

Creating digital workflows for the future

As part of the Brother
Digital Transformation series



Research-led
thought leadership report

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Stepping into the future

During the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses have been squeezed as never before. Producing the normal output of goods and services under lockdown conditions has been impossible for many, whilst a lack of demand is continuing to bite.

Small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) are particularly hard hit as they lack the cashflow and resources to absorb the hit.

Business efficiency was always a key goal, but it has become the cornerstone for any SMB that wants to survive. In addition, we are seeing companies having to fundamentally rethink the way in which they do business, with working from home now a necessity. Digital workflows will become increasingly important on both counts. We have reached a crisis point where SMBs cannot afford to ignore the gains they could make through implementing efficient digital workflows.

This report is designed to help SMB decision-makers enhance workflows within their organisation through digital transformation. It is part of a wider series that aims to inform decision-makers on how to best utilise digital technologies within small and medium sized organisations. The reports are based on a robust programme of research undertaken amongst SMB decision-makers in the EMEA region. The series is split up into four reports, each tackling one of the following themes:

- Digital workflows
- Implementing the right solution for your business
- Security
- Sustainability



This report is focused on digital workflows and will explore how digital technologies can enhance ways of working within SMBs. Our research shows that a high proportion of SMBs face challenges related to digital technologies which prevent them from achieving business goals.

Workflows are a key obstacle, with manual / slow processes, time wasted through the duplication of work and remote working capabilities all being significant barriers. However, they are also all areas in which digital transformation can have a positive impact.

We will examine how printing workflow technology can alleviate these challenges. Firstly, intelligent scanning capabilities can reduce the need for manual work, whilst simultaneously bringing workflows together onto a single system. Furthermore, digitalised printing hardware and software allows employees to both access and print documents from anywhere, enabling them to get work done away from the office. We will look at how these technologies have been implemented and the benefits that SMBs are seeing.



The state of digital transformation

Encouragingly, digitisation is a key trend for businesses today, with two thirds of businesses reporting that their business workflows are becoming increasingly digitised.

However, the real potential of digitisation is some way from being realised. Two thirds of SMBs (**68%**) currently complain that manual and slow processes - such as scanning and sorting legal documents, medical records or post - could be automated. At the same time over half (**60%**) of businesses say that they waste time on administrative tasks such as data capture, identification and filing that could be automated with intelligent workplace solutions.

Additionally, without such solutions in place, a similar number (**65%**) are often duplicating their efforts across multiple systems that are not compatible.

This inefficient use of resource is a typical barrier to the revenue and productivity growth businesses have their sights on.

Percentage of SMBs reporting that...



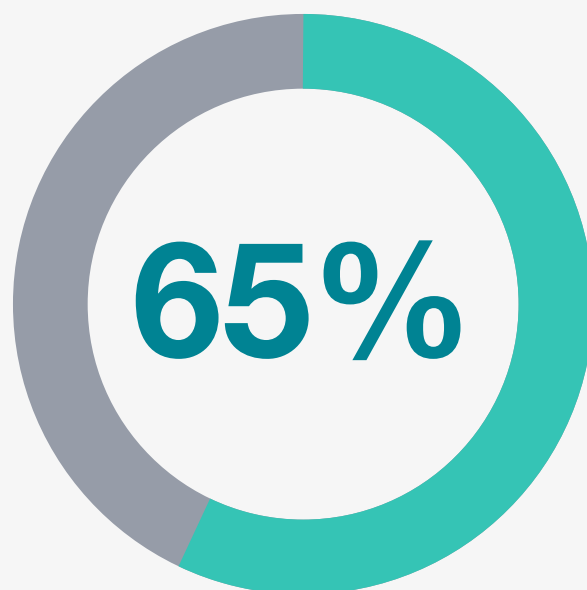
68%

Say they have a manual / slow processes in place that could be automated



60%

Waste time on administrative tasks that could be automated



Say they are duplicating their efforts across multiple IT systems

Introducing intelligent workplace solutions - starting with the printer

Not surprisingly, businesses are looking to introduce intelligent printer and workflow solutions to surmount these barriers.



The key technologies that SMBs are looking to invest in are:

1

Automated identification and filing of scanned documents

2

Character recognition of scans to create editable files

3

Introducing rule-based scenarios (such as if this, then that) which can be constantly improved through machine learning and Artificial Intelligence

4

Integrated third-party systems such as digital assistants

Automated identification and filing of scanned documents are the primary areas that businesses are looking to invest in over the next three years. Business leaders/decision makers have said that having automated identification and filing provides a multitude of benefits all of which add up to a significant productivity boost, including:

- Saving countless hours of manual administrative work
- Helping to reduce the number of errors made
- De-duplicating work done across multiple systems
- Reducing operating costs



65%

Technology that allows automated identification of scanned documents



56%

AI / machine learning workflow solutions for printing & scanning



56%

Character recognition software that creates editable scans



53%

Third-party digital assistants linking to your printing systems

The Brother approach

Brother's solutions drive business efficiencies with ease and are built around your specific requirements for seamless integration within your organisation



Custom UI

Developed and fully supported by Brother, custom user interface (UI) allows the touchscreen control panel of multifunction printers and scanners to be personalised to the requirements of the customer.

