

Paperless office remains a pipe dream for many

Dated: 29 January 2016

Published by: IDM <https://idm.net.au/article/0010863-paperless-office-remains-pipe-dream-many>

More than 35 years have passed since British-American information scientist, Frederick Wilfrid, first envisioned a 'paperless office' in 1978. Today, the reality is that the physical page continues to be a central part of daily office life.

According to a new, independent survey of over 3,600 European employees commissioned by Epson Europe, 64% indicated they'd prefer to read reports and brochures on printed paper, citing the ability to 'share/handout' (53%), 'read' (44%) and 'edit/annotate' (41%) as key factors.

In addition, 62% believed that errors were more likely when editing an electronic document as opposed to a printout. Overall, an overwhelming majority (83%) felt a 'paperless office is unrealistic'.

In the UK, the printed page remains a crucial feature of office life, with 86% claiming that a ban on printing would "limit their productivity".

Rob Clark, Senior Vice President of Epson Europe, states "it is clear from our research that – despite digital advances – people still like to work with paper, preferring print rather than working on-screen for certain tasks".

Clark continues: "The reality is organisations need printing, not only to help employees work more effectively but reap wider productivity. People collaborate effectively for many tasks digitally; for many others, a printed page is key, or an interactive whiteboard, an augmented reality headset or an in-person huddle.

"Businesses need to provide their employees with the options to use the best technology and processes for each task in each circumstance, from the humble printed page to the more sophisticated digital collaboration tools."

Renowned global futurist, Jack Uldrich, adds 'the paperless office hasn't materialized for the same reason that microwave ovens didn't replace all traditional ovens. Every technology has unique benefits, and paper is no different; it's arguably the greatest instrument ever invented for conveying, sharing and disseminating information. Recent scientific studies have demonstrated that people understand and retain information present on paper at a far higher level than information presented electronically", which may explain why 61% of respondents agreed that "there is more chance of making errors when editing an electronic document than editing a print-out".

Whilst paper remains important, the research demonstrates how inefficient printing systems are limiting productivity. European office workers spend nearly 19 hours every year walking to and from their printer, marching over 110 kilometres in the process! In the UK, the average distance to a printer is 13 metres, second only to Germany in the European 'printer Olympics'!

To increase employee productivity and efficiency, Clark recommends a distributed printer fleet, with units being placed closer to end users or workgroups.

“A distributed printer fleet brings multiple advantages to businesses, reducing the average of 5 minutes spent walking to centralised printers every day”, Clark suggests. He adds that “a distributed printer fleet minimises the impact of printer downtime, eases the pressure on corporate networks and reduces delays through local control of print jobs and queues”.

Technology is changing the way people work, something that Clark acknowledges. “At Epson, we see this with our wearable and projector-based technologies. But when it comes to reading, editing and sharing documents like reports, emails and attachments, office workers, from baby boomers to millennials, still prefer the tangible printed version,” he concludes.

Submitted by: Alan Kong - PROV