

# Take Back Control of Your Business Process with Workflow Automation



eBook

Information managers can be excused for feeling overwhelmed these days.

Managing mission-critical information has never been easy.

- The back-office processes at most organizations are extremely resource intensive.
- The business is putting more pressure on the back-office to support enterprise initiatives.
- Complying with ever-increasing legal regulations is burdensome and risky.
- And there is little time for information managers to focus on higher-value activities.

This eBook will detail the challenges that organizations face managing their information when staff work remotely and show automated workflow solutions can help them take back control of their business processes.

## The New Back-Office Reality

Remote working has turned back-office processes on their heads.

Consider the plight of accounts payable leaders.

**83%** of accounts payable departments are working from home, at least in part, according to an online survey conducted in 2021 by the Institute of Finance and Management (IOFM). **31%** of accounts payable departments are working completely remotely.

Remote working has disrupted the way that many accounts payable departments operate.

- Invoice receipt and data capture is the biggest remote working challenge for **47%** of accounts payable leaders, IOFM finds.
- About one-quarter of accounts payable leaders say that routing invoices for approval is harder these days.
- More than one-third of accounts payable leaders say that resolving invoice exceptions is a bigger problem.
- And **17%** of accounts payable leaders are having trouble ensuring segregation of duties.

It's also harder for organizations to know where things stand in the process when staff work at home.

**83%** of accounts payable departments are working from home, at least in part, according to an online survey conducted in 2021 by the Institute of Finance and Management (IOFM).

**31%** of accounts payable departments are working completely remotely.

**Canon**



Only **25%** of organizations surveyed by IOFM have an automated way to track invoices. Some departments use spreadsheets and e-mail chains to track invoices, which provide little visibility and control. Others rely on the workflows in their enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. But an ERP doesn't provide visibility or control into what's going on before an invoice reaches the ERP.

All this comes at a time when businesses must be more efficient and agile than ever.

The challenges created by remote working speak to the difficulty finance departments have had in adapting their manual and semi-automated processes to the new reality. Only **9%** of accounts payable leaders describe their department as being fully automated, IOFM reports. Most accounts payable departments are "partially" or "largely" automated and rely on manual tasks to get work done. Fourteen percent of accounts payable departments rely on manual processes.

## Biggest Work from Home Challenges

The challenges of working from home aren't going away any time soon.

Moving forward, employees may be asked to continue working remotely to ensure social distancing. The success of Work from Home during the pandemic also may embolden some organizations to offer more flexible work arrangements to employees. And more organizations are likely to offer remote work arrangements to recruit new talent to finance. Over time, some businesses may downsize their office space because of the success of remote work arrangements.

Now is the time to automate the way your organization manages its information.

There are five tell-tale signs that it may be time to automate your workflows:

- 1. Slow or Unreliable Connections.** Accessing documents through a virtual private network (VPN) can be slow. Without high-speed Internet, accessing documents takes even longer. Documents that can't be readily retrieved and worked on aren't much use to remote workers.
- 2. Version Control Issues.** Many remote workers store local copies of the documents they are working on to get around slow company networks. But their co-workers can never be sure whether they are working on the latest version of document or that the information is current.
- 3. Trouble Finding Information.** Under the best of circumstances, workers waste lots of time combing through shared file folders to locate information. Erroneously filed documents can be nearly impossible to find. If a document is found, the user must then spend what seems like a lifetime waiting for large files to download through a VPN.
- 4. Poor Document Control.** The operational disruption caused by remote working has created an opportunity for fraudsters. Data breaches are a big threat. The root of the problem is the manual and semi-automated approaches that most organizations use for routing documents when staff work from home. E-mails containing sensitive information can be intercepted or inadvertently sent to the wrong person or spoofed. Routing information via e-mail also makes it hard to determine who accessed, reviewed, changed, or approved documents. And critical business information can be deleted ahead of retention schedules, even by well-intentioned staff.
- 5. No Tracking of Tasks.** Adapting paper-based approval processes to a remote working environment is hard. It's not always clear who must approve documents. Tasks cannot be delegated if you don't know who is on leave. And e-mail routing doesn't provide alerts, notifications, or escalation procedures. As a result, staff waste lots of time calling and e-mailing approvers to determine the status of documents, jeopardizing deadlines.

If your organization is experiencing these challenges, it may be time to automate.

## What is an Automated Workflow Solution?

Automated workflow solutions help staff stay connected and productive when they work remotely.

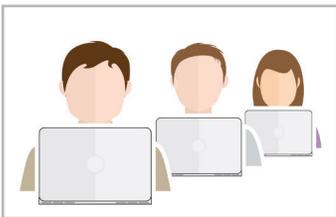
- **Digital Processes.** Automated workflow solutions digitize any business process for expedited approvals. Documents are digitally routed based on pre-configured business rules. There is no chance of documents being misrouted or becoming stuck at the bottom of an approver's in-box. Users always know where documents stand in the process. And intelligent workflow engines follow-up on tasks to ensure that nothing slips through the cracks.