This solution provides the ability to edit and create customised workflows that are bespoke to your organisation, streamlining workflow with one touch scanning to network folders.



Custom UI

Barcode Utility

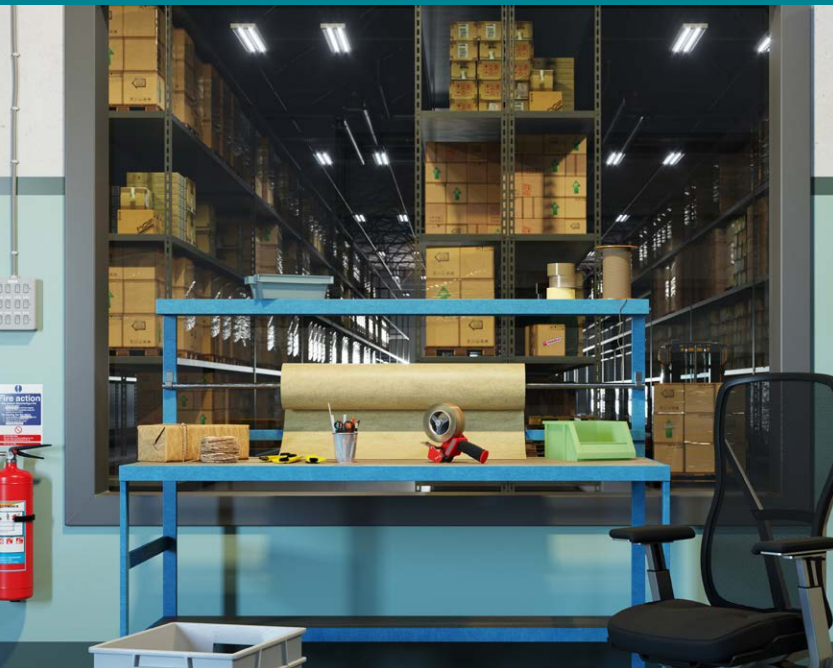
Barcode Utility provides a clear structured workflow, taking the information from the barcode and saving the files to the precise final location.

By automating the process, and utilising the barcode data on the documents, digital copies can be saved consistently with the correct naming, and in the correct location every time, making documents easy to find, facilitating faster processing and reducing opportunities for error.



Barcode Utility

Custom UI



Case study: transforming post room efficiency

In post rooms, traditional processes can be time consuming. To increase operating speed and efficiency a solution was needed to simplify the mail distribution. Brother's Custom UI enabled the business to pre-configure its multi-function printing devices to allow scanned documents to be automatically sent to a specific users email address. The resulting efficiencies helped produce margin growth for the business.

Case study: a simplified workflow for increased productivity

Brother worked with a government agency to provide scanning services powered by the Custom UI solution to simplify their workflow and improve user productivity.

To do so, Brother provided an easy to use workflow solution that enabled any documents to be processed automatically within a workflow tailored to their requirements.



The solution helped to:



Fully customise the visual layout on the device touchscreen



Add custom backgrounds and icons for branding and identification



Create bespoke workflows including personalised 'scan-to' destinations



Barcode Utility



Case study: automation leads to big savings

A transportation company needed to connect their logistics documentation with SAP to enable each document to be linked with a specific process. To fulfil the need of this complex routing issue, Brother were able to implement the Barcode Utility solution to simplify the process, resulting in €15,000 productivity savings per year.

Case study: rapid ROI for manufacturer

A manufacturing company had an inefficient system for scanning job cards, which was time consuming and created backlogs of work.

Using Brother's ADS-2800W wireless desktop scanner integrated with Barcode Utility software instantly made the process faster, more efficient and accurate. The results provided the firm an immediate saving of two working days every month, a much more simplified workflow and a return on investment achieved within weeks.



The solution can help to:



Direct scanned data to relevant folders and organisational processes



Rename a batch of files based on a barcode



Group individual pages into documents for secure archiving

How technology is changing the way we work

Character recognition

Character recognition technology allows multifunction printers and scanners to create editable scans, which employees can easily work on. As well as the considerable time saving gained, employees cut down on duplicated work and report fewer errors, enabling them to focus on greater value-add areas and ultimately boost productivity.

