THE GLOBAL DRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND THE VALUE OF ONLINE DOCUMENT COLLABORATION
THE GLOBAL DRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Growing concern over our consumption of natural resources and disposal of waste has captured worldwide attention like never before, prompting business and government leaders to find measurable ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

Large multinationals, such as Siemens, for example, have announced plans to cut carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2020 and become carbon neutral by 2030.

In 2012, major UK retailer, M&S, announced it had achieved its goal to become fully carbon neutral, and has since announced a second phase of initiatives to become the world’s most sustainable major retailer.²

Sustainability has also become a top government issue. Norway has established a goal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2050, encouraging other countries to follow. The EU has also set a 40 percent goal for 2030.³

With ambitious targets for improvement in mind, many Corporations and global organisations are measuring every aspect of their operational life cycle to understand and reduce their carbon footprint. They are also implementing wide-reaching, long-term programmes to reduce consumption or, in cases where consumption cannot be avoided, off-set it by investing in programmes to “nourish” the planet.⁴

Following are some examples of elements of these programmes:

• Unilever announced in 2015 that it had achieved a 20 percent reduction in energy consumption across the globe. Additionally, the company has a target to reach 40 percent renewable energy by 2020 and will work towards 100 percent of renewable energy in the future.⁵

• Global hospitality company, Wyndham Worldwide, has committed to track and offset the emissions from business travel and air freight shipping activities, and invest its carbon offsets in the GreenTrees’ project along the Mississippi River Valley.⁶

• Sodexo, a Fortune Global 500 company, has committed to reducing its carbon footprint by 34 percent by 2020, through waste reduction, energy reduction and the integration of sustainable energy sources across its supply chain.

• Waste reduction is a top concern for cosmetics company Estee Lauder. According to company spokesman, John Delfausse, the company does not landfill materials. Roughly 55 percent of everything that comes out of their factories is recycled and the rest is incinerated for energy.⁷

These are just a few examples of the dramatic steps being taken by global companies, and they demonstrate how those working with or supporting them must also share their drive for sustainability.
THE IMPORTANCE OF REDUCING PAPER DEPENDENCY

Paper consumption represents one important aspect of sustainability in which all organisations can make a measurable impact.

To some degree, technological advances have had a positive impact in reducing our reliance on paper as compared to 10 or 20 years ago. Nowhere is this change more dramatic than in the way we handle document-intensive business transactions.

For example, when the merger of Sweden’s Stora Kopparbergs Bergslags AB and Finland’s Enso Oyj took place in 1998, the process required more paper than the companies could conceive of.

“This was an extremely large transaction that merged two of the world’s leading paper companies,” said one of the investment bankers involved with the deal. “I recall we brought more than 20 double decker buses loaded with paper from the UK to the companies’ offices to complete the printing.”

Contrast that scenario with a similar sized merger taking place today. By and large, the transaction could be managed using digital documents in an online virtual data room (VDR). The need to print thousands of pages of legal, financial and business documents for due diligence teams to review is eliminated. While some document printing is still necessary, it amounts to a fraction of earlier print volumes.

In ways such as this, online document sharing platforms are paving the way for organisations to more easily achieve their sustainability agenda, streamline their reliance on paper, and also reduce production costs. The savings can be considerable and not just limited to mega companies. For example, Suncoast Medical Clinic, a 370 employee organisation, estimated that it will save about $1 million by using electronic health records (EHR), eliminating 80 percent of its paper-based medical records budget and most of its transcription services.

THE TRUE COST OF PAPER CONSUMPTION

However, despite the proliferation of technologies that enable us to replace paper documents, our dependence on paper in the office has grown rather than declined.

Consider the following statistics:

• Worldwide consumption of paper has risen by 400 percent in the last 40 years with 35 percent of harvested trees being used for paper manufacture.

• In 2011, worldwide paper production was approximately 400 million tons.

• Printing and writing papers comprise the largest category of paper product consumption.

• The average office worker uses a staggering 10,000 sheets of paper a year.
Even more disturbing, about 45 percent of the paper printed in offices ends up trashed by the end of the day—this daily lifespan occurs for over a trillion sheets of paper per year, worldwide.¹²

Faced with statistics like these, the movement to reduce our “paper footprint” is understandable.

REPLACING PAPER DEPENDENCY WITH A DOCUMENT COLLABORATION PLATFORM

In the past, companies have tried to become “paperless,” but have fallen short for different reasons. Often, the “security” of having paper documents was hard to displace. For many companies, the time and cost of transitioning to a paperless environment was perceived as too high. Moreover, earlier document management technologies were more geared towards document creation and storage, but not sharing and collaboration.

