



Paper-lite:
Busting the myth of
the paperless office

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Paper-lite means using less paper to achieve a range of efficiency, security, productivity and environmental advantages.

Executive summary

The concept of the paperless office really took off in the 1980s, when computer screens became ubiquitous on our desks.

The aim was to reduce the environmental impact of paper production and make offices that relied on stacks of paper more efficient and secure.

Since then, businesses have made significant progress in reducing the amount of paper they use.

But the truth is, most businesses have now realised that going fully paperless is an impractical idea; 63 per cent of managers we spoke to when researching this report said they couldn't function without paper.

Instead, they are now focused on being *paper-lite*.

Paper-lite means using less paper to achieve a range of efficiency, security, productivity and environmental advantages.

Scanners, mobile technology, cloud storage and file-sharing platforms have all made this a truly achievable ambition for businesses.

We've commissioned this research to understand the benefits that a paper-lite strategy can bring, speaking to more than 800 SME managers and employees to get a comprehensive insight into this diverse business sector.

The results demonstrate a clear opportunity for businesses to incorporate scanning and Managed Print Services into their processes to strike the right balance between using paper and digital documents to achieve the optimum efficiency and cost benefits.



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Print and scan habits

Our research set out to understand how much firms are printing and scanning, and how this has changed in recent years, to see what progress is really being made towards the paperless office.

Almost all (99%) of the businesses we spoke to have printers, with an average of seven each.

More than three quarters (77%) have standard desktop printers, and slightly more (79%) have more versatile multifunction devices, which also include a scanning function.

Most firms printing more

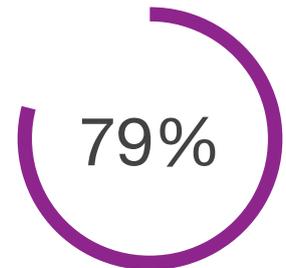
Perhaps surprisingly, 41 per cent of managers said their business is actually printing more than it was two years ago.

When we asked managers how their print volumes had changed over the last two years, 39 per cent said they had stayed the same and just 14 per cent said they had decreased.

This is clearly disappointing, given that 61 per cent of managers say they are striving to use less paper and that technology provides superior alternatives to so many paper-based processes.

Employees said they used a printer at work an average of 2.5 times a day, with a fifth printing upwards of five times per day.

Strikingly, those employees who use printers said almost half (43%) of their printing was done in colour. Managers could take some simple steps to reduce this proportion, such as defaulting printer settings to mono or restricting who can print in colour, in order to bring down the cost of consumables.

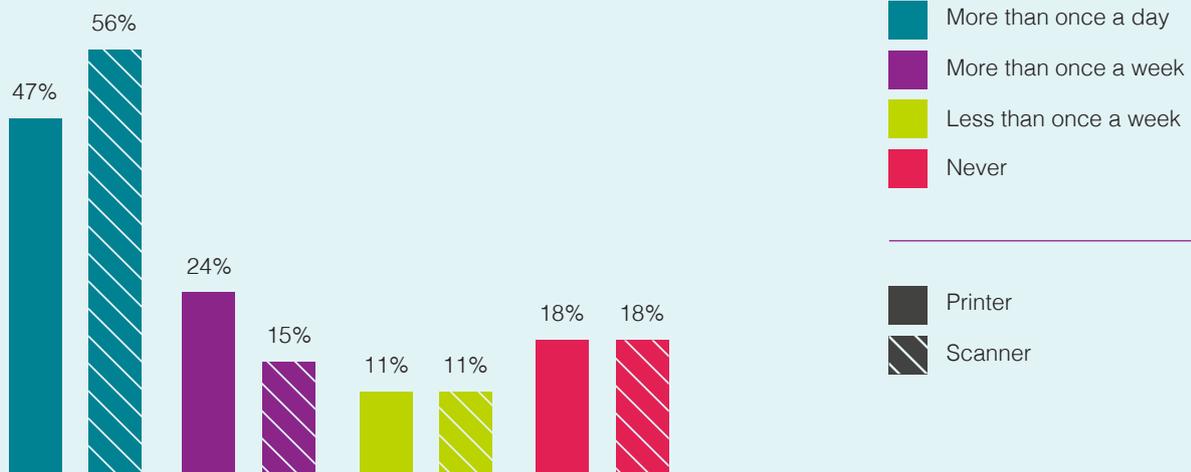


of respondents have a scanner



of respondents have a printer

How often do employees print and scan at work?





