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The journey to becoming a paperless business

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Two small business owners share their experiences of ridding paper from the workplace.

For centuries, good old fashioned pulp has been the indispensable lifeblood of any organisation, carrying information around it the way that blood cells carry oxygen around the body. But the advent of cloud computing, plus the countless IT tools and apps that are readily available to businesses has made it more straightforward than ever to eliminate paper from your firm.

When the [Equine Business Association](https://www.equinebusinessassociation.com/), which provides training and support for other businesses, decided to go paperless at the start of this year, its founder, Christina Jones, says that a number of factors prompted the decision.

“We’ve transitioned to a 100pc virtual team, so having paperwork in office filing cabinets was no longer accessible. I also wanted more freedom to work from different locations, and to reduce admin costs, particularly with accounts and bookkeeping.”

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The firm uses a range of software in place of paper, such as Google Drive for online document storage, and Google Docs and Sheets for any documents that need collaboration. It also uses organisational tool, [Slack](https://slack.com/), for internal communications and the [Asana](https://asana.com/) app for tasks, projects, editorial calendars and templates.

[Kashflow](https://www.kashflow.com/) is also used for electronic invoicing, and for customers to pay online straight from an emailed invoice.

“We spend far less time on admin tasks, especially bookkeeping.”

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Working with its IT department to design a bespoke online portal, the whole project took about 18 months to roll out. It has been a major success, says business owner, Anne Corder.

“Being paperless has improved everything from ensuring faster payments to reducing our stationery and postage costs,” she explains.

“The fact that staff have access to all the required information also means that we’re able to work more efficiently. Mundane admin tasks have reduced significantly and there’s no more hunting for lost or misfiled paperwork.”

Cost it up

The cost of going paperless will be different for every company, but essentially, price up the required equipment and software, as well as staff training costs. Calculate how much you spend on paper, stationery and waste, then calculate the difference to see if the move is for you.

“Look at the cost of the project versus the future cost savings to be made,” advises Ms Corder. “There are some excellent products that can support your move to a paperless office, so speak to potential supply partners.”

Educate and adjust

Change can be hard. You need to inform customers and staff of what you’re planning and why. Your staff will also need to be trained on any new systems.

Ms Corder says that it was a big challenge for her staff who were in the habit of printing paper, making hard copy notes and generating paper. “There was a period of adjustment for the team and, even today, we do still appreciate that this is a big change for new people joining our business,” she adds.

Cloud tech

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