

Labeling paper

DYMO puts labels to new use for document management

BY JAMES E. GASKIN

Remember the promised paperless office? Today that seems just as much science fiction as flying cars and holiday resorts on the moon. But DYMO, the labeler company, just took a big step forward in better paper control. (No word from the company on flying cars.)

The only mistake I believe DYMO has made on this product is classifying it as a “document management” tool. Many small businesses hear document management and envision a \$25,000 bill for high-end scanners, expensive servers and unending frustration. You can't blame them for that image, because that's too often the situation.

But just as DYMO made it easy for middle school boys to label everything in their classrooms, DYMO makes it easy for small businesses to file electronic documents as easily and quickly as they file paper documents. Maybe that's the hook the company should have used: easier to file, easier to find than paper. DYMO calls its process the easiest way to go from paper to digital, which may be true in today's market.

DYMO File Office and DYMO File Professional software (\$199 and \$399, not counting the label printer) fix two of the document management issues from the past. First, the tools make scanning easier. Second, they allow you to search and find documents using your own search programs, or theirs, or both.

Old days: put a stack of papers into an expensive, self-feeding scanner. Supposedly the paper feeds automatically, but someone has to watch the scanner to catch the papers that go in askew and mess things up. After you have a pile of electronic documents, someone must go through each docu-

ment and attach electronic keywords and tags so you can find the document. Then they must physically move the document to the right folder in the file system so the management program can find it later.

Today with DYMO File: pick the piece of paper (or papers) you want to convert and put into the electronic filing system, choose the location folder for storage, hit OK, attach the small label the printer spits out to the paper and set aside for scanning.

When you scan that labeled page, the software reads the label information and puts the image into the folder you assigned earlier. DYMO File automatically performs OCR (Optical Character Recognition) on the page, creating an indexable text file that is attached to the document. The software then changes the page's status from pending to digitized so you know if all the documents you asked to be scanned were scanned. If someone drops one of the 12 pages you sent, the software will tell you that page has yet to be converted and placed in the system.

You don't need new servers because you use the storage or servers you already have. You don't have to create new storage organization plans, because DYMO works with your existing folder structure. You don't have to create keywords and electronic tags, because the text from the document will be indexed by the DYMO software and/or whatever search program you prefer. And when you file the actual paper copy, the label shows where the electronic version was stored. So if you really prefer file cabinets to Google Desktop, you can look at the paper to start your search process.

Another advantage is the distrib-



uted document labeling for scanning that still provides centralized control and retrieval. Let's say a company has three clerks who open correspondence from customers. Each clerk can initiate the paper-to-digital process with their letters at their desk. Later, one of the three or someone else can feed the letters into any type of scanner or multifunction printer. Once scanned, the customer letters will be indexed and can be located by anyone with authorization to that information. None of the three clerks has to stop working to wrestle with a scanner until later. In fact, all three can give their letters to another person in charge of scanning and filing the physical letters.

Does this follow my new Task — Process — Tools progression from last week? I think it's a great example. The Task is to digitize paper for easier storage and later retrieval. The Process is to scan the paper and store the result inside some management system, and index the documents for retrieval. The Tools can be the DYMO File software and desktop label machines. Or you can try the lousy software included with your scanner or multifunction printer until you get frustrated and declare document management a black hole of time and productivity.

With the right tools, document management can become an easy, useful process. It's no holiday on the moon, but it's a big improvement over past attempts at digitizing paper into something easily indexed and retrieved by a computer.