data to be applied to customized design and data formatting templates. This allows you to create polished, professional forms without outsourcing any work to an expensive print shop. You incorporate design features including logos, signatures, barcodes, font treatments, precise data positioning, shading, lines, and a lot more internally.

Data reformatting functionality also allows you to eliminate redundant data, eliminate multi-line detail items, and perform other functions to reduce document page counts. So, you create shorter, easy-handling forms while maintaining or increasing readability.

Distribute

'Distribute' refers to the delivery of newly created electronic documents to fax machines, email mailboxes, web sites, or to laser printers.

The fact is that customers and vendors are growing increasingly demanding when it comes to how documents get delivered to them. In addition to wanting delivery in multiple formats, they may also want copies CCed to multiple individuals. Using centrally managed recipient profiles, PPM allows you to customize delivery formats and routing options without the end user becoming involved in who gets PDF, who gets fax, who wants to view their forms online, and who gets a print copy.

Very often, you'll be able to simply schedule when documents should be created and delivered. PPM will automatically perform those delivery functions once a week, twice a month, etc., without any end user involvement.

In instances where document delivery requires user involvement, all they have to do is click "Send" or "Print" and move on to their next task. PPM distributes documents exactly how the recipient wants them automatically.

Retrieve

'Retrieve' lets authorized users find, access, and review electronic documents in the PPM archive.

This usually occurs using a thin client or from a web portal. It replaces the time and space consuming practice of maintaining filing cabinets full of paper documents. The 'Retrieve' component of PPM allows you to retrieve that physical space while exponentially cutting down on time spent locating documents. It also exponentially reduces time spent locating lost documents.

Even better, 'Retrieve' through PPM is much more secure less costly compared to maintaining sets of room and cabinet keys, lock combinations, and other physical security measures.

Workflow

'Workflow' controls the movement and processing of electronic documents throughout your system.

Usually accessed via a thin client, the 'Workflow' component of a PPM solution operates as a traffic cop for your documents, content, and processes.

Using a thin client hub, the user can view and process documents, alerts, and notification as well as set deadlines for certain actions and responses.

Users and managers can also track processes and produce an audit trail to stay constantly on top on transactional and time sensitive documents.

While much of PPM's workflow functionality is appealing from the productivity / efficiency perspective, it's equally critical to view workflow through the lens of a regulatory environment that includes Sarbanes-Oxely and HIPAA. Highly dynamic workflow features aren't a luxury so much as a necessity when you need to produce very specific tracking and auditing information for compliance reasons.



Archive

'Archive' is the central repository – or safe – where the electronic documents are stored.

This is the component that replaces the rows of filing cabinets you currently might use. It is also where your PPM solution performs the bulk of its document lifecycle management procedures.

Archiving is the most important functional area within PPM because all the others funnel in to or out of this one. The 'Archive' component is also where your document retention policies are created and stored. For any business dealing with regulations like SOX or HIPAA, retention policies are both critical, time consuming, and costly.

But through PPM, you can quickly and efficiently customize how long specific documents (or groups of documents) should be retained and then destroyed. The archive also makes it possible for authorized users to locate documents, no matter how old, with tremendous ease.

As we've noted in other sections of this whitepaper, this level of document lifecycle management is critical both to efficiency as well as ensuring that you comply with various industry-specific or industry-wide regulations.

The important point is that, with a workflow solution, all document transfers are automatic and system-managed. What's more, to ensure that nothing is lost in the shuffle, the workflow software can send automatic alerts to the appropriate people to ensure that they perform the necessary tasks in a timely fashion.

Workflow lets you focus on the process rather than on the document. It automates and streamlines activities so that what used to be manual administrative tasks (photocopying a document, walking it over to the intended recipient, waiting at a fax machine, etc.) are now fully automated workflow steps.

By taking a holistic view of both the relevant business processes and the information lifecycle, PPM offers substantial opportunities to streamline and reduce the costs of purchase-to-pay processes.

