

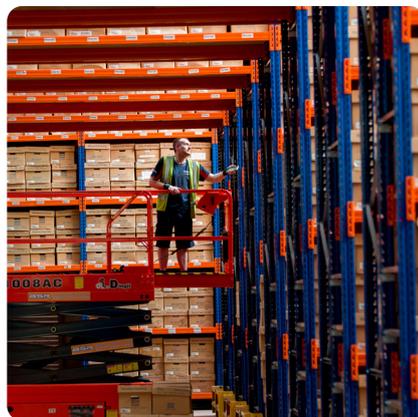
WHITE PAPER

# Document Management Best Practices

**In an era where information is both an asset and a liability, the ability to manage documents efficiently and securely is paramount for any organisation aiming to thrive.**

The volume of data generated by businesses, coupled with the stringent compliance requirements, as well as the need for swift access to information, has underscored the importance of implementing robust document management practices.

This whitepaper serves as a comprehensive guide for companies seeking to optimise their document management workflows and processes, ensuring they're efficient, compliant, and in line with the best practices in the industry.



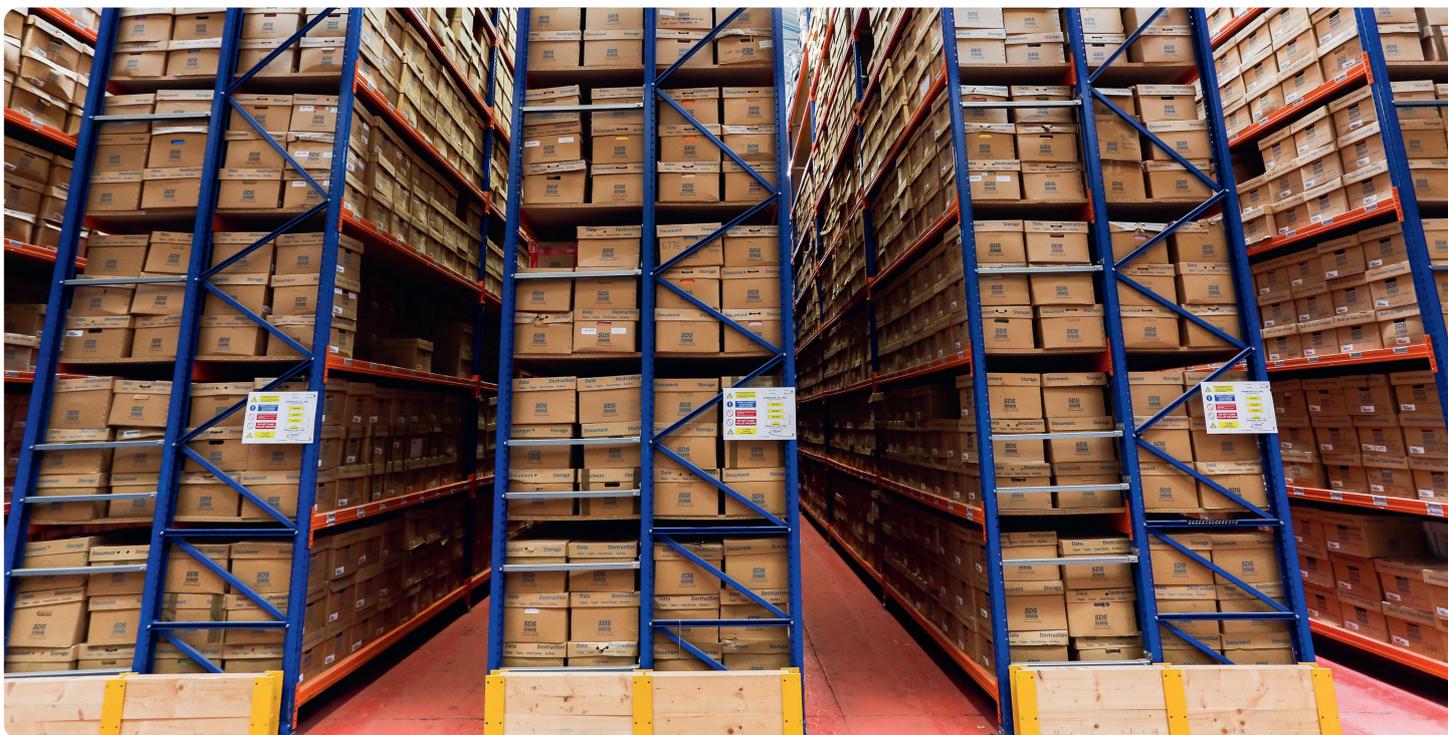
# Introduction: what is document management?