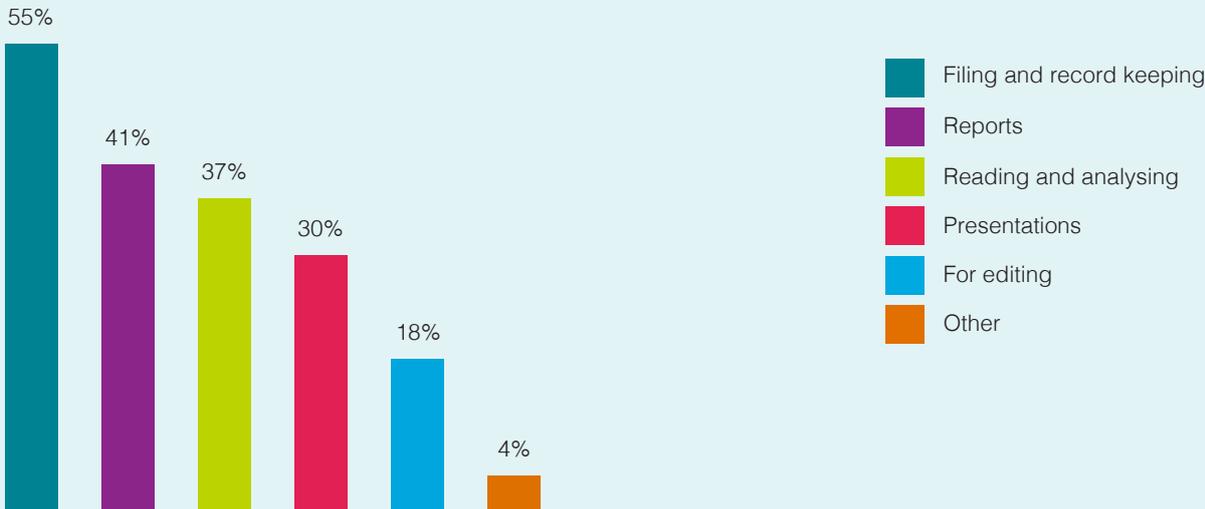
One quarter of the businesses we spoke to have increased their level of scanning in the last year.

An effective tool

Despite most employees having access to a scanner in the form of a multifunction printer, fewer employees said they used a scanner in their work (76%) than a printer (82%).

Those who do have access to a scanner, use it on average 1.8 times per day. And the businesses which use scanning seem convinced of its effectiveness; over half (52%) have maintained the level of scanning they do over the last two years, while a quarter (26%) said it had increased and just 10 per cent reported a decrease. This suggests that scanning has become established as a fundamental part of their operations, with proven benefits.

Top reasons for printing



The importance of printing and scanning

It's striking that the most common reason for employees to print is still filing and record keeping, with more than half (55%) using it for this purpose, followed by reports (41%), reading and analysing (37%), presentations (30%) and editing (18%).

Managers also report that it is their firm's administration and document management functions that benefit most from print (58%), followed by sales and marketing (32%), delivery of products and services (31%) and finance (25%).

This suggests that firms have been slow to recognise the productivity, security and space-saving benefits that scanning records can achieve over storing paper documents.

Increasing efficiency

Almost three-quarters (71%) of employees say they print documents to increase their efficiency at work, justifying this by saying they felt it makes information quicker to share in meetings (40%), easier to review (39%) and amend (37%) and easier to read (36%).

Again, this suggests a lack of awareness of the versatility of scanned digitised documents, where the text can easily be searched, spellchecked, edited and comments added, and shared with colleagues for access on mobile devices, which are now so widely used in the modern workplace.