- **Instant Document Retrieval.** Index and full-text searches enable users to easily locate files. Structured index fields help provide a logical manner for saving and finding information.



- **On-demand Access.** Automated workflow solutions store documents and data in a central repository. Files can be retrieved within seconds from any web browser or mobile device, at any time of day and from any location. Some solutions even allow users to view more than 400 different document types, even if they don't have the correct application to open it.



- **Online Collaboration.** Automated workflow solutions enable users to collaborate on a document, annotate PDFs, or request an e-signature. And some solutions can seamlessly integrate financial data with enterprise content for a 360-degree view of what's happening.



- **Audit Trails and Version Control.** Automated workflow solutions eliminate the possibility of creating multiple versions of the same document. And the audit trails built into an automated workflow solution enable users to see all actions taken on a document.
- **E-mail and Office 365 Integration.** Out-of-the-box integration with Microsoft Office 365 enables users to save their documents directly into the system from Microsoft Word, Outlook, Excel, or PowerPoint.



- **Business Analytics.** Interactive dashboards enable users to track business performance in real-time and instantly identify potential bottlenecks.
- **Ironclad Security.** Access controls, anti-tamper measures, and disaster recovery safeguard mission-critical information.

Automated workflow solutions make working from home, work better.

## How Automated Workflow Solutions Work

An automated workflow solution enables an organization to leverage its business information, regardless of its format. Electronic documents are imported with simple manual or automated options. Integrations allow seamless saving directly from third-party software. Paper documents are scanned and indexed directly from scanning devices. The documents are automatically classified, and data is extracted and validated according to the organization's business rules.

Once information is captured, it can be managed effectively across all areas of a business.

Users can easily assign tasks, collaborate with stakeholders, process information through rules-driven workflows, and track changes. Workflow automation solutions also can be seamlessly integrated with any third-party using native integrations. Documents can be searched based on their metadata or content. Information can be accessed in the office, on the web, or a mobile application. And users can easily share information with internal and external stakeholders.

Automated workflow solutions also include a secure digital repository that empowers users to comply with legal and regulatory requirements regarding document retention.

Workflow automation solutions provide all these capabilities while ensuring privacy and security.

For starters, only authorized users can access the system. Permissions on content can easily be defined for individual user, groups of users or by role. The system also verifies the authenticity of documents each time they are retrieved. And automatic backup storage and failover cluster ensures that data can be recovered in case of failure without interrupting the work.



**An automated workflow solution enables an organization to leverage its business information, regardless of its format.**



## The Benefits of Workflow Automation

Workflow automation is what organizations need in today's Work from Home environment.

By digitizing and standardizing workflows, organizations can ensure productivity, accelerate cycle times, eliminate inefficient paper processes, and mitigate risks.

Workflow automation also provides better visibility into mission-critical information. The technology puts actionable insights at the fingertips of the decision-makers who need them:

- CFOs can assess the financial health of the business.
- Controllers can spot suspicious transactions.
- Procurement can see how money is being spent.
- Treasury can identify opportunities to optimize payments to suppliers.
- Accounts payable leaders can ensure optimum efficiency and effectiveness

Automated workflow solutions deliver information the way that decision-makers need it:

- Real-time graphical dashboards
- Drill-down capabilities
- Seamless integration with any ERP
- Ad hoc reporting
- Mobile access to information
- Export capabilities
- Mobile access to information
- Export capabilities

## What to Look for in an Automated Workflow Solution

Organizations cannot achieve the benefits of workflow automation without the right solution.

There are three things to look for when evaluating an automated workflow technology.

1. **Flexibility.** Can the workflow solution be easily configured for your business rules? Does the workflow solution offer on-premises and cloud deployment models? Was the solution designed to be used by a single department or can it be extended for multi-site deployments?
2. **Ease-of-use.** How hard is it for users to learn and use the workflow automation solution?
3. **Scalability.** Is it possible to start simple and add more functionality as your business grows?

## Unlock the Value of Your Information

With the right automated workflow solution, organizations can create a remote working environment where their information is:

- Centralized
- Digitized
- Accurate
- Accessible
- Available on-demand
- Secure

Best of all, automated workflow solutions can be configured and customized to suit just about any departmental need or process, including:

- Financial services
- Customer service
- Logistics
- Operations
- Human resources
- Manufacturing
- Contract management

If your organization is looking for ways to take back control of its business processes as staff work from home, an automated workflow solution may be the answer.



**For more information, please contact the Digital Imaging Solutions Division at Canon at [info@cusa.canon.com](mailto:info@cusa.canon.com) or visit [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com).**

Canon is a registered trademark of Canon Inc. in the United States and may also be a registered trademark or trademark in other countries. All other referenced product names and marks are trademarks of their respective owners and are hereby acknowledged.