



# A Paperless World

**C**ould you imagine living in a virtually paperless world? It would mean opening your mind to no longer receiving bank statements in the mail, writing your shopping lists on your smartphone and keeping scanned copies of receipts on the computer.

It's a concept that growing numbers of Australians are embracing as various tools, apps and software hit the market to make the transition smoother than ever before. While going paperless is a great way to help the environment, reducing paper use is also streamlining the lives of many converts who swear they'll never go back.

## 30 Day Paperless Challenge

One of the popular tools on the market that helps you achieve a paperless life is Evernote, which is a suite of software and services designed for notetaking and archiving. Evernote is a great tool for both business and personal use.

In a bid to encourage people to consider their paper use, Evernote launched its second 30 Day Paperless Challenge at the start of the year, which was a virtual event aimed at helping people kick off a paperless lifestyle in 2013. More than 850 people joined in the event and shared their progress, according to a spokesperson from Evernote. On the company blog, one participant was

a clear convert. "I work out of my home, and after working at about 95% paperless for two weeks, I will never go back. Everything feels more streamlined and more organised," the participant was quoted as saying.

## Paper Cuts, Huge Savings

Given the potential savings, many more Australian businesses are also on board, particularly given that some claim that a paperless office can increase productivity.

Banks alone would be able to make significant savings if all account holders would be willing to switch to emailed bank statements. And while email works for some, many other Australians aren't yet embracing a paperless existence. ▶



## Tools to help you go paper *less*

**GoCanvas:** Download and customise mobile forms onto your smartphones and tablets

**FileMaker:** Create custom-made business application that manages a range of procedures.

**EverNote:** A suite of software and services designed for notetaking and archiving.

**Adobe X1:** Touch features so people can use tablets and smartphones to secure PDFs

**DropBox:** A great tool to share files with clients

**Google Docs/Drive:** Great for word processing, spreadsheets and other forms

**Presi:** Helps create professional presentations

**Asana:** For task management creation

**Turboscan:** For scanning receipts

But for those in business who have made the transition, they know that a paperless office can have huge benefits.

A recently released white paper found that dealing with document challenges is costing companies millions of dollars each year in lost productivity. The research, by the International Data Corporation, covered information workers and IT professionals in Australia, the US, UK, France, Germany and Japan and found that information workers waste a significant amount of time each week dealing with challenges relating to working with documents.

For a company with 1,000 employees, for example, there is an associated addressable productivity cost estimated at A\$15.2 million a

year. According to IDC, addressing these time wasters would be equivalent to hiring 213 new employees.

Further research on paper use within a business paint the full picture. Figures published by Triple Pundit (a media company for the business community) found that the average office worker uses 10,000 sheets of paper a year. The site also says that it can cost up to 31 times the original cost to send information on paper when you take printing, copying, postage, storage, filing and recycling into consideration.

But perhaps most alarming is that the average four drawer cabinet costs about \$25,000 to fill and \$2,000 per year to maintain, which should be enough incentive to get all of us

considering how we can reduce our paper trail.

## Customer Approval

Australian businesses that operate a paperless company say they would never go back.

National online retail business Cheap Sheds has been dedicated to being a paperless operation since 2008. All communications, including marketing, remains electronic where possible.

Business owner Krisztian Panzcel says communications with customers is done online, using online chat, online phone calls and electronic receipts and invoices. Staff aren't required to print documentation and everything is done and stored in the cloud.





## Paper Wastage

Takeaway coffee cups are impregnated with toxic dyes, which make them difficult to recycle. In fact, biodegradation of a paper cup can take 50 years or more. Statistics from the Reusable Cup Program recently launched nationally reveals that **50 billion** disposable coffee cups discarded worldwide a year and **2.7 million** thrown away per day in Australia alone. The program urges coffee chains to join the initiative.

Panzcel says 99% of customers are happy about dealing with a paperless business and respect the paperless policy and understand its importance. "But there are times a customer will insist on a printed receipt, which means we have to visit a print shop to get it printed and posted. We try and avoid this but due to legalities and our commitment to our customers, we have to do this at times," he says.

Panzcel says being paperless saves thousands of dollars, but adds that there are other advantages. "Being a paperless company also improves your standing with customers, who are concerned about the environment. It is a way to connect with them and show that we are also working towards a brighter future. It represents our commitment and caring nature and makes them trust us. This relationship is extremely important in the online world."

## Tablets and Effective Tools

Sydney PR firm Click PR is also a paperless operation. It utilises a variety of tools to get the job done without having to print anything, including Gmail, Google Docs/Drive for word processing and spreadsheets, Harvest for timesheets, Asana for task management, DropBox for sharing files with clients, Evernote for taking notes and Presi for creating presentations. All of the programs it uses (except FileMaker) are cloud-based, meaning the team can access them from their smartphones, laptops or tablets.

Click PRs Rob Langford says iPads are used for client presentations, which helps with engagement and makes a presentation less formal. "We can sit down with someone and avoid the death by powerpoint-style presentation," he says.

Google Drive allows Click PR to live edit documents and collaborate with clients. "It's a very powerful tool that means our team can be more responsive

and efficient. We don't have to send versions back and forth, and we can all work on a document together at the same time without any version control issues. Plus it automatically saves our work every few seconds. And if you ever need to revert to a previous edition, it stores them all, too."

## Remote Access

Paperless is also a state of mind for Newcastle firm GoSolar. The company had long relied on whiteboards and a traditional office, but staff now work from home or on the road. Sales and installation staff now use FileMaker Go to handle all quotes, job descriptions, itemised system components and automatic warranty reminders from the road.

GoSolar founder Lindsay Parker says the transition has been a huge time saver and that productivity has gone through the roof. "No staff member needs to waste time attending the office, as their iPad replaces whiteboards, which had appointments and installation data that had to be written on and wiped off continually."

The thing holding many businesses back from embracing a paperless existence is a lack of understanding about the best technology applications to make it possible.

## Moving Forward

New research by Telstra called Out of Office Nation has found that many Australian small businesses don't have the technology required to support work away from the office.

Based on more than 1,000 small business owners, it found that many work 20 hours a week away from the office, but are limited due to poor access to technology.

It found that 76 per cent of small businesses were unable to access critical files and data while travelling, and that 36 per cent believe they could run their business more efficiently if they had access to better technology.

John Boniciolli, executive director for small business, Telstra, says that small businesses continue to look for ways to maximise productivity and improve customer service, and that the right technology to work remotely was now an essential tool of the trade. "Mobility is no longer a preference for any business. It is a key requirement to remain competitive and our goal is to provide the tools and technology to enable this," he says.

However businesses wanting to go paperless need to give careful consideration as to how it might impact on customers.

Telstra did, in fact, try switching customers to bills delivered via email this year. While the telco gave plenty of written warning that the switch was taking place to customers via letters in the mail, some customers told the telco it preferred it didn't switch them to emailed bills, while others were confused by the changes.

Telstra ultimately reverted back to paper bills delivered via snail mail in March this year, giving customers the option to go to their website to opt in to receiving bills via email if they preferred this method. **Q**