



Digital Foundations: The Role of Document Scanning Technology in Digitalising Government

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Foreword



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This report explores the roles and rationales behind digitalisation, applicable to all, but from the unique perspective of one sector responsible for leading by example.

The UK government published its Digital Strategy in June 2022, presenting IT decision makers across central and local government administrations with a big challenge – but also huge opportunities around digital transformation.

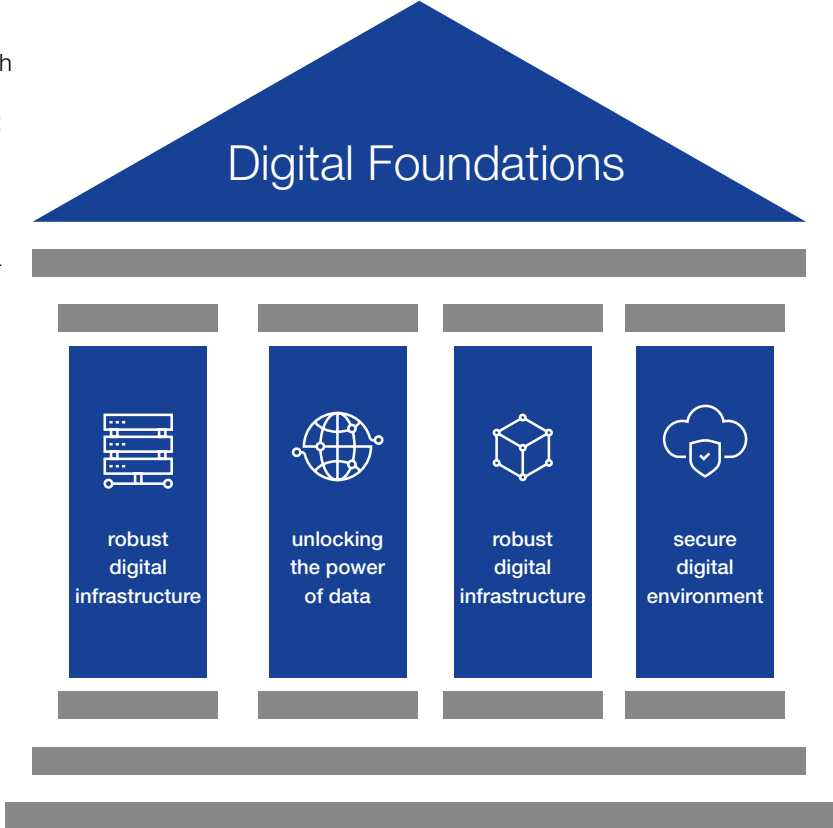
The developing behaviours by which organisations digitise, protect, and optimise information-sharing using technology as part of their digital transformation is critical to understand as businesses standardise agile working and respond to inflation, climate change, and cyber security.

What better way to explore these behaviours than with the UK government’s Digital Strategy, an agenda for digital policy designed for all sectors, ambitiously built and implemented from within the UK government. And who better to explore this with than the engine of the government’s digitalisation, its own IT decision makers, whose actions around technology, security, and sustainability will affect the delivery of services for decades to come.

The key pillars of the Digital Strategy are known as the ‘Digital Foundations’ and form the basis of this report’s focus. The pillars of the Digital Foundations include: robust digital infrastructure, unlocking the power of data, a light-touch pro-innovation regulatory framework, and a secure digital environment.

The success of the Digital Foundations must be built from the ground up, not only within government but across all sectors. As such, IT leaders must take a comprehensive view on the digital processes that drive all workforce activity within their organisations.

The management, storage, and sharing of information is a central part of these systems. Many departments are already moving away from paper-based operations, instead converting documents and data to the cloud. As they do so, considerations around data security and process efficiency are paramount in safeguarding the constitutional obligations of this government.



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Around a year on since the Digital Strategy was published in June 2022, we have a real chance to understand how it has been administered by those within government itself. This report explores how IT decision makers across government organisations are aligning with their own Digital Strategy — including the application of document scanning and other digitalisation processes — as they seek to complete the complex journey to a competitive digital future.

As a world-leading manufacturer of imaging technologies, including document scanners, Epson has a significant footprint on the gateway to digital transformation, and through this report hopes to inspire and educate businesses in the next step of their digitalisation journey.



Executive summary

A year after the Digital Strategy was launched in June 2022, 98% of IT decision makers say they are familiar with the UK Government's Digital Strategy, however, only a third (33%) say their organisation has fully transitioned to using digital processes.

This means that the majority (two thirds) of government is still on its digitalisation journey, and despite the broad understanding from this audience of what this journey entails, it is far from securing the world class and secure digital infrastructure outlined within its own Digital Foundations.

