

# Edge@Work

## Going paperless is easier said than done

### Companies find technology a mixed blessing

By Dean Askin  
Business Edge

The paperless office is still mostly a pipe-dream. Lingering habits, faster printing technology and information overload created by technology, mean there's generally more, not less, paper floating around company offices five years into the new millennium.

"There's a huge amount of paper that's printed for no other reason than it's just habit," says Chris Ellsay, president of Workshift.com, an Ottawa-based computer consulting firm specializing in helping companies integrate all of their business-management functions electronically.

People still have the mentality that they "need to print that piece of paper to carry around with me or to put on my desk to follow up." It's a comfort thing, Ellsay says.

One online report by Visa cited statistics from the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario: 35 pages are printed every day in this country by the average employee at a small-to-medium-sized company — and 60 per cent of all the information created by employees is printed.

In doctors' offices, paper is still the only method of record keeping for 69 per cent of

physicians according to the results of a 2002 questionnaire by the Canadian Medical Association. Only three per cent of doctors have gone completely paperless and 24 per cent keep paper and electronic files according to the survey.

"We're probably at the same level as everyone else," says Lise-Ann Jackson, director of public affairs at Chatham-based Union Gas. "We're very electronic, we're all hooked up to laptops and Blackberries and the whole nine yards, but we can't seem to break the paper habit.

"I'm definitely less reliant on paper than I used to be, but I'm one of those people who, if it's a long document, say over two or three pages, I like to print it and read it that way, and then it seems to hang around," she says.

Faster printing technologies are contributing to the paperless challenge. Some copiers for example, can blast out up to 55 pages per minute and printers can crank out up to 35 pages per minute in full colour.

"It's just so easy to hit print because of the technology," says Ellsay. "I could probably go to our printer and find at least 100 pieces a day that are never even picked up on the printer." He notes, however, that he himself prints "almost nothing."

At the same time, technology is making it easier for offices to go paperless.

"Scanners are faster, computers are more powerful, storage devices are more capacious and content-management systems are ever more reliable," says Comspec Communications, a Toronto-based IT consulting firm, in a white paper titled



#### Approaching the Paperless Office.

On Nov. 16, Rogers Wireless launched Rogers mForms for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). It's built on technology from HP Canada, Microsoft and TrueContext, an Ottawa company specializing in electronic forms.

Rogers mForms lets mobile field workers fill in forms such as work orders electronically with handheld computers. The system works on HP hand-held PDAs and the Rogers Wireless GPRS/EDGE network.

But in the office, even where there's technology there isn't necessarily the will to go paperless.

"Despite the almost complete permeation of modern life with computers and digital technologies, we still think of paper as somehow more permanent, more appealing visually and tactilely and more official," Comspec says.

Information overload is the other factor, Ellsay says.

"For the amount of written communication we're produc-

ing now, we're printing dramatically less. I think the difference is that the volume of information we're getting is so much higher, that even if you print only 10 per cent of it, that's probably more than what we used to get 10 or 15 years ago," he says.

Jackson of Union Gas says: "I don't know if I'd agree with that or if I would say that in the desire to get rid of the clutter, I think I'd delete it from my electronic in-tray versus print it."

According to a survey of 2,000 executives and managers by New Hampshire-based NFI Research, more than two thirds of companies with 10,000 or more employees have decreased the amount of paper in their offices over the last five years — but small companies are using more paper.

"I think larger companies have been forced into it and micro-companies end up doing it, but it's the small and medium-size business that has the hardest time," Ellsay says. "I think it's because they're often

so busy doing what they're doing, that it's very hard for the owner to say: 'Stop, let's do an analysis of our paper flow and see how we can improve these systems' . . . they're just trying to get the product out the door."

But there are businesses going paperless, Ellsay says. "A lot of professional firms such as accountants, lawyers, doctors' offices, they're embracing it. I guess those professional service businesses, they're often willing to sit down and do the return on investment. But we see it in traditional retail outlets, too."

What's the cost of not going paperless?

"The commitment to go paperless is not to save the hundreds of dollars in paper costs; it's to save the tens of thousands in opportunity costs, meaning they won't be able to improve the customer experience if they don't take that leap," Ellsay says.

Going paperless can mean making a minimal investment in equipment such as the Microsoft small-business server and a fax/modem or a major investment in total integration.

"If you can start the process with a \$50 modem and send and receive all your faxes electronically, there's a great start for \$50. And that can flow up to hundreds of thousands if you're in a large organization wanting to automate your whole business process," Ellsay says.

But paperlessness does not make sense for every company, Ellsay says. "Only if you can establish the benefits is it worth pursuing. For some companies, especially small ones, they may think they're being inundated with paper but it's just so minor that it's just not worth it. The cost of doing something about it at this point may be more than not doing something about it."

Most companies can effectively go paperless by hiring the right outside technology adviser and investing in off-the-shelf software, Ellsay says.

"Go standardized. Try to buy off-the-shelf software. It will do 95 per cent of what you need and customize the last five per cent. Go with a proven reseller and consulting company with valid references who has a real desire to understand your business," he says.

"Probably more important is to get rid of the filing cabinets first. Get rid of the place to put the paper," Ellsay says.

(Dean Askin can be reached at askin@businessedge.ca)

## Rogers Communications shuffles boardroom

Business Edge

Telecommunications giant **Rogers Communications Inc.** said it will move **Bill Linton** into the positions of chief financial officer and vice-president of finance.

Toronto-based Rogers (TSX:RCI.NV.B) says former CFO **Alan Horn** will become president and CEO of **Rogers Telecommunications Ltd.**, the holding company of the Rogers family's private investments.

Linton was formerly president and CEO of data services firm Call-Net Enterprises, acquired by Rogers in July.

Rogers also appointed **Randy Reynolds** as president of **Rogers Telecom Inc.** The company says Reynolds has had extensive

### MOVING ON

experience in the telecom sector.

Former Microsoft Canada president **Frank Clegg** has been named chairman of information technology firm **Navantis Inc.**

Toronto-based Navantis builds software products for enterprise content management, relationship management and business processes.

**Scotiabank** (TSX:NYSE:BNS) has appointed **Kim McKenzie** to the position of executive vice-president of **Scotia Intek**. McKenzie has been at the bank 19 years and was most recently senior VP of

international banking systems.

Scotia Intek provides technology infrastructure, network and communication design and support, and oversight of information security for all areas of Scotiabank.

**North American Palladium Ltd.** (TSX:PDL) has named mining consultant **James Excell** as its new president and chief executive.

Excell, previously president of mining consultancy Narego Solutions Inc., will replace **Andre Douchane**, who will serve as North American Palladium's chairman beginning Jan. 1.

NAP also appointed **Ian MacNeily** as its CFO.

See MOVING ON

Page 19