Document management is a critical component of modern organisational strategy, giving businesses the ability to organise, access, and safeguard their documents, and ultimately, their information. The practice of document management encompasses the strategy and technologies used to create, use, store and dispose of the documents within an organisation.

Historically, document management has been synonymous with paper filing. Using filing systems and physical managerial tools was common practice, however often led to businesses being prone to risks like

loss and information theft. Now, document management has expanded to include a wide array of digital formats, including text files, emails, spreadsheets, and any document containing critical information.

This evolution in the type of documents we use, and the amount that we use, has meant document management has had to become more agile and data-driven, using tools such as document management systems (DMS) to manage document lifecycles.



# The benefits of effective document management



The significance of a high quality document management system can not be overstated. From enhanced efficiency and productivity, to improved compliance, and of course security, businesses will see benefits of a strategic move into an increasingly digital and regulated world.

By streamlining the process of accessing, retrieving and sharing documents, businesses will reduce the amount of time spent on manual document management, freeing up employees to focus on more valuable tasks. Optimisation of workflows also improves collaboration amongst your teams, and makes decision making an easier process.

A robust DMS facilitates compliance and minimises security threats. By maintaining

detailed records of the document lifecycle, such as which individuals have access to the document, businesses can maintain detailed records of how they've adhered to regulations. Similarly, with security features such as encryption and audit trails, document management systems protect sensitive confidential data from unauthorised access.

Fundamentally, effective document management ensures documents are up-to-date, secure, and readily accessible to those who need it. This streamlined access empowers employees to make quick, yet safe, decisions with their document, leading to improved operational performance.



# Document management best practices

By implementing the document management best practices below, businesses will see the numerous benefits. In this section, we'll delve into the core principles that a business needs to establish an effective document management strategy.

## 1 Identifying business requirements

This is the foundational step in analysing your businesses specific needs when it comes to document management, including the objectives you want to achieve and the challenges that you might encounter. This process means the entire business needs to work together to ensure the document management system is tailored to support your workflows, your compliance needs, and your security demands.

To find the clear and precise requirements for document management, businesses should understand the variety of documents they manage, the frequency of access employees need, and the levels

of collaboration that teams need. This way, the chosen technology and features can align with existing requirements, ensuring a smooth handover and correct functionality.

Similarly, confirming the overarching goals that a business wants to achieve with the DMS is critical in this step. A business that's looking to grow and evolve will need a scalable DMS that can handle increased data volumes and new document types. Whereas a business that spans multiple industries will need to ensure that the system integrates seamlessly with other softwares used within the organisation.

## 2

### Automating procedures

Through the automation of routine and repetitive tasks such as document indexing and approval, processes will need significantly less manual intervention, therefore improving the likelihood of human error. For example, a document management system can enable documents to be automatically routed to the appropriate personnel, either for review or for action, ensuring that the document lifecycle is expedited, whilst also maintaining the outcomes.

By automatically applying consistent rules across document procedures, businesses will observe compliance regulations, as well as their own internal policies. Functions such as automated alerts and notifications means document access and modifications can be monitored with ease, providing an audit trail that increases accountability.

## 3

### Optimising document workflow

Not to be confused with automation, optimising the document workflow allows for the restructuring of how a businesses documents are created, reviewed, approved, modified and archived. To optimise the workflow, businesses should look at their existing workflows and identify any bottlenecks, either where time is lost or where there's a risk to security.

From there, businesses can enhance their workflow. This could include streamlining the movement of documents between individuals or departments, or reduce the processing times of documents getting into the system with enhanced [document indexing](#). Many document management systems are equipped with workflow optimising features such as version control and automated routing.