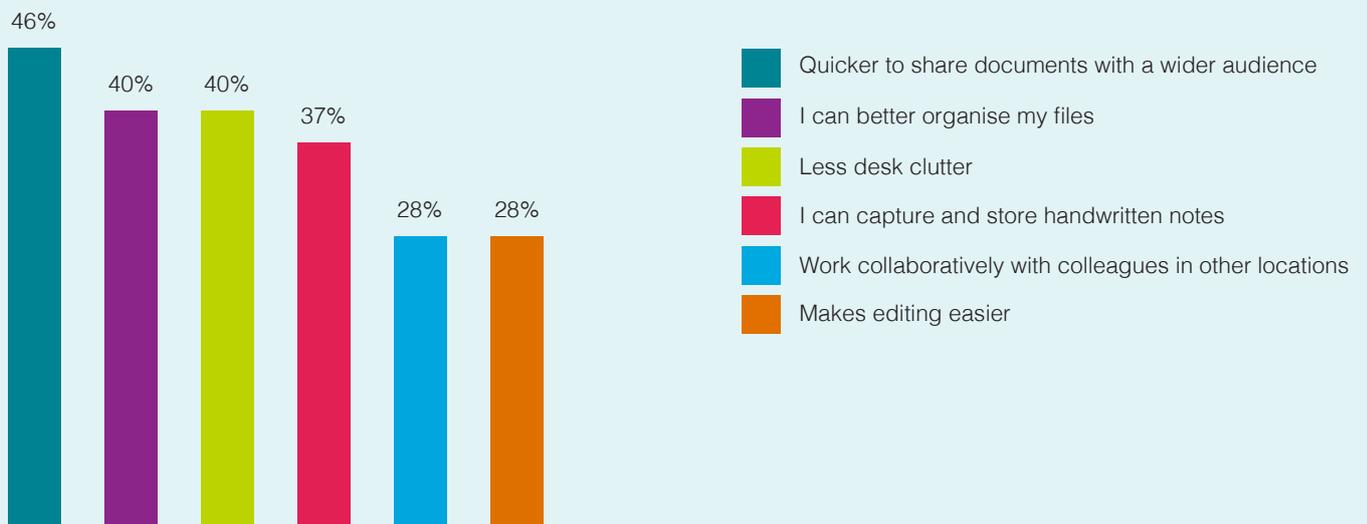


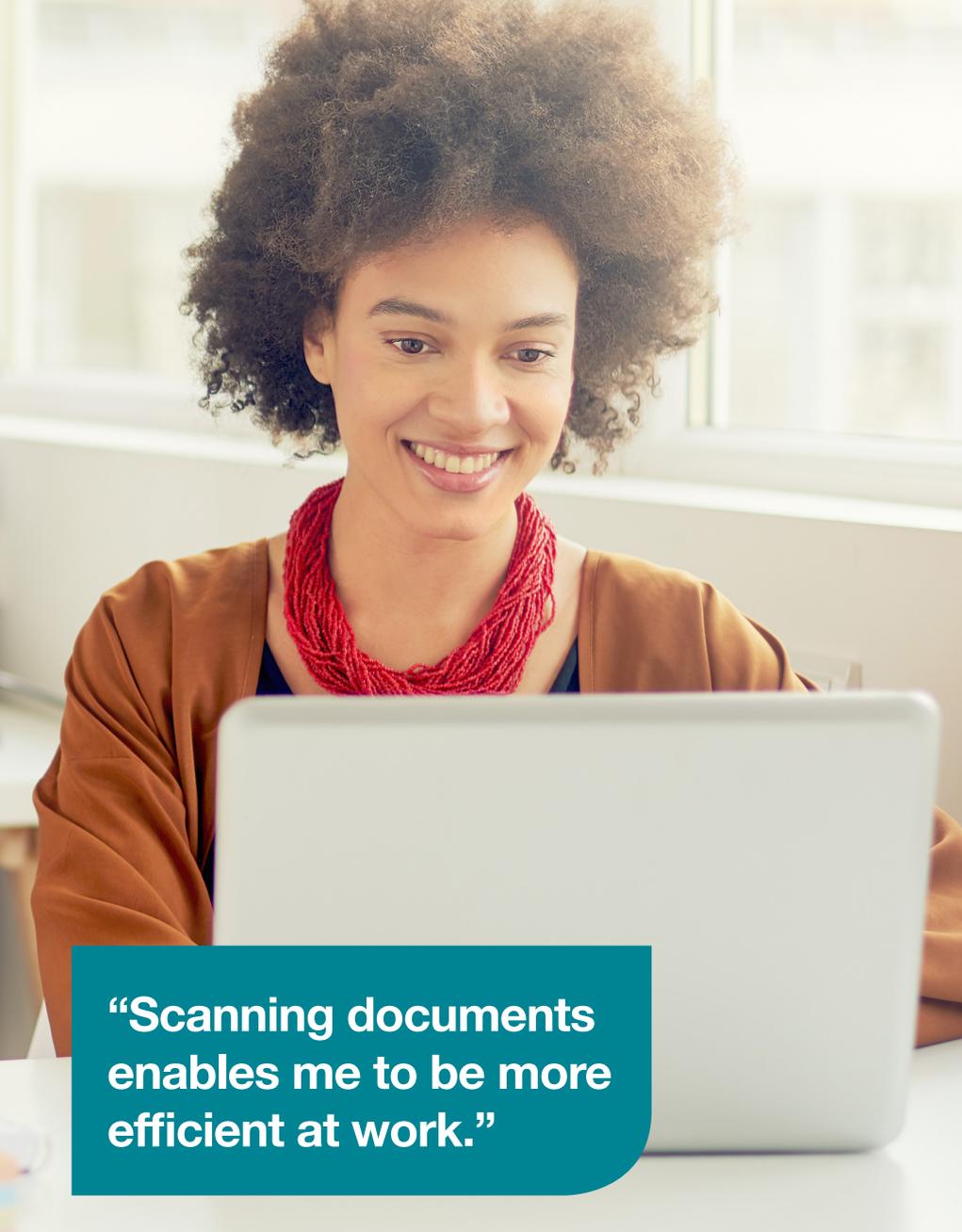
of employees report that scanning has helped improve the quality of their work