Applying the PPM approach to customer service

Digitize all documents that might be used to provide service to customers, including:

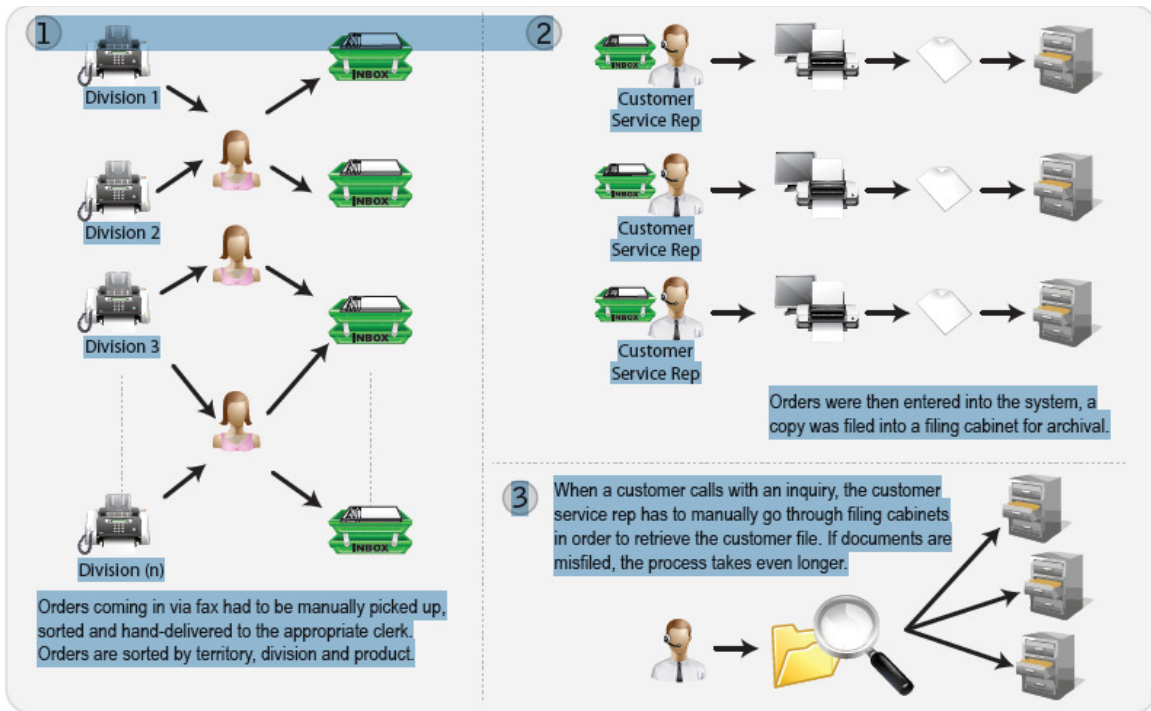
- Product literature
- Orders
- Invoices
- Shipping documents
- Returns documents
- Manuals
- Parts lists
- Maintenance histories
- Customer correspondence
- RFPs
- RFQs
- Quotes
- Index and cross-reference all documents so, with a push of a button, a CSRSR can see all documents related to a customer transaction or communication
- Create self-service options so customers can help themselves 24x7 by accessing relevant documents on the web (with security to protect privacy).

Case in Point: Streamlining Customer Service at Sperian Protection

Roissy, France-based Sperian Protection, which maintains its U.S. headquarters in Smithfield, Rhode Island, is the world leader in the manufacturing and distribution of personal protective equipment. It holds the number one position in both eye and fall protection equipment and number two in hearing protection. Around the world, almost 6,000 employees work at 36 production sites on five continents. In 2006, the company recorded a profit of 41.1 million euros (about 55 million USD) on sales of 737 million euros (almost one billion USD).

Sperian Protection runs the JD Edwards World ERP application on the IBM System i platform.

The company receives 200 to 300 multi-page orders by fax every single day. Because each division handles its own orders, these inbound faxes had to be manually distributed to a CSR in the appropriate department, which was a slow, laborious and error-prone process. Compounding the problem, when a customer called with a question the caller was typically put on hold while the CSR tracked down the order and other related documents.



As the company grew and orders increased, these already slow and costly processes became even slower and costlier. Furthermore, because it was taking longer than necessary to process orders and answer customer questions regarding invoices, cash flow was also impacted.

