



Tom Linhard Faxcore

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# 21<sup>st</sup> Century fax

Tom Linhard, president of FaxCore, takes us through the reasons why the fax is very much an integral part of today's business landscape, rather than the IT dinosaur that many of us believed it to be



**"Fax servers can be integrated with applications so that – to cite a couple examples – when sales confirmations and purchase orders are completed, the application can automatically fax them"**

**D**espite our rapid advances in technology, we are all creatures of habit and continue to do business as usual. Technology is just the facilitator towards accomplishing our business goals faster and more efficiently. Wireless devices and cell phones allow us to communicate with one another any time, any place but we are still just sharing ideas and asking questions that could have been handled over a land line phone, or even in person.

The emergence of fax machines provided an alternative to communicate, send and receive documents, and conduct business. Scanners, combined with e-mail and fax servers, are taking document delivery to the next level, further reducing the related time and costs. These technologies all reinforce the crucial role of document delivery in setting the pace for business today. Among the communications options available, fax continues to drive business, especially as it pertains to supply chain management, order processing and e-commerce.

To help your business thrive and operate more efficiently, we need to examine how you accomplish everyday tasks. The next step is to introduce tools and best practices that enable you to conduct these activities faster, easier and more cost-effectively.

Believe it or not, fax communications streamline communications and workflow, and are very much a part of the fabric of business today. Who could have predicted that in today's wired and wireless world of e-mail, Web access, cell phones, and SMS, sales of fax machines continue to increase annually?

**fax off, fax on**

IT professionals rarely send and receive faxes and may struggle to understand why anyone would still use a fax machine or fax server. To fully understand the continued need for fax communications, we need to examine the types

of documents that are sent and received via fax by organisations. For example, engineering firms still rely on fax for sending drawings while brokerage houses need to fax statements, trade orders, and confirmations. And, for any business, there will still be contracts, purchase orders, invoices and other documents that need to be sent via fax to keep them in business.

Without fully comprehending the inherent value of fax communications, those individuals with pre-conceived notions could prevent an organisation from implementing technology that has the potential to create significant gains in efficiency, accountability and cost savings.

If your organisation does not currently have a fax server, then the gains will be exponential. If you already have an automated fax solution, there are newer systems that maximise the power of the Internet and utilise Microsoft's .NET software to provide universal access to the documents that drive business.

Peter Davidson, president of Davidson Consulting, has been at the forefront of documenting the advantages of using a fax server and predicts that the majority of the market growth will be in the area of "production faxing".

Davidson Consulting specialises in newsletters, market research, consulting and conferences covering the convergence of messaging and fax-related technologies. Davidson explains: "Fax servers can be integrated with applications so that once, to cite a couple of examples, when sales confirmations and purchase orders are completed, the application can automatically fax them. In fact, with EDI and e-business applications, fax is widely used to handle cases where e-mail cannot."

Additionally, numerous studies document the costs associated with manually faxing documents and the soft dollar savings provided by a fax server solution.

In addition to the time savings, consider these ten improvements and efficiencies:

- 1 Send faxes as you would send e-mail, by selecting a recipient and attaching the file to be faxed.
- 2 Fax-enable other business processes such as invoicing, reports and purchase orders so that the applications will automatically send the faxes out.
- 3 Allow users to send faxes from their PC instead of having to print out the document, walk it to the fax machine, stand in line, and then return to the fax machine for a transmission receipt.
- 4 Fax servers will automatically retry busy fax numbers.
- 5 Fax software allows users to maintain frequently used fax numbers in a Fax Phonebook or MS Outlook Contact, thus eliminating the need to search for fax numbers. Fax phonebooks also allow you to send group faxes so sending newsletters, marketing collaterals or detailed reports becomes a 'two click' process.
- 6 The quality of faxes sent from fax servers directly from a PC is far superior to those sent through a low resolution scanning process.
- 7 Fax servers simplify the process of scheduling faxes to be sent during cheaper off-peak times.
- 8 Using a fax server, you can automatically route incoming faxes to the right recipient as soon as they are received, ensuring timely and secure delivery of faxes.
- 9 A fax server integrated with the e-mail system enables users to have one location for both e-mails and faxes.
- 10 Fax servers give administrators the ability to monitor fax activity, archive faxes and charge back fax-related costs using call accounting techniques.

Fax servers adhere to the basic rule of successful innovation – the technology is not intended to change or circumvent the fundamental activity

but to simply enhance and make it easier for people to move documents by the most efficient means possible.

As an illustration of the power of the technology, a national distributor of computer software and hardware products uses a fax server for many functions. Outbound faxes such as price quotes and proposals are generated from the desktop. The organisation also has a mainframe application that automatically faxes purchase orders through the fax server. For added convenience, the company receives faxes as online images because faxes are delivered to the appropriate recipient via e-mail and the fax is an attachment.

So, as the distributor in the previous example has utilised fax communications technology, consider the following six criteria before you purchase a fax server:

- 1 Sending or receiving a fax must be as intuitive and natural an activity as accessing any other document via the Web or e-mail.
- 2 Select a fax server solution that offers a thin client interface, where only a browser such as Internet Explorer is all that is needed for a client interface.
- 3 Integration with the corporate e-mail system such as Exchange and Outlook is also a must for people to treat faxing as any other form of messaging.
- 4 For automating the faxing of documents from back-office applications, look for a solution that features a .NET API and other tools that make it easy to fax enable your in-house applications.
- 5 Ensure that the solution you select has massive storage and powerful searching capabilities so large quantities of faxes can be stored and easily searchable based on keywords.
- 6 Choose a fax server solution that offers a Web services architecture that allows you to easily add fault tolerance and scalability. Once you implement a fax server, it becomes

a mission-critical application for individuals within your organisation.

Documents archived by a fax server solution are easily accessible, speeding communications and workflow – all within the context of the Web. This bridging technology integrates fax into the business environment and takes your company's faxing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. ☐

## REASONS FOR THE POPULARITY OF THE FAX

Entire business processes and regulatory procedures were put in place over hundreds of years that require a paper document in order to initiate or confirm a process. Faxes have equal legitimacy as paper when it comes to legal matters and business transactions, so they will always be vital to commerce.

Faxing is one of those tools that enables people to do what they have always done, send or receive information in written form, but much more efficiently.

Fax is simple and reliable. If it's on paper you can send it to someone else anywhere in the world within minutes, and you'll know right away if they received it.

Not everyone is wired or wireless, but nearly everyone has access to a fax device, which equates to almost universal access to a universally accepted means of communication.

Faxes offer a simple, secure, reliable and confirmable way to deliver documents requiring signatures and other hand written information.