

INNER SPACE

Jane Smith looks at the filing and storage market, and the key trends currently driving it.

The office is a very different place now to what it was even five years ago and working practises in the context of 'office work' or 'white collar' work have changed beyond recognition. The impact this is having on the traditional area of filing and storage is quite significant. There are several trends that can be identified as key drivers in the changes we see in products and solutions to filing and storage.

MOVING TARGETS

There has been a dramatic increase in 'nomadic' working. "Today's technology allows people to work anytime, anywhere and that is exactly what they are doing," says Steve Keen, European business development manager for Acco. The latest DTI survey says home working has almost doubled in the UK from 16% to 28% in 2004. To back this trend laptop sales will exceed desktop PCs in 2005.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

It's now being suggested that organisations are doubling their filing volumes every three years, with the average office worker creating 45 pages of new information every day, according to document management expert Canon.

DISORGANISATION TIPS THE BALANCE IN THE BUILD UP OF STRESS

Finally there is a growing concern over the health risk at work, a phenomenon dubbed the 'psychologically toxic' office. The cocktail of long hours and a target-based working culture has become so acute that workers face more health risks than ever before. Esselte research reveals these facts and highlights disorganisation as one of the five main factors that affect stress. When three or more of these factors come into play then stress levels rocket and the result is a 'psychologically toxic' work environment.

The research shows that 39% of office workers suffer from disorganisation, neglecting filing and task prioritisation thus making them feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. Ironically of the five factors mentioned in the research (heavy workload, unreasonable boss, disorganisation, unrealistic targets, short deadlines) disorganisation is the single factor that workers can control and may consequently prevent the onset of this workplace phenomenon. That's because heavy workloads and deadlines can be managed by prioritisation and time >>



management, and having more control can even improve relationships with the boss. Despite this however, only 3% of those taking part in the research regard filing as an important element of work. "In fact, our research reveals that disorganisation is a 'tipping point' in the build up of psychologically stressful conditions," comments Barry McCool, vice president of marketing, Esselte Europe.

So, it seems there is clearly a challenge here in managing information effectively. How should it be tackled?

First we need to understand that all information we generate has a lifecycle and a level of importance to the individual and organisation.

Information can be live, pending or historical. It can be needed on a short, medium or long term basis. The information might be needed by only one individual or shared by a small or large number of people. It might be information needing to be shared by one department in one location or may need to be shared by many different people in different locations. Information can also be distributed (pro-actively pushed out to individuals, or accessed (people proactively seeking to use it)). Finally, information carries different risks, in terms of importance, confidentiality and sensitivity.

Another important factor, particularly for organisations, is the cost of ownership of information. For many companies their information is a key asset and due to volume the cost of keeping it and managing it is now a real factor in determining an organisation's policy of accessibility, availability and protection of information.

All of these factors combine to give a 'picture' of the lifecycle of the information. How it is then managed becomes easier to determine. There are two ways of dealing with information: in hard copy or soft copy forms. And we can talk about filing and storage in terms of personal needs and an organisation's needs.

On a personal level mobile organisation products are becoming more and more popular. It is estimated that some 10% of the UK workforce now works from home for at least part of the week. At the same time the average office worker attends more than 60 meetings per month and over 200 million business trips are made by rail each year. "That's a lot of potential customers for any office product designed specifically for use 'on the move'," says Keen at Acco, which is launching a new range in January 2006.

Esselte and other key brands in the office products market such as Tollit & Harvey concur, with many new personal filing products with mobility in mind coming on stream. This is also an area where price is not so sensitive. Consumers are looking for a solution and, it appears, are willing to pay for it.

On a slightly different angle, Avery is experiencing growth in its ranges of innovative and modern storage solutions. For Avery it's colour that is helping to differentiate products and influence the consumer. Philip West, marketing

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manager office accessories at Avery said, "Recent research has shown us that colour is a key influence within the office – both work and home."

From a corporate point of view organisations are beginning to embrace the concept of electronic filing systems. The days of rows of filing systems are beginning to decline. The cost of space is too high and hard copy documents are open to unauthorised access, manipulation and unwanted destruction. In addition, the workforce tends to be more fragmented and much more mobile than before. According to Canon, an amazing 32% of documents are unavailable at the time they are needed which does little for productivity. Canon provides document management, document accounting and document distribution solutions that help improve business efficiency by minimising costs and maximising productivity.

Fujitsu are also very proactive in the area of electronic document managing and scanning with allegedly 50% market share. They provided us with an interesting case study which demonstrated the benefits an East London solicitors' firm saw when it moved away from a paper based system to an electronic repository using Fujitsu's leading edge ScanSnap system which includes character recognition technology, meaning you can scan documents straight into editable Word and Excel documents.

"Brilliant," explained Donna Thyer, office manager at William Bailey solicitors. "The fact that you do not have to re-type lengthy documents or copy type the contents of an incoming letter into an email for a client's response is a great time-saver. Key documents can be made available to everyone on a central computer system, rather than having to be photocopied and distributed as hard copies which are easy to misplace or misfile." The company is now able to save its clients' time by scanning and emailing documents to save huge postage and fax costs. Thyer estimates that ScanSnap will reduce admin time at William Bailey by a staggering 75%.

So next time you are thinking about your customers' filing and storage needs, don't think boring commodity, think exciting new products! ■