

Document Imaging

By: Jason Kirkpatrick (Article appeared in the April 2007 issue of "The Logistics Journal")

Previously, we discussed the growing relationship between document imaging systems and electronic payment. We noted that in order to retain and attract carriers in a competitive market, third parties must find ways to process invoices and pay carriers faster. We discussed how some companies use integrated imaging systems to facilitate the exchange of invoices and payments electronically and in the process build stronger relationships with their carriers. We also discussed how, on a more limited basis, third parties implement imaging solutions only to store and retrieve documents and have no plans to pay carriers electronically.

The key component of an onsite imaging system is a high volume scanner. In today's market, there are numerous models to choose from, with startup costs ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Although these systems are relatively easy to install, their primary attribute is also their greatest limitation. These systems can reduce storage space and retrieval time for documents, but they do nothing to eliminate the problem of incoming mail. In fact, the use of these systems still requires a company to receive, open and sort mail, before it's scanned and labeled for future reference. As a result, many scanning solutions end up trading one set of tasks for another and provide no appreciable savings.

A more integrated approach to document imaging is available to third parties that have an asset-based division. Companies such as TMI and Pegasus offer remote imaging services that link to in-house imaging solutions, allowing companies to receive and store electronic images more efficiently. With these systems, drivers can scan documents from specified locations or deposit them in a lock box for scanning at a later date. Once scanned, proof of delivery images are made available to the company's A/P staff via email, web interface or they can be uploaded and stored in the company's management software. TMI's standard imaging service (TripPak) requires the use of specific envelopes. Because of this requirement, TripPak may not be an ideal solution for most third parties, unless the company's A/P department is willing to collect documents and send them to TripPak for imaging.

Pegasus' remote scanning system provides a more flexible solution for third parties and can be integrated with an onsite imaging system. Because of this flexibility, Pegasus provides unique solutions to third parties, including a fully automated document imaging system that provides document collection, storage, online access and downloadable files to a company's management software.

When investigating imaging solutions, companies should be aware that the process of scanning and storing documents onsite can be an added burden to a company. The primary benefit of these systems is to improve the storage and retrieval process for scanned images. Generally, these systems do not create a "paperless" environment. In order to accomplish this objective, a carrier must be given the option to fax, email or electronically submit delivery documents, instead of mailing them. By allowing carriers to send documents electronically companies can achieve more tangible benefits than imaging alone.

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