of employees say printing documents improves the quality of their work

How does scanning documents enable you to be more efficient at work?





Message received

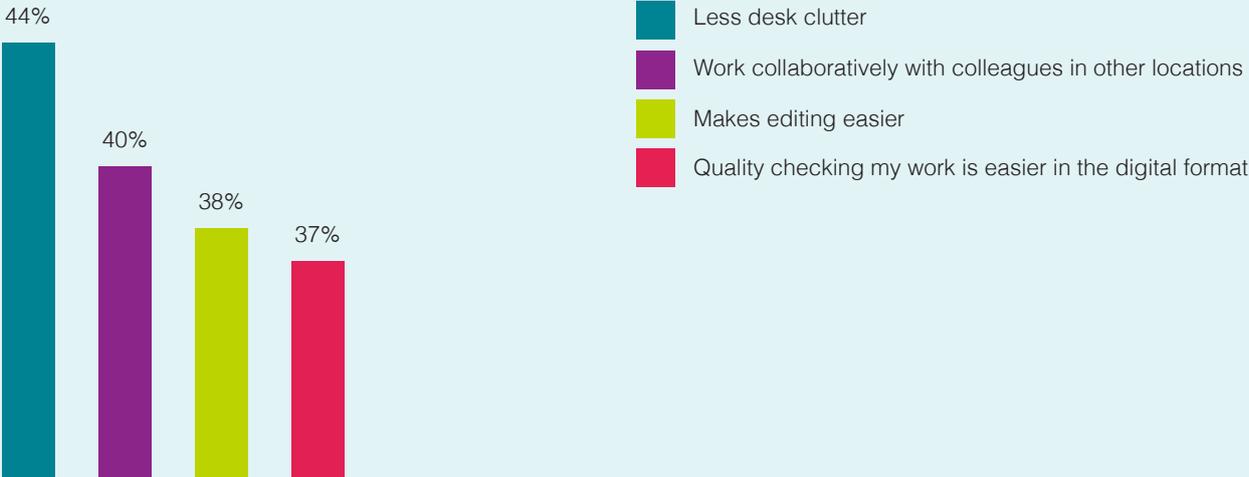
This message does appear to be getting through however, with nearly two thirds (64%) of employees agreeing that scanning documents enables more efficient ways of working.

