



Foreword:

Not too long ago, many people felt paper was a thing of the past and that everything was going electronic. Fast forward to today—the realization is that paper cannot be completely eliminated. Electronic forms are increasingly prevalent, but paper remains important. As a result, document capture is a critical piece of the enterprise content management (ECM) strategy that an organization adopts.

If we look at how document capture technology has evolved over the years, the technology has matured in many ways, including the ability to read machine-printed and hand-printed data from forms and documents with a very high degree of accuracy, validate information against all types of business applications, and deliver data and images to a variety of back-end content repositories and business systems. These proven capabilities sometimes blur the differences between the various capture products available today. When considering an enterprise capture solution it is helpful to take a step back and look at all of your business and operational requirements before determining which capture solution is right for your business.

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Not all capture products are created equal

When looking for a capture solution today, you will find that there are many products to choose from. Some capture solutions provide a simple to use approach for those looking for basic scanning and indexing of documents, while other capture solutions provide flexibility optimized for enterprise capture environments that have unique and, in some cases, complex requirements. If we look at the core capabilities of a capture product, you will find that most solutions have the basic features covered—scanning, image enhancement, recognition, validation, and export. And in some cases, these basic capabilities are all that is needed.

However, these basic capture capabilities do not meet the requirements for all customers. For example, if you expect to be capturing high volumes and many different types of documents, then looking for a scalable solution that will provide automatic document identification is important. The ability for a capture solution to automate the identification of documents will reduce the amount of time that is spent preparing and sorting documents before scanning. Automating this step alone will result in significant cost savings. If the volume of scanned pages is very high, then selecting a proven solution that easily scales across several servers in an enterprise environment is essential.

As capture technology has evolved over recent years and become easier to deploy and manage in a decentralized environment, many organizations are now considering how capture can be pushed closer to the source of where a document enters a business. For example, a financial services organization receives many different financial documents from their customers at branch offices. In a centralized capture environment, these documents must be mailed to a central site for processing, which results in shipping costs, delays, and requires additional resources on the receiving end. It's important for organizations to consider both their near-term and long-term capture environment needs to ensure that their solution supports both centralized and branch office capture environments.

A few key points to consider when evaluating a capture solution are highlighted below. If your organization is looking for a capture solution, it may be helpful to further consider these points when evaluating the right solution.

Does the capture platform support both high volume batch capture and branch office ad hoc capture environments?

Many organizations have capture requirements that involve a combination of both centralized high volume capture and distributed branch office scanning. Whether an organization is planning on doing one or both, making sure the capture platform will solve all aspects of your capture requirements today and allow an organization to expand in the future will ensure the right solution is purchased.

In the case of distributed processing, a single approach does not necessarily address all the needs. For example, distributed scanning and indexing could either be low volume ad hoc scanning or high volume batch capture. In the case of a high volume scanning operation that is remote, a distributed capture server may need to be running with images and data being moved between servers at set times during the day. In the case of a low volume ad hoc scanning environment where an organization has possibly several hundred sites that require basic scanning capabilities, requirements could include an easy to deploy web-based client or the need to leverage existing multiple function peripheral (MFP) devices to enable capture at a set of branch offices.

Does the capture solution address the high cost of document preparation?

One of the most complex steps in processing a paper document is identifying what type of document it is. If you are an organization that will be processing large volumes of documents that are highly variable in terms of the layout, then being able to automatically identify the documents is a must have feature. Intelligent Document Recognition (IDR) automates the identification and classification of all document types, reducing the amount of human intervention. This means organizations can further take advantage of the reduced cost associated with prepping and sorting documents, as well as delivering the captured content to the right people and systems much faster.

Will we be able to optimize the automated data capture so that the amount of manual data entry required is minimized?

As noted earlier, recognizing data from a form or document has come along way, often to the point where a document can pass straight through without any or very little human intervention. However, if you are dealing with a set of unstructured documents where data is not always in the same location, then a capability like free-form extraction is important to have. The ability to automatically capture all key data from a document will further reduce any manual keying of data that would otherwise have to occur. To ensure the accuracy of the information, a capture solution must include ways to enforce business rules either through custom business rules or by connecting to other business applications and databases.

Will we be able to customize the solution to fit our business requirements versus changing our business processes to fit the technology?

If your organization has very specialized needs or complex business requirements, you will want to make sure these can be easily handled. While all document capture products will give you the basic needs of scanning, image enhancement, recognition, validation, and export, that does not necessarily mean the product is the right one. It is important to understand the business requirements for your capture process. If you have time-sensitive issues with getting some documents through the system faster than others, it is important to ensure that there are ways to prioritize document processes. An organization may require that various sets of documents be routed to different operators for validation based on business rules that have been defined. A capture solution that provides a modular architecture will provide a more flexible environment for addressing your unique capture requirements. Unfortunately, many document capture solutions force you to adapt your business requirements to the way their product works.

Will the solution allow us to easily connect into our applications and business processes?

This may seem obvious, but knowing if—and how—the solution works with your content management system and other required business systems is important to fully understand. To take it a step further, if there is customization that needs to be done, it is essential to make sure that the solution offers a development environment that will enable the capture application to integrate with various third party systems. Furthermore, the ability to customize existing integration modules that have been developed by the vendor will further enable an organization to take an existing module and modify it for their needs. These key points will ensure that organizations are not boxed in when it comes to integrating with their applications.

Will the application support the volume of paper that we expect to capture?

The volume of documents your organization plans to capture is an important requirement to understand. Page volumes can be extremely high for some organizations, surpassing a few million pages per day. Considering some capture solutions are better suited for lower volumes and departmental applications, knowing what your volumes will be and asking the right questions will ensure you don't purchase a solution that cannot meet your volume requirements either today or in the future. If the vendor you are considering does not have customers that match your volume requirements, then their solution may not be reliable to handle those volumes.

How will I monitor my capture environment including the other applications it interacts with?

In a large capture deployment with multiple servers, many unattended capture services running, dozens of client validation stations, how does IT know when a problems or bottlenecks arise? In the majority of capture products today, you will get some basic batch monitoring and reporting capabilities, but in many cases organizations will require something much more sophisticated in order to handle problems that could arise where services have stopped, a connection has been dropped between the capture application and a database, or a bottleneck has caused a backlog of batches that need to be processed. These types of problems directly affect productivity, reduce the value of capture, and impact the bottom line. Monitoring ensures that you get the full value from your investment. The application monitoring tool needs to be able to monitor all capture activities and enable IT Managers to proactively act before a problem impacts the business.

Will we be able to leverage this capture solution across many different business processes?

Some capture solutions are focused on a single business process, such as invoice or claim form processing. A capture solution that is able to process all types of documents will enable an organization to leverage the solution across many parts of the business. A good example would be a healthcare organization considering capture for handling Explanation of Benefit (EOB) documents. Finding a document capture solution that can handle EOBs—as well as all the other healthcare related documents—will enable this type of organization to get the greatest return on their investment.

Can the vendor provide us with a complete, end-to-end solution?

The answer to this question helps you evaluate whether or not the vendor can address your complete business needs. Over recent years, the capture market has consolidated to some degree, which has proven beneficial to organizations seeking solutions that involve not only capture, but also solutions that can manage the processing of information, and address content archiving and storage requirements. Working with a single vendor can be a significant benefit—reducing the number of parties involved in solving business problems enables an organization to communicate needs more effectively, and as a result, get the most out of their investments.



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