IMAGE CREDIT: BRIAN TIMMERMEISTER

MANAGING THE PAPER WITHIN YOUR DEALERSHIP

❯ AN INDUSTRY DILEMMA

Your dealership produces paper – a ton of it. Storing it costs you floor space and money. Getting rid of it can also be costly and difficult to justify.

There's also the issue of security. You collect and record personal financial information from your customers. You train your employees to place F&I paperwork face down, on their desk, or store it in a drawer. But do they always comply? And what about the thousands of people who pass through your dealership each year? It only takes one with a camera on their phone to photograph this information.

Your Dealer Management Software presents an option for you, but it is not only cost-prohibitive, it frankly is not efficient at managing your paper documents and workflow. Storing your paper off-site is also expensive, and limits your access to the information.

❯ BUSINESS NEED

You may not make your profits on back office operations, but you can lose them there. The more efficiently you run your dealership, the more money you will drive to the bottom line. Managing your paper documents from inception to destruction may not be fun, but it saves revenue.

Let's begin with the service and parts departments, one of the most profitable areas of your dealership,

and, a major paper producer. Storing ROs takes time and space. Not being able to produce an RO for a manufacture's audit can cost you money.

Then there's F&I, and all of the documents that make up a deal jacket. There's a lot of paper, and much of it contains confidential information.

Don't forget about Accounts Payable and all of the invoices that are received from manufacturers, small local shops and parts stores. Managing AP and the approval of invoices can be complicated and frustrating.

> " MANAGING YOUR PAPER DOCUMENTS FROM INCEPTION TO DESTRUCTION MAY NOT BE FUN, **BUT IT SAVES REVENUE.**

❯ WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

Many dealerships have turned to scanning their paper and saving it electronically. This can be a risky

proposition if not handled properly. Simply storing your documents electronically can open you up to a variety of risks, unless you address the following guidelines.

- Create a daily backup of all data and images that you save.
- Limit access to confidential information through secured and limited access to the records.
- Create record retention schedules, destruction dates and delete the records once they reach these dates.
- Follow all manufacturer guidelines for storing and accessing your electronic records.
- Certify your electronic images and system with your state Department of Motor Vehicles.
- Create procedures for your employees to follow when scanning and storing electronic images.

Sound like a lot of work? It can be, unless you invest in a system that does the work for you. But where do you begin? There is a lot to consider, so let's break the system down into a few basic components.

CAPTURE HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

These days everyone has a Multi-Function Peripheral (MFP) that scans and prints. These devices are great for an occasional scan or if you need to fax or print, but for your larger scanning needs you will want to consider a dedicated desktop scanner.

Today's scanners are fast, small, powerful and affordable. Most provide high quality scans and small file sizes through image enhancement software that is included with the scanner. The majority of scanners will also scan in color, and two-sided. When selecting a scanner you will want to look for the following features.

- Minimum speeds of 40 pages per minute (80 images per minute)

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IF DESIGNED PROPERLY, SCANNING YOUR DEALERSHIP'S PAPER SHOULD REQUIRE LITTLE EFFORT.

- Duplex (two sided) scanning
- Black & white and color scanning
- Image enhancement software
- USB connection
- TWAIN and ISIS drivers
- 8½" feed throat with extended length scanning of at least 24"
- Straight paper path

Now that you have selected your scanner, it's time to turn your attention to capture software.

Don't underestimate the value of good capture software. Indexing a scanned document such as an RO or Deal Jacket can be tedious and time consuming. If designed properly, scanning your dealership's paper should require little effort.

Most Dealer Management Software packages will print barcodes onto your documents. Consider, as an example, printing barcodes on your RO that include the RO Number, VIN, Service Date and RO Type (warranty, internal or customer). With the proper capture software, your scan operator can simply place the ROs (prepped to remove any staples and paper clips) into the feeder of the scanner and the software will read the barcodes to automatically index the pages.

