

Death to paper!

Get rid of the stacks of invoices and receipts with a handy little scanner and simple software

BY JOHN KAUFELD

Years ago, the computer geeks promised us a paperless society. They lied. Instead, we got an avalanche of paper. Your store is awash in it: packing lists to file; receipts to organize. And no matter how hard you try to keep everything in order, the one document you need *right now* always takes the longest to find — or you can't find it at all.

Good news: the computer geeks are back again, but this time they might actually help.

By combining the right software with a scanner, you can get rid of the paper once and for all and turn yourself into an organizational maven at the same time.

Best of all, all of this high technology costs less than you think, and works so well that you might not believe your eyes.

The hardware

First, you need a computer in your office. You can find scanner and software packages for both Windows or Macintosh, so the details there don't matter.

This computer also doesn't need to be the biggest, best, or fastest machine on the planet, although you do want plenty of free hard-disk space to store your documents. Regular backups are vital, so the computer should have either a DVD or CD burner, and probably an external hard drive plugged in through the USB port. Your local computer store can help you with the details.

Scanner technology has changed over the years. Although you can still find big flatbed scanners on the market, a small, portable document scanner will do a better job for your business needs.

The Fujitsu ScanSnap S300 (or the S300m for Mac users) scans both sides of a document in one quick pass. It's one of the fastest small scanners on the market. Its included software recognizes a blank page when it sees one, so single-sided sheets won't



A portable scanner can help turn your invoices and receipts into PDFs you can easily store and organize on your computer.

take up as much space in your computer.

It features a simple document feeder capable of holding about 10 sheets of paper. You can mix and match page sizes freely. Just flip open the top, stack your packing lists, lunch receipts and business in the document feeder and hit the scan button. The scanner smoothly runs them through and drops them onto the desk in front of the machine.

Software to scan the paper monster

For software, you can use a general-purpose organizer like Evernote, or a more focused receipt-oriented solution such as Paperless (Mac only) or NeatWorks (Mac and Windows, but only available with a scanner bundle on Windows).

Evernote is a combination of desktop software and a free web-based service. (If you plan to rely on it for your business, I recommend paying the minimal monthly fee for their "pro" web account.)

Every document you add to your local copy of Evernote automatically gets backed up into your secure online account. There, the Evernote servers convert the scanned images into searchable text through optical character recognition and then send the updated information back to your computer. The system recognizes and converts both printed text and handwriting. (Yes, it's pretty amazing!)

If you carry a Blackberry, iPhone, or other "smartphone," you can download an Evernote app for your device. You get on-

the-go, searchable access to everything in your Evernote account, anywhere you happen to be. This can be very useful at trade shows or conventions.

Many people consider NeatWorks from The Neat Company (www.neatco.com) the gold standard of receipt scanning. It covers all of the bases you need when it comes to capturing information from receipts, including sorting, filing and categorizing. NeatWorks handles normal, non-financial documents as well, but that isn't the system's real strength.

You can get NeatWorks for Windows as part of a scanner and software bundle (with your choice of a portable scanner or a desktop model), or as stand-alone Mac software to use with your scanner.

Paperless, a Mac-only solution from Mariner Software (www.marinersoftware.com), mixes the best of Evernote and NeatWorks.

It organizes normal, day-to-day documents, plus it understands the world of receipts. In that way, it offers the best of both worlds. Paperless also performs optical character recognition, so it turns your scans into searchable documents.

Paperless doesn't include the online storage side of Evernote, so backups are vital if you use this as your office organization solution.

Ridding your office of paper will simplify your life. Your accountant will love you at tax time (even the IRS likes scanned receipts). Your documents will be at your fingertips, and you can focus more of your attention on the business of your store.

With the advances in scanner and software technology, now's definitely the time to take the paperless office plunge. ■

John Kaufeld left his heart in specialty retailing, but still hopes to find it again someday. He helps retailers of all kinds with marketing, publicity and customer connections. You can reach him at jkaufeld@aol.com.