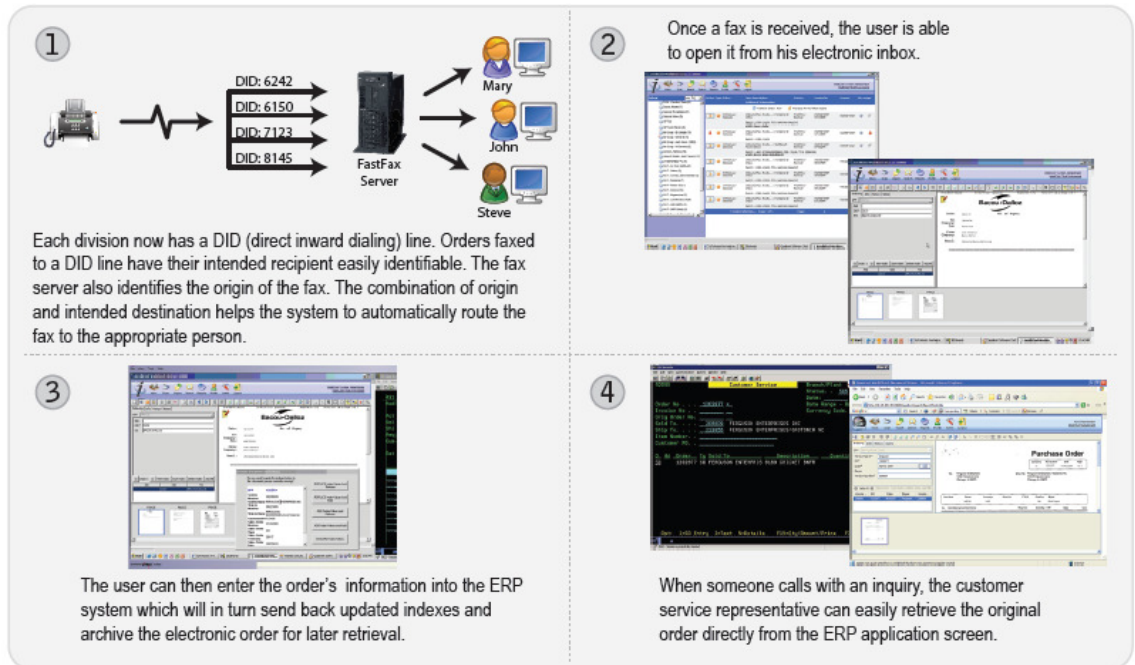
Sperian Protection deployed a multifaceted solution to solve these problems. First, they chose Quadrant Software™ electronic forms solution, Formtastic™, to eliminate the use of costly pre-printed forms. In their place, Formtastic merges templates for documents such as order acknowledgements, shipping documents and invoices with the necessary data and then emails or faxes the resulting completed forms to customers directly from the system, without the need for manual handling.

The challenges of receiving faxed orders were next overcome with Quadrant Software™ enterprise fax solution, FastFax™. When orders arrive, rather than being printed on a fax machine, FastFax receives them as electronic images. The software recognizes the sender's fax station ID and the fax line the order came in over. Using this information, the workflow processing software automatically routes orders to the appropriate CSR's inbox. This function enabled the CSR to simply mouse-click the order to view it.

CSRs have two screens on their desks. One screen shows the image of the faxed order, while the other displays the JD Edwards order-entry application. The CSR simply keys in the data from the image on one screen into the order-entry application on the other. IntelliChief, the final component of Sperian Protection's solution, uses the data from the JD Edwards application to automatically index the order image that is stored in IntelliChief's image repository. The JD Edwards application then generates order acknowledgements and advance ship notices and emails or faxes them to the customer.

If a customer later calls with a question, the CSR can pull up the order from the JD Edwards application and hit a key to see the image of the faxed order and all related documents, such as the order acknowledgment, advanced ship notice and invoice.

The Formtastic™ and FastFax™ trademarks are the property of Quadrant Software, LLC



The benefits Sperian Protection received from this solution include the following:

Increased automation throughout the order-to-invoice cycle allows the company to get invoices into customers' hands sooner, thereby improving cash flow, while also facilitating considerable labor savings.

Automation has also decreased the number of order processing errors, which improves customer perception of quality and the CSR's troubleshooting workload.

Eliminating paper, particularly preprinted forms, has reduced paper costs.

Mailing and handling costs have been reduced because many forms that used to be printed and mailed are now faxed or emailed directly from the system.

Storage facility costs have been reduced because documents are stored electronically rather than on paper.

Customer confidence has increased because questions are answered immediately and completely rather than customers being put on hold or having to wait for a return call while the paper documents are retrieved.

Because the system immediately emails or faxes order acknowledgements, the company doesn't get as many "did you get my order" calls as in the past. Not having to deal with these inquiries reduces labor costs for Sperian Protection and increases customer satisfaction.

Case in Point: Streamlining Customer Service at Shemin Nurseries

With more than 50-years of experience under its belt, Danbury, Connecticut-based Shemin Nurseries has grown into a major landscape supply company with 30 customer service centers in 15 major metropolitan markets in the northeastern, southeastern and midwestern United States. Today, the company is one of the largest wholesale distributors of nursery products in the United States.