Technology has evolved steadily over the past fifteen years, changing the way businesses now view digital document management. Today’s solutions have evolved into full-featured online document collaboration platforms that eliminate the inefficiencies of working with paper.

However, to truly gain the benefits of working in an online document environment, it’s important to choose a true document collaboration platform as opposed to a storage solution.

Real platforms for collaboration will support organisations to become paperless and should include:

- **Centralisation**—Setup one centralised, easily searchable body of information that is accessible by all team members, regardless of their location
- **Fast, convenient set up**—The platform should be designed for the rapid uploading, tagging and sorting of large volumes of documents in a matter of hours
- **Ease-of-use**—Designed to flow like many familiar web-based applications so they’re simple and intuitive
- **Collaboration**—Allow users to mark up documents, manage version control, add notes and communicate via embedded Q&A and email tools
- **Tight security**—Provide a secure environment for sharing confidential or critical information. Documents should be encrypted, have customisable watermarks (so they’re tamperproof), and should be viewed, printed or downloaded only by the account holders with permission
- **Audit trail**—Should include an easy-to-administer and trackable organisational discipline around the storage and access to corporate documents
- **Responsive support**—Support should include a project manager from planning to launch to ensure that the document platform is setup with the correct index and permissions
CASE STUDY

HOW MUCH DOES AN ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT COLLABORATION SOLUTION REALLY SAVE?

The environmental and business benefits of electronic document collaboration make a compelling case for transition. VDRs make it possible to manage nearly the entire due diligence process online, for example. Given that capability, companies can drastically reduce their consumption of office paper and valuable resources.

Merrill DataSite alone has stored, to date, 950 million pages of documentation in electronic form for M&A transactions and other business practices. From the standpoint of using trees to produce paper, one tree produces roughly 8,333 pages of paper. Using this figure, 950 million pages divided by 8,333 pages/tree equals a savings of 114,000 trees by avoiding printing of these documents—let alone printing multiple times for different parties.

In addition to M&A transactions, companies can also make measurable environmental and financial savings by adopting a VDR as a document collaboration platform for all their business transactions. One important benefit of this approach is that the savings can be recovered in a relatively short period of time. For example,

**Bank of America cut its paper consumption by 25 percent in two years by increasing the use of on-line forms and reports, e-mail, double-sided copying and lighter-weight paper.**

Citigroup, another large financial services company, determined that if each employee used double-sided copying to conserve just one sheet of paper each week, the firm would save $700,000 each year.

If a concerted effort was made by all companies to adopt electronic document collaboration platforms, such as a VDR, the environmental impact would be enormous. For example, consider the savings based on industry calculations of paper consumption:

- The average worker uses 10,000 sheets of office paper a year
- Collectively, that’s 4 million tons of copy paper used in one year in the U.S. alone
- If we were able to reduce copy paper usage by 75 percent:
  - 1 ton of virgin office paper = 24 trees
  - 3 million tons of paper saved = 72,000,000 trees

These savings are a rough estimate of the contribution made by reducing paper consumption in businesses in the US. Imagine the impact if electronic document collaboration were a global initiative for all businesses, of all sizes.
SUMMARY

Thanks to advancements in technology, companies of all sizes now have the means to virtually eliminate paper-based business processes, reduce operational costs and support sustainability goals. Today’s online document collaboration platforms have advanced significantly into secure, intuitive solutions designed with business collaboration in mind.

Leading providers have developed Web-based document platforms that can be launched very quickly, require no hardware investment or IT resources to manage, and include robust features that make it easy for groups to upload, store, search, share and work on documents in a secure online environment—without the need to print and waste resources.

By adopting this enabling technology, companies can take a smart, yet simple step toward eliminating the “throw away” of valuable resources, reduce waste and measure their progress toward sustainability.

Environmental and financial benefits can be measured in as short a time as a year or less, making it a compelling initiative for companies to adopt.

With the drive for sustainability increasingly high-up on the agenda for Corporations, both large and small, simple steps with big results, can’t be overlooked.

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1 Carbon neutral, also called carbon neutrality is a term used to describe the action of businesses and individuals taking action to remove as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as each put in to it. The overall goal of carbon neutrality is to achieve a zero carbon footprint. [www.webopedia.com](http://www.webopedia.com)
3 [www.climateactiontracker.org](http://www.climateactiontracker.org)
4 Carbon offsetting: a program in which a company, country, etc., reduces or offsets its carbon emissions through the funding of activities and projects that improve the environment.
5 Unilever Saves 1 Million Tonnes of CO2 – and €244m,” [www.unilever.com](http://www.unilever.com), May 18, 2015.
11 “Facts About Paper Consumption.”
12 “Facts About Paper Consumption.”
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Merrill Corporation secures solutions at every phase, so you can secure ongoing impact and growth.

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