❯ DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Now that you have successfully scanned and indexed your documents, it's time to store them. A true document management system will allow you to control access to applications and the documents within them.

As an example, you may want your service manager to have access to the ROs, but not to Deal Jackets, or you may want to limit access to files by store. By properly choosing the index values for each application, you can easily control who can view a document. Let's look again at the RO application and the following index values:

- VIN – allows you to search for all of the ROs for a vehicle regardless of how many owners it may have had.
- Store Number – used to limit access of documents to a specific store.
- Service Date – allows for lookups over a range of time and schedule destruction dates for purging the records from the system.
- Type – could be warranty, customer or in-house as an example. Allows you to search for a specific document type over a period of time. Great for audit purposes.

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> MAKE SURE THAT THE SYSTEM YOU CHOOSE CAN BE **EASILY ADAPTED.**

❯ SELECTING A SOLUTION

Obviously cost is a factor when selecting a system, but don't let it be the only one. The system you select should not only fit your needs today, but also be able to adapt to your changing requirements in the future. Things change over time; you might purchase a competitor, add a new store, or bring on a new line or

change DMS packages. Make sure that the system you choose can easily be adapted to these changes.

Here are a few things to consider when selecting a system.

- How important is it to integrate with your Dealer Management Software – is this a priority? Since the major DMS systems are proprietary and "lock down" your data, do you want to risk storing your documents there?
- Who will need access to your documents – are these the same people who have access to your DMS system? Do they have different needs in reviewing documents?
- How easy will it be to scan your paper – will you be saving time or adding to your employees' workload? Look for options that eliminate or reduce the amount of manual indexing you will need to do.
- What about workflow – it may not be a priority today, but at some point you may want to route documents such as Accounts Payable approvals.

❯ CAVEAT EMPTOR – BUYER BEWARE

Avoid proprietary systems, especially ones that restrict your ability to remove your documents when necessary. Be careful of systems that store your images as BLOBs (Binary Large Objects) in the database. Over time, they will increase the size of the database to the point that it becomes sluggish and unresponsive.

Also avoid systems that charge you a "click charge" for saving and accessing your data. You should not be penalized for saving and viewing your own documents. Find a system that allows you to administer key components such as security, application creation and workflow implementation.

❯ FINAL THOUGHTS

Understand your processes and needs, and the interaction of your employees to them. Once you have completed this step, choose the technology that best meets your dealership's requirements. Verify that the solution you select will meet your needs today and in the future. Confirm that you can convert your information to a different system in the future if necessary.

A document management solution may not have the appeal of a new car sitting on your dealership floor, and it may be harder to justify than a remodel to your dealership, or a new marketing campaign. However, one thing is for sure: your back office operations will profit from the use of the technology and so will your bottom line.

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ABOUT THE PRITON GROUP

The Priton Group is an award winning Document Management Company headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. For the past 25 years, the principals at TPG have worked with auto dealerships and other organizations designing systems to scan, store, process and retrieve their paper documents. You can find more information on TPG's solutions for Auto Dealerships by visiting www.pritongroup.com/auto-dealerships or calling (608) 279-4088.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Arnston is a principal with The Priton Group, a document management company located in Madison, Wisconsin. With over 25 years of industry experience, he began his career providing Computer Output to Microfiche (COM) and data entry services.

As the digital age emerged he moved to Computer Output to Laser Disk (COLD) and later to advanced process driven workflow solutions. Mr. Arnston has worked on advisory councils for leading industry manufacturers helping to shape the direction of their products. He has been asked to speak in front of both industry and user groups.

Mr. Arnston is a past president of the Midwest AIIM Chapter. He has numerous industry certifications including Certified Document Imaging Architech (CDIA), Enterprise Content Management Practitioner (ECMP) and Information Organization and Access Practitioner (IOAP). He can be reached at jarnston@pritongroup.com.

700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 2
Madison, WI 53711

608-279-4088

www.pritongroup.com

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