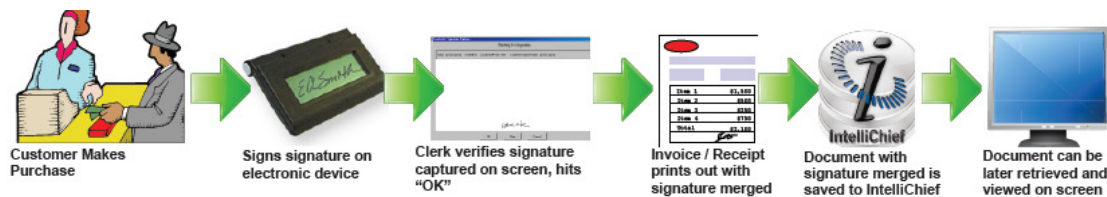
Shemin Nurseries prides itself on having built its business on four simple concepts: quality, variety, availability and service. With regard to service, the company's web site promises, "we back up our broad product offerings with a knowledgeable professional staff that you can rely upon for fast, courteous service and technical support."

The fulfillment of this promise in the company's expanding operations was becoming a challenge because some of Shemin Nurseries business processes were paper-based. For example, customer information was fragmented across the company's 30 locations. What's more, the yard tickets – two-part paper forms on which customer service representatives wrote item numbers, quantities, discounts and other information as they filled customers' orders – and the invoices that the company produced on preprinted forms were expensive. In addition, all of the manual form-filling created data quality issues because of the inevitable human errors.

Shemin Nurseries needed a better approach to document management. It needed to make the information that was available only on paper more accessible to staff. Furthermore, it wanted to streamline processes and reduce costs by automating customer service operations. However, one caveat was that as the company moved from paper-based to electronic storage of information, it still needed a way to capture customer signatures on invoices.

Shemin Nurseries met these needs by implementing IntelliChief and by adopting PPM principles. Now, rather than using the old paper-based yard tickets, CSRs in many locations use radio frequency (RF) scanning devices to automatically record items as they are picked to fulfill a customer's order. When a customer returns to the counter to pick up his or her order, the invoice will have already been printed out, ready for the customer's signature, without the need for any manual data entry on the part of Shemin Nurseries' staff.

Because the RF scanning solution was rolled out to the various locations in phases, the paper yard tickets were not eliminated immediately across the company. But even in those locations that kept the yard tickets, a barcode containing the order number, customer number and related information was added to the tickets. This allows the tickets to be scanned into IntelliChief and then indexed automatically without the need for any manually keying of data. Once scanned into the system, the paper tickets are discarded.



At the checkout counter, rather than signing a paper invoice, the customer signs on an electronic signature pad. IntelliChief then automatically indexes and archives an electronic copy of the invoice, including the customer's signature. The final invoice can also be automatically faxed or emailed to the customer directly from the system.

The benefits of the solution have been numerous, including the following:

In the past, customer signatures weren't always obtained and those that were could be lost. With its new PPM solution, Shemin Nurseries has achieved a 100% signature capture rate, thereby reducing the room for subsequent disputes.

Before, long lines formed during peak planting seasons because of the cumbersome paper-based business processes. This could result in lost business. The faster and more efficient business processes made possible by the PPM solution have reduced these lines, thereby improving customer satisfaction.

Previously, when investigating an invoicing issue, headquarters staff had to call the store that processed the order. A store employee then manually hunted for and faxed the document. Employees often had to call customers repeatedly to ask them for further information. Now, regardless of which store processed an order, the order and all related documents are immediately available to headquarters staff online. This has reduced the labor costs involved in resolving issues and it has eliminated the need to call customers to request information that staff should have had at their fingertips.

IntelliChief has provided Shemin Nurseries with greater control over workflow processes, allowing them to set business process rules and automate the enforcement of those rules.

Eliminating the need for pre-printed forms has greatly reduced paper and printing costs.

The ability to fax or email invoices and other documents out of the system and to store documents electronically rather than on paper has greatly reduced postage, paper and storage costs.