Of that group, the biggest proportion (46%) said scanning makes it quicker to share documents with a wider audience, while 40% said it enables them to better organise their files and reduces desk clutter.

More than a third boost their efficiency by using scanning to store handwritten notes (37%), while over a quarter (28%) use it to collaborate with colleagues in other locations and make document editing easier.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of employees reported that scanning has also helped improve the quality of their work, principally by reducing clutter (44%), supporting collaboration with colleagues in other locations (40%), making editing documents easier (38%) and enabling them to quality check their work more easily (37%).

How does scanning documents improve the quality of your work?



How scanning benefits print cost control

We know that cutting costs is a key priority for businesses in the current environment, where economic uncertainty has become the 'new normal', and managers clearly recognise an opportunity to reduce their print spend, and fast.

It shouldn't be a surprise that this research found a clear majority (70%) of managers said they had plans to streamline their print policy, and 42 per cent of them said those plans were already in action.

A further 29 per cent said they would start streamlining within the next six months, while 20 per cent said they would start bringing in their plans within the next year.

Opportunity to integrate

It seems clear there is an opportunity for more managers to reduce print spend by integrating scanning into their business processes, particularly in their filing and record keeping functions.

Despite their concerns over outgoings, only half (53%) of managers say they are actually aware of their monthly print costs.

But they estimate they spend approximately £1,502 every month on print, of which £475 goes on hardware, £468 on human resource, £351 on external IT support and £208 on consumables, including ink and paper.

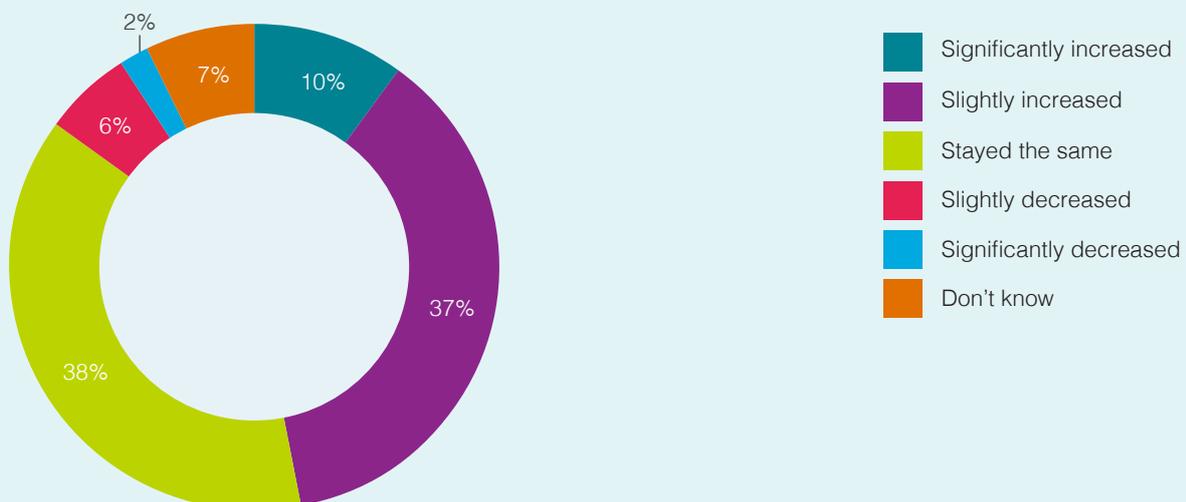
Freeing up staff

Just under half (47 per cent) said those costs had increased in the last two years, with 38 per cent saying costs had stayed the same and only eight per cent having reduced costs.

Managed Print Services (MPS) have the potential to help managers monitor this area of their outgoings more accurately.

It's a proven way to reduce print costs by up to 30 per cent, while also reducing printer downtime and freeing up staff from tasks like ordering new print supplies to be deployed more productively.

How have print costs changed compared to 12 – 24 months ago?



The future of paper in offices

Reducing paper consumption is an aspiration we can all understand, but we wanted to find out whether firms felt going fully paperless is actually desirable, and why.

Environmental sustainability is clearly a philosophy that employees value, and which is also directly influencing the amount they print.