## 4

### Implementing rigid file structure

Just as businesses implemented an organisational structure within their physical documents, effective document management practices dictate that there's a clearly established digital file structure too. This is the fundamental backbone of document retrieval, and there are a few essential components that need to be considered.

A well defined file structure needs clear naming conventions that employees follow, as well as hierarchical arrangements that are logical and intuitive. Not only does this reduce the amount of time spent searching for documents, it reduces the risk of duplicating documents, enhancing productivity. As outlined in the first best practice, this organisational structure needs to align with the goals and workflows of all departments within the company, including stakeholders.

## 5

### Bulk scanning to save time

In the modern day, even small businesses manage large volumes of data. By [bulk scanning](#) documents, rather than one by one, documents can be simultaneously scanned and indexed. This means utilising high-speed scanner technology to quickly convert large quantities of paper documents such as invoices, contracts and archives, into their respective digital formats.

This can be particularly useful when first getting started with transitioning from a physical document management system to a digital one. By adopting bulk scanning practices, businesses can save time in converting documents to their digital counterparts and become more resource-efficient.

## 6

### Defining access for security

Access parameters are a critical part of ensuring high-level security and confidentiality. An effective document management system should establish clear access controls for individuals; managers will be able to regulate who has permission to view, edit and remove specific documents and document types.

By enabling this level of granularity, confidential data is protected, reducing the risk of a data breach and unintentional disclosure of sensitive information. Although it's effective in enforcing security, businesses need to be wary about the levels by which they grant access to employees. They need a level of access that protects from unauthorised individuals, but also allows employees to modify documents, not preventing them from being productive.

## 7

### Utilising cloud based software

Cloud-based software provides a centralised and secure repository for storing and collaborating on documents, from anywhere with an internet connection. Utilising this type of system offers businesses unparalleled flexibility, accessibility and scalability. Being cloud-based eliminates the constraints of on-premises service, meaning remote teams can collaborate in real time, which is essential in the modern digital world.

When choosing your cloud-based document management system, make sure to invest in a reputable provider who prioritises security measures such as encryption, access controls, and disaster recovery. Minimising data loss is paramount, and the secure nature of cloud-based document management establishes a resilient approach to data protection.

## 8

### Recovery & disaster planning

Although businesses implement secure and cloud-based document management practices, preparing for disaster and recovery is still a necessary component of document management strategy. It ensures that organisations can quickly rebound from unforeseen disruptions, and protect their, and their customers, valuable data.

An effective recovery strategy should outline the procedures for system recovery, data restoration and document retrieval at a minimum. By outlining these processes, businesses reduce the amount of downtime they have, preserving the integrity of data, meaning that they can resume operations in a timely manner. Not only does this serve as a way to prevent data loss or theft, it also gives customers confidence in your security.

## 9

### Audit, audit, audit

Auditing within document management serves as a cornerstone of process improvement and regulatory compliance. Conducting regular and routine auditing means you can maintain integrity and security of the document management system.

These audits at a minimum should involve the examination of document lifecycles and workflows, access logs and permissions, and finally the security protocols. They also provide the necessary documentation to highlight

adherence to industry compliance standards and legal requirements.

By continually assessing document management processes, businesses can identify vulnerabilities, unauthorised access, and any instances of non-compliance, and address them prior to them causing further issues. Simultaneously, the document management system is always going through iterative improvements, providing the business with a better system.

# Implementing the best document management system

Implementing document management best practices means adopting a multifaceted approach, one that considers all elements of the business, including defining the business goals and continually auditing document management processes.

Embracing these best practices contributes to the overarching goal of enhancing efficiency, security, and compliance. However, choosing the right document management system is paramount in meeting the needs of the business and ensuring the future scalability of the system too.

The journey from a traditional paper-based system to a digital one can be complicated and risky. At [Shredall SDS Group](#), we've assisted many businesses in this transformation, helping them navigate the complexities of building a document management system that suits their unique needs.

From utilising our [high quality scanning technology](#), to [document management software](#), we have a diverse range of services that can manage the document lifecycle from end to end. With years of experience in managing confidential data and the [highest standards of compliance](#) in our industry, businesses that partner with us can be assured that their document management system will uphold industry best practices as they continue to evolve.