The legal and healthcare professions are leading the way in recognising these benefits with around two thirds (67% and 62% respectively) already invested or expecting to invest over the next three years – and over half of businesses (56%) across the wider commercial landscape have or are expecting to invest in this area over the next three years.



Artificial intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence and machine learning are other emerging fields of innovation, both directly supporting the automated identification and filing of scanned documents. By introducing rule-based scenarios such as IFTTT (If This Then That) technology, which helps all your apps and devices to connect with each other, another step forward is achieved towards intelligently automating manual business processes.

Machine learning

Machine learning can be integrated with third-party technologies such as digital assistants to seamlessly aid workflows. The Artificial Intelligence that powers digital assistants can provide an intuitive way for employees to instruct assistants to take on monotonous and time-consuming administrative work, and also provide helpful suggestions on actions to employees at the appropriate point. As a result of this, the use of digital assistants can free up employees to focus on more important and productive work.

As popularity grows, there is a real risk of being left behind, and businesses that do not invest in these technologies now will likely drop behind the curve and lose out as a result.



Manual scanning

Manual scanning, editing and filing of documents is quickly becoming a thing of the past. As workplaces evolve intelligent businesses are letting their multifunction printer or scanner solution take care of the brunt of the work.

However, having the technology in place is only ever part of the story. SMBs implementing digital workflow solutions will need to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills to make use of the tools at their disposal. For such systems to work effectively, employees will need to be informed about the purpose and scope, as well as being trained in the specific skills they will need. Moving to digitised systems often requires involvement from a wider range of staff, as roles specific to scanning and sorting are phased out.



Workflows for the remote workforce

Digital transformation makes workflows more efficient, but it also enables SMBs to develop non-traditional modes of working. Flexible and remote working practices continue to grow amongst Europe's workforce. On average, 30% of the workforce is working remotely at any given time, a trend that has now been accelerated through the work from home requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Flexible working comes with a multitude of benefits to both businesses and their employees' personal health and well-being. Productivity flourishes by having access to a wider pool of talent beyond what is available within a commutable radius. Absenteeism is seen to be reduced and retention rates improve amongst existing employees.

Yet, many of these potential benefits are being severely eroded by technology solutions which do not fit the working patterns they are intended to support. Focussing on print solutions in particular, eight in ten businesses say that it is difficult to access their printers remotely, to print or scan away from their office, to print from their mobile or to link their personal devices to the organisation's printers.

Without these mobile printing facilities businesses lose valuable time and productivity suffers. Not only that, it can frustrate staff who see it as a sign that they are not being truly enabled by their company. And it can jeopardise organisational security as employees seek workarounds to enable them to get the job done.

Businesses that want to provide employees with access to office-based machines from anywhere as well as on-the-go mobile scanning and printing must recognise that investment is needed to ensure the right support solutions are in place.

8 in 10 SMBs report that they do not find it easy to do one or more of the following...



link personal devices to organisation's printers **(44%)**



print and scan away from the office **(43%)**



access their company's printers when working remotely **(42%)**



print from their mobile device **(40%)**

94%



report a negative impact on their company from challenges in printing and scanning when working remotely

The Brother approach

With Brother's bespoke Managed Print Service (MPS), you are always in control and can ensure your people have what they need, when they need it.

Brother offer comprehensive yet flexible services, built around you. At the core of our offering is our "At your side" support. It means we do everything we can to ensure your business has an effective MPS that benefits your business every day, and we're on hand to help when you need us.



Our MPS offerings are built around:

1

Flexibility

Flexible and scalable solutions built to fit specific customer needs from small business to enterprise organisations

2

Transparency

No hidden costs and a range of reports to clearly demonstrate value, delivering complete visibility of all aspects of a customer print infrastructure and service

3

Simplicity

Straight forward easy to understand agreements, ensuring the customer has maximum confidence in the service being delivered

4

People

Experts in understanding customer challenges, assessing, transforming and optimising print infrastructure and services specific to their environment



Final thoughts

It is time for SMBs to properly invest in technology to overcome some of their most pressing obstacles to productivity.

Manual processes and the duplication of effort are wasting employee's valuable time, which could be spent on more useful and engaging tasks. In addition, working from home was a significant challenge for businesses trying to meet their goals even before COVID-19 - it is even more vital now.

Printers are often seen as an integral but basic component of the working office. However, intelligent printing technology can help address these workflow barriers. Optical Character Recognition and the use of AI for scanning and filing documents has the potential to revolutionise the way SMB workflows are managed. Printing solutions are more connected to the internet, each other and other systems than ever, also allowing employees the ability to work remotely or from home.











Digital workflows are not the end of the story. These technologies must be implemented in a way that maximises productivity, ensures tight security and is also sustainable in the process. The other reports in this Digital Transformation series have more information on these topics.

