



## Who Could Use A Network Scanner?

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Answer: most of us. Is the idea of using a scanner to work with documents and route them electronically via a corporate network so far fetched? Not really. We've been doing it for years, however, not in a very straight forward manner. We scan to our PCs and then rely on PC applications to work with those documents, either locally or remotely. This is where we have gotten stuck. But the tide has turned with MFP and digital copier manufacturers leading the crusade to integrate scanned documents into their multi-talented networked machines. As a result, they are exploiting the benefits of scanning office documents to the tune of increased sales.

What MFP and digital copier manufacturers have done is offered a strong value proposition. Although they promote the printing and copying capabilities of their products, they have upped the ante by incorporating simplified document scanning functionality. This has been achieved through network and application integration. This combination has improved access to scanning (through sharing the device) and simplified the scanning process (via network routing of those documents.) As a result, users are increasingly using these devices to scan their work documents.

So, are digital copiers and MFPs the only options for shared scanning functionality? The answer may seem to be yes, and most of the multi-function peripheral manufacturers want you to think so. The reality is that single function scanners could and should be used for shared office scanning in departments that are particularly paper-centric. They are faster and far better at paper handling than their multi-function counterparts. Accounting, legal, human resources, and sales are good examples of typical departments that can benefit from a robust document scanner. The problems lie in the inability to share and use these scanners easily (a.k.a. network support and application integration.)

There have been jewels in the rough, namely HP's Digital Sender and Kodak's Scan Station networked scanners. Regarding ease of use and application integration, there has been notable work done by Visioneer with its One Touch technology and by Fujitsu with its PDF integration in the ScanSnap product. Some scanner vendors have offered "network boxes" or optional network interface boards to tie their scanners to networks, but these hardware-centric "solutions" do not improve the experience by much.

The bottom line is that there are plenty of users who could benefit from scanners that are tightly integrated into corporate networks and business applications. These users might be ad-hoc business users or steadfast scanner users, but they could all benefit from better usability and application integration. Document scanning via the corporate network is here to stay; there is no doubt about that. The next question is: who can deliver the best scanning solutions for business users?

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