Three quarters (75%) said sustainability and recycling is important to them personally, and two thirds (66%) said it was important to their employer.

Over half (54%) said the importance of sustainability and recycling affected the amount they print at work.

A secondary motivation was security, with a third (34%) raising security concerns about printing documents at work, a concern shared by a similar proportion (37%) of managers.

An unrealistic ambition

But we found that over half (52%) of employees believe going fully paperless was unrealistic, calling it 'more of a dream than reality', with nearly two thirds (65%) believing offices will always need paper to some degree to operate efficiently.

That was a view shared by management too, with 63 per cent of managers saying it would not be possible for their business to become paperless and still function, and 61 per cent saying they were striving towards using less paper, rather than not using any paper at all.

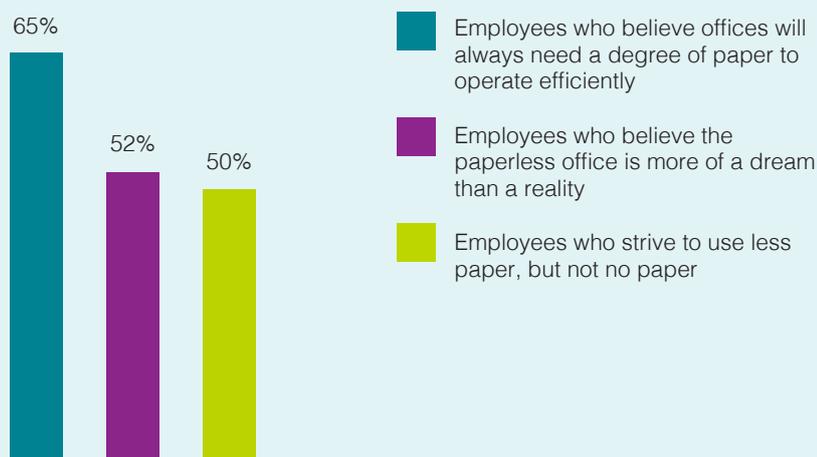
And there are more clear signs that paper-lite, as opposed to paperless, is a more realistic proposition for employees.

An achievable alternative

Over half (55%) said they think technology like tablets, smartphones and Sharepoint - a collaborative platform used to store and share digital documents - is making printing less relevant than it once was, while over a third (37%) said they no longer print much at work anymore.

So, as much as firms can see the environmental benefit of going paperless, it seems they can't imagine an entirely paperless future for their business and see paper-lite as a more practical and achievable alternative.

Employees' attitudes to print.



Becoming paper-lite

We've seen from the research that the paperless office is now largely an unrealistic concept for businesses.

Despite this, the majority of firms are seeking to reduce the amount of paper that they use.

It's heartening to see that this is a shared objective for both management and staff, suggesting that those businesses which choose to adopt a paper-lite strategy would see strong support from their employees.

Overcoming outdated opinions

We hope this research will help overcome some entrenched but outdated opinions, particularly around sharing, reviewing and amending documents, which many seem to think is still quicker and easier with paper.

We've shown how employees are using scanned documents to share and edit information, collaborate, save space and organise their working lives.

But we've also seen that firms are still using print to store records and share reports, so opportunities remain to make processes far more efficient.

Short-term hacks

In the very short-term, there are some simple hacks to get people printing less.

Employees who are sat closer to printers tend to use them more, for example.

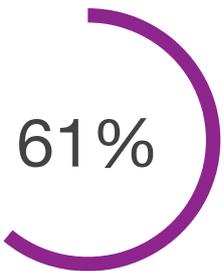
It takes the most frequent printers – those who print more than five times a day - just 40 seconds to walk to the printer and back, so simply moving printers further away from their desks could help cut print volumes.

A more permanent solution

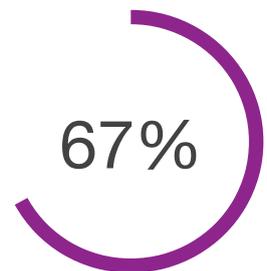
But scanning can provide a more permanent solution, that can create long-term efficiencies in the way businesses store and share information.