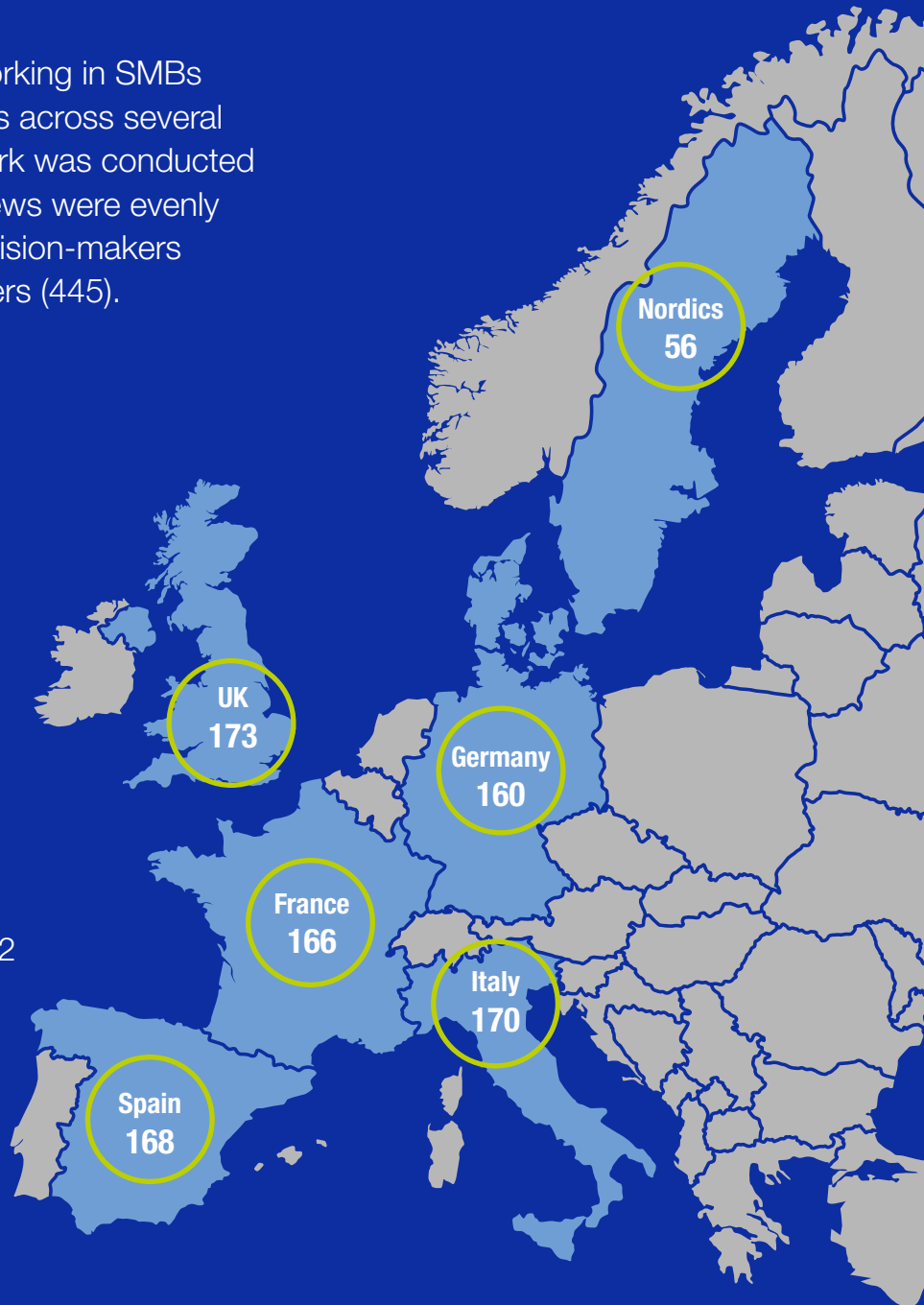
Our methodology

This report is based on 893 online surveys with IT and business decision-makers.

IT and business decision-makers working in SMBs with between 10 and 499 employees across several Western European markets. Fieldwork was conducted across 2019 and early 2020. Interviews were evenly split between strategic business decision-makers (448) and business IT decision-makers (445).

Key industries interviewed:

-  Healthcare - 152
-  Retail - 117
-  Logistics - 113
-  Hospitality - 81
-  Transportation and storage - 62
-  Professional services - 65
-  Manufacturing - 54
-  Financial services - 53
-  Education - 51
-  Construction - 39



Additional interviews were from other industries, including energy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, defence, property & real estate, sports and entertainment.

The research was conducted by market research agency, Savanta.

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