



Intelligent Digital Mailrooms Make a Difference

In the age of digital transformation, the very notion of a “mailroom” seems antiquated. A goal for many organizations is to remove or reduce the reliance on paper-based processes and manual workflow. As a result, the image of a basement mailroom with carts of envelopes and giant mail inserting machines just seems so last century. But despite the desire to go paperless, the fact is that for most organizations today the mailroom remains an integral and essential part of business operations.

The disruption of the past two years has accelerated the need to rethink mailroom operations. With the onset of COVID, all of a sudden floors of onsite workers quickly transformed into a scattered and remote workforce. Simply getting incoming mail to the right person became a challenge. Many important business processes ground to a halt as a result. Within days, a better digital alternative was no longer a nice-to-have, it was essential. Enter the notion of a “digital mailroom.”



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What Was Old Is New Again

The idea of digitizing the mailroom – where incoming mail is scanned, imaged, indexed, and ingested into a digital workflow – isn't particularly new. But what is new is the sudden shift in the importance and relevance of digitizing. And while going digital may have been essential in the short term to respond to the needed shift to work-from-home, getting rid of paper and building intelligence into the process are essential for organizations to remain competitive in the long term. Customers, seasoned by nearly two years of remote and touchless interactions, are simply no longer willing to go back to the old way of doing business at the speed of paper.

The demand for digital is clear. Economists tell us that in [2022, spending on digital transformation is projected to reach \\$1.8 trillion](#). By 2025, global digital transformation spending is forecast to reach \$2.8 trillion.



Global executive surveys find that 97% of C-Suite respondents say that the outbreak significantly sped up their digital transformation initiatives.

What Does it Take to Become a 21st Century Mailroom?

So the question becomes, what can be done to bring the mailroom into the digital transformation age? That was the subject of a [recent AIIM webinar](#) featuring Peter Nickel, Principal Advisor at Iron Mountain. The session explored how leading organizations are digitally transforming their mailroom operations to accelerate access to information and enhance the customer experience – all while delivering better efficiencies and cost-effectiveness.

Peter discussed several techniques to digitally transform mailroom operations and drive increased customer engagement via digital channels, eliminate paper-based processing and costly mundane tasks, and identify and deliver process efficiencies and automation that make a difference. I asked Peter to define what he feels differentiates the approaches from a traditional mailroom.

“It’s a state where we’re able to digitally capture either an already digitized asset, like an email, as well as a physical asset, like a form or a letter,” said Peter. “We capture that at the moment that asset comes into the organization; the first thing we do is digitize it. From there we work on it through different systems and software user interfaces.”

Digital Mailrooms Make a Difference

Getting rid of mountains of paper leads to operational savings. But Peter is quick to point out the extended benefits of a new digital mail-enabled workflow. “One benefit is that now we have a single office asset. You can have multiple people working on it. You can access it remotely. And this allows for much better operational efficiency, speed, and scale of access to that data.”

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Digital mailroom operations were a life-saver for some organizations as the pandemic unfolded in 2020.

“The main challenge was around the access to the facilities and the documents themselves,” said Peter. For organizations [in healthcare or insurance, for example] this caused significant challenges for client servicing. But an even bigger challenge was around regulatory and legislative compliance. A lot of these documents and the data within have very specific requirements regarding how it gets processed, how it gets turned around, and how long it can sit. That was where Iron Mountain was uniquely positioned to be able to help.”

Amid the crisis, organizations quickly rerouted their mail to another physical location where Iron Mountain staff opened the mail and scanned the envelopes and the documents. Integrated systems applied metatags for indexing and retrieval, then the digital mail was routed to a specific queue or mailbox. “We could leverage their systems, but what most folks looked for was a centralized data repository that was easy to search against, easy to apply specific rules to, and authenticate. Again, you could have multiple people access the information the moment that the mail was received and scanned.”

The Intelligent Digital Mailroom

The benefits of a digital mailroom don't end there. As the webinar progressed we focused discussion on what Peter calls an “intelligent digital mailroom” that leverages artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotic process automation. “The integration of these tools gets us to a point where a digital mailroom becomes a truly intelligent document processing center. We're now able to automate the capturing of documents, both physical and digital, and the classification of that information with an

understanding of what that document is, and the extraction of data from that document populates any number of line of business systems.”

“What we're enabling is an omnichannel capture of information and documents that will change the way that we work,” says Peter. “Now the mailroom goes from being a traditional single port of entry to one that will encompass any type of data that enters the organization. We capture it all at inception and start processing it immediately.” Peter went on to give specific examples in the mortgage process, claims processing, invoicing, and HR onboarding. [Watch the complete webinar here.](#)

Moving Forward

Where will the future take us? It seems our concept of a “mailroom” can perhaps become a new and vital model for digital transformation: capturing and digitizing information as soon as it comes into the organization, no matter if that's from a loading dock or a digital upload.

“That future state will be a journey over the next couple of years,” says Peter. “There's a lot of change that's going to have to occur. The key is to automate the classification, the structure, and the data extraction, and then integrate into backend systems with process automation, RPA, and workflow systems. Those are the key outcomes that everybody's focused on right now.”

How can you do it too? Look for providers and partners with the right mix of experience, capability, and vision to make the most of your intelligent digital mailroom.

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