

Relocating staff to home offices? Should we scan or store our archive documents as part of that move?

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The transfer of staff from working in company offices to working from home is accelerating as the effects of the pandemic stabilise and staff return to permanent or new ways of working. But what do you do with the valuable or essential archive documents currently stored onsite? There are options to consider.

Here at Scan Film or Store we offer both [document scanning](#) and [document storage](#) services (among other things). While choice is always a good thing, it does pose a potential dilemma to clients who aren't sure which option is the right one for them.

We're always happy to sit down with people and work out a plan that suits their particular business needs. But in the meantime, we've come up with this list of questions to get you thinking about the kinds of things that will help you decide which route to go down.

1) How often do you need to access your records?

This is the first and most important question you should be asking yourself. If you need information on a daily basis, having your records stored off site – even if it is just down the road – will be a

nightmare. In fact, even storing them on site can be a waste of time if you or one of your team is spending half their working day in the archive room ferreting around in dusty boxes for whatever is needed. Far easier to have everything scanned so you can access it at the touch of a button from laptops or p.c.'s.

2) How quickly do you need to be able to access your records?

If your answer to question one is “not very often”, off site document storage could be the answer for you. However it may be that when you do need a document, you need to be able to get your hands on it really quickly. In that case, you either need to make sure your storage company is local and able to provide a rapid scan on demand or delivery service (which we do, in case you were wondering). Or you're better off getting your documents scanned so you eliminate any wait time. This is especially important if your internal processes or quality systems require you to be able to produce certain documents within a specific time frame (e.g. for auditors).

3) Will you be required to produce an original at any point?

There are some documents that are only valid in their original hard copy form. For example, in the aerospace industry, if a Certificate of Conformity were to be needed, only the original would do. In this case it is important that the documents are securely stored, ideally with the environmental controls and security checks that a professional storage company like Scan Film or Store can offer.

4) How long do you need to keep your records?

There are some archive documents – like financial records and pupil files – which you're unlikely ever to use again but which you might be required by law to keep for a certain period of time. In that case you will need to store the originals, and a professional off site storage company almost certainly offers the best security for this kind of important document. If you also need frequent or very fast access to these documents, however, you might want to consider getting them scanned as well.

5) Do you prefer to send documents electronically or by post?

If you want – or need – to send your documents by post, you can either photocopy your hard copy originals or print out copies from electronic ones. So either scanning or storing would work. But if you're going to be sending them electronically then it makes sense to have your documents stored electronically, rather than having to scan hard copies before they can be sent. In this case, scanning will save you a lot of time and effort in the long run.

6) Will your documents need to be destroyed at any point?

If you're holding onto documents simply because you're legally required to, you will most likely want to destroy them once you're allowed to do so. Boxes of paper files are more easily destroyed, especially if you track boxes by date, which we do here at Scan Film or Store with our special barcoding system. Electronic data (ie scanned archives) can be harder to keep track of, which can make destruction that bit more complex, especially if you keep backups on different servers.

7) What's your budget?

In the short term, scanning is more expensive than storage. So if cost is an issue, you might want to consider getting your documents stored. However, take the time to work out your longer term calculations. Because while scanning is a bigger initial outlay, it's not ongoing in the same way as the monthly rental cost of off site storage. And don't be fooled into thinking that your best bet is storing everything in your own premises. When you work out the cost of your rent or the maintenance of your own premises, you'd be surprised at how reasonable professional storage actually is.

If you're still not quite sure whether you need to scan your documents, store them, or go for a combination of the two, [contact us here](#). One of the team will be able to talk you through some more individual questions to help you figure out the perfect solution for your business or organisation.