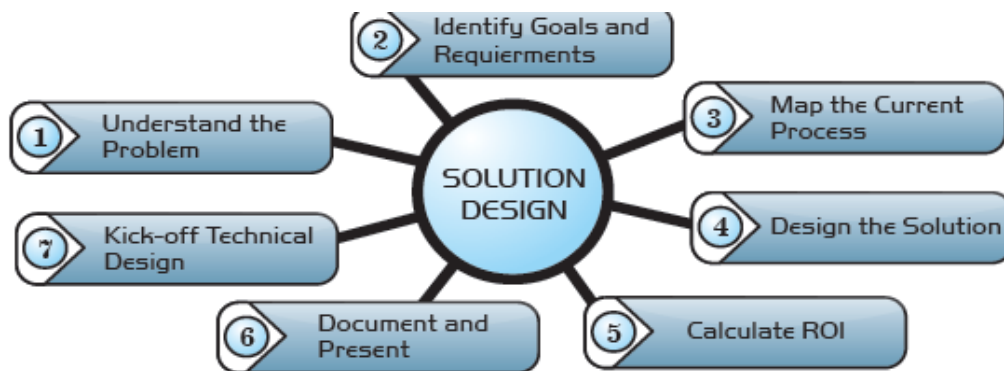
Taking Action: Next Steps

If you're ready to streamline your customer service processes, the best advice is to exercise patience. Jumping in and buying technologies before understanding your business processes – not as they are perceived by executives, but rather as they are actually practiced by front-line staff – will almost certainly lead to sub-optimal results, and possibly utter failure. Therefore, start by analyzing the target processes and how they interact with other processes. Only then can you choose the right PPM technologies and implement them optimally.

The First Step: Solution Design

As suggested, business analysis is the most important part of the process. Contracting an outside consultant is often a worthwhile investment in this phase. Frequently, people in the organization cannot describe the details of what they do because the processes are intuitive to them.

If, in order to walk, we had to issue specific instructions, at precisely the right time, to each of the required muscles, we'd all fall flat on our faces with every attempted step. Yet, we have no problem walking. Work processes performed many times a day by longtime employees are often like that. The employees perform the tasks easily, but the details are ingrained. An outside consultant may be required to tease out those details, including not just the minutiae of the normal work processes, but also any exceptions to them.



Although a comprehensive discussion of the solution design is outside the scope of this whitepaper, suffice to say that the main benefit of this approach is that it ensures that your business goals are driving the technology implementation, and not the other way around. As you create a Solution Design (either with your own internal team or jointly with a solution provider), you will be asking yourself (and your team) questions about your business objectives, the goals of your company and the problems you are facing today. At this time, you will also map your current activities. You then go on to visualizing the solution that needs to be implemented in order to solve the problems identified.

A good portion of the Solution Design documents the process as you do it today. By doing that, you ensure that everyone is in agreement as to how things are done in your company, where the bottlenecks lie, where the paper becomes unmanageable and which steps in the process are the critical ones for your business. In addition, by documenting the way things are done in your company you are at the same time establishing a common language among all participants of the project. It is amazing to see the faces of the team members, especially the managers, every time we conduct Solution Design sessions and the comments, such as those about activities they didn't know existed, start being drawn out.

As you uncover the current situation and the problems you face, the next step is to define a solution. And here is where the Solution Design flourishes and its value is understood. In order to determine what a good solution is, you need to make sure it resolves the issues you identified. If a solution sounds good only because it will implement the newest and greatest of the technologies, but it doesn't actually solve the problems you identified in the previous steps, it is worthless. By always going back to the current process documentation and the list of problems and goals you identified, you ensure that the proposed solution will address those issues.

As you document the solution, you follow a similar pattern. The team discusses what the optimum process should look like, what steps should be removed, what actions should be automated, what controls should be in place. The mapping of the solution serves to not only help build the business case for implementing the paperless project, but also to document what your future process will look like. A thorough Solution Design can help with the technical implementation and with industry regulations, such as Sarbanes-Oxley, that require specific documentation of business processes. Section 404 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act requires management to fully understand the processes and the control mechanisms in place that might impact financial reporting. As the team draws the detailed process, the business rules, the exception handling, and all related activities, they are also helping with such documentation efforts.

Only after you have your solution designed should you start the Technical Design, that is, detailing the technical aspects of your project. The Technical Design should follow the business requirements you documented and should use the process you documented as a basis for implementation. By having your business goals, metrics and rules drive the technical side of the project, you ensure that, in the end, you will have a system that does what it was supposed to do: improve the way you do business.

Involving Business Users

It is important to involve as many people as possible in this analysis phase. There are two reasons for this. As alluded to in the previous section, during the consulting phase with clients on implementing PPM, it becomes clear that the executive's view of how the business processes work is not what is actually happening in the company. When talking to front-line staff, they generally respond with the following comment, "Yes, that's how our company manual says it's supposed to be done, but it doesn't work that way. This is what we really do."

