

Shedding the Operational “Paperweight”

Quit Paper with the Esker Document Automation Platform to Advance Excellence Across Your Operations

Sooner or later, organizations taking steps toward operational excellence come face to face with the stifling effects of manually processing orders, invoices, and other documents that drive day-to-day business processes. They must find a way to overcome the cost and inefficiency of having staff enter data from customer and supplier documents into the SAP system, pushing paper documents around the office to get approvals, manually preparing documents for delivery to customers and suppliers, and retrieving paper documents upon request.

In addition, these companies struggle to gain the visibility they need to enable continuous improvement, and this visibility is something that paper-based document processing simply does not provide. So, how can they overcome these challenges?

Electronic Documents Boost Performance

Analyst research consistently finds that top-performing companies process a higher percentage of documents (orders and invoices, for example) *electronically* compared with their peers.¹ To avoid losing customers to competitors that operate at higher levels of performance, organizations need to be able to:

- Automatically receive and send documents through multiple channels that match customer and supplier preferences
- Submit documents to an electronic workflow
- Make document data available to SAP applications and other enterprise systems
- Electronically archive documents
- Track the entire process

The question, then, is whether to choose standalone solutions for each operational process or a single solution that can automate all of them. Answering this question requires that companies assess the value of solutions that automate a document process, such as

invoicing, or a specific document communication medium, such as faxing (see sidebar).

As you assess these solutions, consider that the issues driving this push for document management automation are common to all document processes and media. And because all operational processes in an organization are essentially intertwined, paper-based document processing can cause delays that start a chain reaction affecting the entire enterprise — thus impeding progress toward operations excellence. Additionally, in today’s world of mergers and acquisitions, organizations often have different enterprise systems in different business units. Operational processes span locations and departments, but applications do not always communicate with each other. As new business



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Build on the Cloud Faxing Foundation

Fax continues to be the communication medium of choice in some operational processes; nearly every company has a certain percentage of trading partners that want to do business via fax, often because they are unwilling or unable to use EDI. But faxes also present a challenge to operational excellence efforts. While companies need reliable faxing capabilities, most would rather have their IT staff focusing on improving operations instead of maintaining fax infrastructures. Fax hardware and software can be time-consuming to manage and expensive to support, and fax architecture can add significant complexity to the SAP system landscape.

With Esker on Demand Fax Services, companies can leverage the Esker platform as a cloud service using the software-as-a-service (SaaS) model. Large and small businesses can deploy an easy-to-manage faxing solution for the entire organization quickly and at a low cost. The services also support business continuity by easing the effects of transitions (like SAP system upgrades) on faxing systems.

Esker on Demand Fax Services also lay a foundation for operational excellence that goes beyond faxing processes, opening the door to other cloud services that leverage the Esker platform, such as the mail delivery of documents through Esker production facilities, automated sales order and vendor invoice processing, and more.

¹ See “The E-Payables Benchmark Series: A/P Strategies for Success” by Andrew Bartolini and Amit Gupta, Aberdeen Group (September 2008).

FIGURE 1 ▶ The Esker platform gives organizations a single destination and delivery point to automate the flow of documents and data into and out of SAP systems



units and enterprise systems are added and the number of customers and suppliers increases, operations can become less efficient and more costly.

A specialized application that is effective in automating one particular document process may do nothing at all to help with others. As a result, companies could find themselves investing time, money, and resources in separate solutions for each process that they want to automate.

All in One, One for All

The Esker alternative is a single platform that works with a full range of formats and media to capture, read, route, format, and transport business documents (see **Figure 1**). Using patented Esker technology to define how specific documents will be processed, the platform extracts and validates data from virtually any document source, automates complex workflows, performs data transformation (such as EDI to iDoc), sends outbound documents to intended recipients in virtually any format, and stores documents automatically in the built-in Esker archive, the SAP Content Server, or other archives.

By providing a unified set of capabilities combined with specific functionality for core operational processes — like sales order processing, customer invoicing, and accounts payable — the Esker platform empowers organizations to:

- Implement a scalable solution to automate document processes throughout the organization
- Standardize and centralize document processing for all operational units
- Bring complete visibility to every document processed

- Reallocate staff, IT, and budget resources to core business operations
- Raise customer and supplier service levels while lowering costs

Over the past two decades of working with SAP customers, Esker has found that automation typically helps companies process documents at a cost that is 40% lower, and at a speed that is 90% higher, than manual processing. Along with saving money and increasing productivity, businesses using Esker solutions also see lower days sales outstanding (DSO) rates, as well as fewer fulfillment delays, supply chain disruptions, duplicate payments to vendors, and billing disputes.

Esker offers access to its platform through both a traditional on-premise software implementation and Esker on Demand cloud services, a set of software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions to automate specific business processes and media. Organizations can choose the traditional solution deployment and administration model, purchasing licenses up front and installing the software using internal staff, resources, and technology. Or, they can have Esker externally host and manage their document process automation system in a secure data center.

Partnering for Process Automation

As an established SAP software solution partner and an SAP customer, Esker is a recognized leader in document process automation. Esker solutions integrate with SAP applications to streamline business processes throughout the order-to-cash and procure-to-pay cycles.

For case studies and a demo of Esker solutions, visit www.esker.com. ■