At Brother UK, we have seen these benefits first-hand across a range of sectors, particularly when combined with an MPS.

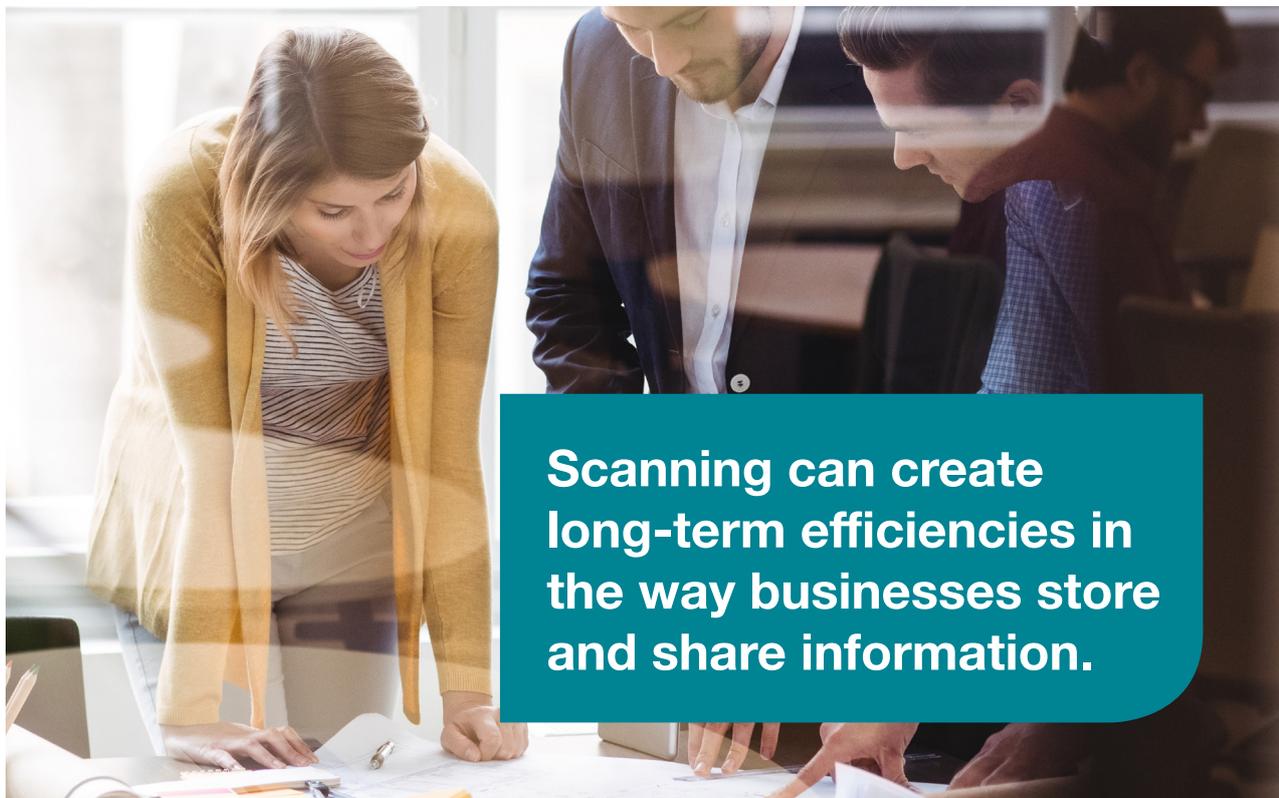
An MPS partner can design and implement a solution that's as individual as your organisation without the need for a large upfront investment, cutting costs and saving time, freeing up staff to focus on core business activities and growth.



of employees said their business is now reliant on scanning



of employees said their business is now reliant on printing



Scanning can create long-term efficiencies in the way businesses store and share information.

Methodology

This report is based on the results of two online surveys, targeting employees and managers of firms with 5 - 500 employees, conducted by Censuswide in May 2018.

To gather representative data from this diverse sector, a broad cross section of 408 adult employees in either clerical, manual (skilled or unskilled) or graduate entry level positions answered a 21-question survey, while 404 adult managers in junior, middle or senior management, or in director-level, business owner or C-suite positions answered a 20-question survey.