The second reason for involving as many people as possible in the analysis phase is that it helps to earn buy-in for the PPM solution. This buy-in has to come from all levels. Before they will authorize a PPM project, senior management has to recognize that there will be a return on their investment in PPM, but employees also have to be comfortable with the solution that is put in place. People who are frustrated because they weren't consulted or who are concerned that the new system will cost them their jobs can, intentionally or not, sabotage the best-laid plans and systems. Involving employees in the analysis process will help make them comfortable with the necessary changes once the solution is put in place.

In doing your analysis, take a wide view. While one business process may appear particularly paper-burdened and, therefore, a prime target for PPM, don't limit your analysis to that one process. There are two reasons for this. For one thing, intuition is often wrong. Closer examination may find other processes that can benefit more from PPM and, thus, should be the first target. More importantly, business processes interact. If you adopt PPM for one process without considering the bigger picture, you may end up implementing technologies in a way that won't allow you to streamline those interactions when you get around to taking the paper out of the related processes.

The Last Step: Technology

As suggested above, the choice of technologies to drive your PPM efforts should be your last consideration, not the first, but you do eventually have to make that decision. When evaluating the alternatives, don't look at PPM technologies in isolation. The greatest gains can be achieved when your PPM technologies integrate seamlessly with your other business applications. In contrast, if users have to jump through hoops to switch from one application to the other or if they have to spend considerable time manually transferring information between incompatible systems, many of the benefits of PPM will evaporate. Consequently, the ability to integrate with your existing business applications should be near the top of your list of PPM technology evaluation criteria.

PPM is not currently an area of expertise in most organizations. If you need assistance, the PPM professionals at IntelliChief can provide additional information, advice and support.

Conclusion

Customer service is your face to your customers – the people who decide whether to reward you with their purchases. To encourage their loyalty and continue to receive revenue from them, you have to keep them satisfied. Remember, the cost associated with getting a new customer is 10 times that of keeping a customer. Yet, old business processes – particularly paper-laden processes – make it difficult to continue to provide excellent service as business volumes grow and as customer expectations increase in an intensely competitive, internet-enabled business environment. When information is distributed in paper form, processes plod along at a frustratingly slow rate. Without a PPM solution in place, documents are moved within the office on foot. They may be faxed at relatively high speeds to remote locations, but once there they resume their pedestrian pace. These manual processes incur significant costs that are measured in both time and money.

Beyond the labor costs involved in handling physical documents, the paper itself, particularly multipart, preprinted forms, cost significantly more than the magnetic or optical media needed to store an equivalent volume of data. In addition, paper takes up a lot of space. Many companies devote considerable costly office or warehouse space to the storage of paper.

In addition, paper documents are error-prone. Paper is often misfiled or accidentally destroyed. And data manually keyed into a system from paper documents is occasionally entered incorrectly.

Another consideration, one that is little noted, is that paper is vulnerable. Unless it is copied, with duplicates stored offsite – a very expensive proposition – a fire or a serious flood may irrecoverably destroy the organization's paper records or the organization may be deprived of vital information if a thief purloins documents.

Paperless Process Management eliminates these problems. By digitizing documents and automating workflows it clears paper-induced bottlenecks and streamlines business processes. Added benefits include reducing much of the manual labor involved in moving, sorting, merging, processing and storing documents. Digitizing documents also eliminates copying costs. Document management systems can make electronic images instantly and simultaneously available to any number of authorized users anywhere in the world, right on their computer screens. What's more, storing digital documents takes up an infinitesimal fraction of the space required for their paper equivalents.

Once digital documents are properly indexed, they can never be misfiled. And, unlike their paper counterparts, digital documents can be backed up offsite as part of the regular data center backup processes. With a paperless solution the backing up and eventual destruction of documents is not only easy, it is an integral and indistinguishable component of your existing data backup processes.

What are the expected benefits to be gained by implementing a PPM solution?

- Faster response to customer requests thanks to electronic information retrieval
- Better protection for customer, purchase, product and other information
- More accurate information due to the elimination of human errors
- Complete resolutions of customer problems and answers to their inquiries

When you boil it all down, the pinnacle of PPM is the realization of improved customer satisfaction. And that leads to increased customer loyalty and higher revenues for your company.

Lower costs, more streamlined business processes, fewer errors, less vulnerable information assets and happier customers – the benefits of Paperless Process Management are clear. Please contact us at 508-594-2800 or email us at sales@intellichief.com for assistance in beginning your journey toward PPM.