Therefore, the opportunities for IT decision makers to boost efficiency, streamline storage, process information, and generally improve the services they provide are left wide open.



Digitisation

With their own government organisations in mind, 27% of respondents claim digitisation (converting from physical formats to digital) is at a 'very advanced' stage and the rest (73%) say they are 'advanced'. In addition, 99% have confidence that they can fully digitise all employee workflows and processes.



Productivity

Almost a third (31%) of respondents strongly believe relying on paper documents lowers workforce productivity overall. Almost all (98%) say digital documents at their organisation can be quickly searched or accessed by the workforce.



Hybrid working

According to 20% of respondents, the majority (76%- 99%) of employees who need support from IT carry out their job away from the office at least once weekly. In addition, 29% reveal employees are permitted to use approved equipment, including scanners, while working remotely, including at home.



Sustainability

97% of respondents agree that digitising documents, rather than retaining paper-based processes, can help their organisation achieve its environmental impact goals.



Security measures

Four in 10 (42%) place restrictions on document access and sharing for employees working away from government buildings. In addition, 16% of IT decision makers agree that the shift to hybrid working increases security concerns, including scanning and sharing documents digitally.

Methodology

The research was commissioned by Epson and conducted online by Vitreous World, in March 2023. The survey was conducted among 150 IT decision makers working in IT roles in government services, including the Civil Service, ministerial and non-ministerial departments, government agencies and other public bodies. All figures quoted come from this research unless stated otherwise.



Understanding the UK's Digital Strategy¹

In June 2022, the British government unveiled its Digital Strategy. Ministers herald the policy as a “vision for harnessing digital transformation and building a more inclusive, competitive and innovative digital economy”.

The cross-governmental strategy articulates what the government calls its ambitious digital agenda. Six key areas of focus have been announced, covering IP, skills, financing growth, international strategy, and digital foundations.

The policy document states the importance of Digital Foundations being laid as the bedrock of all other aspects of the strategy. It updates 2021's plan for digital regulation, which was launched to govern the growth of technology in the UK by promoting online security, competition, and innovation.

Digital Foundations goes further. It now wraps in digital infrastructure, markets, and data alongside the previous plan's purview. The policy states: “A thriving digital economy must start with the right foundations. Digital infrastructure, data, and a competitive, trustworthy online environment are the core foundations fundamental to the development and use of digital technologies that benefit our economy and society.”

Laying the foundations is an extensive task. Around 30 strands of digital policy are contained in the summary alone, ranging from a desire to create a national gigabit broadband network to the creation of a Smart Data Council and improving cybersecurity. This means IT decision makers in central and local government must keep across the detail as plans are implemented.

Ministers have informed senior civil servants that quarterly reviews will take place to assess progress and make digital decision makers accountable. The Government has also committed to releasing six-monthly updates on the roll-out of the UK Digital Strategy.

With government digitalisation front and centre for the foreseeable future, IT leaders will be keen to introduce efficiencies across departments and workforces. As shown in the results of this study, senior civil servants are well aware of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

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¹ Information derived from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-digital-strategy>



Constructing Digital Foundations: Challenges

Digital Strategy: awareness and adoption

Despite generally being confident about digitalisation, and claiming government organisations are already making good progress, concerns arise — not least around information sharing.

The vast majority of senior civil servants (98%) say they are familiar with the UK Digital Strategy. Of these, almost four in 10 respondents (38%) state they are very familiar with its details.

Respondents are highly confident in their current approach to making processes digital. Every one of them claims digital transformation at their organisation is either advanced (73%) or very advanced (27%).

Their positive outlook extends to ongoing digital transformation across entire organisations. Almost a third of respondents (31%) feel very confident that they can fully digitalise their team's workflows; 68% are confident.

In addition, the transition from paper-based to digital processes is well under way. Just 15% of respondents say they use a balance of digital and paper processes, while 53% state a majority of their operations are digital. A third (33%) go further, saying their processes are now 100% digital.



Hybrid working heightens security issues

95% of IT decision makers within the UK government admit that losing or misplacing data due to using paper has been a concern, while only 8% agree that digitalisation presents more of a security risk than paper-based operations. This is significant validation of the security offered by technologies like document scanners but also the importance of print release technologies for multifunction printers (MFPs).

It's well known that the hybrid working that arose during the pandemic now remains a revised model for many organisations. According to a [UK Parliament briefing](#), in pre-pandemic 2019 around one in 10 (12%) of the nation's workforce did their job at home for at least one day a week. This peaked at 49% in June 2020 amidst government restrictions and by September 2022, changed to 22% of the total workforce, an increase of 10 percentage points from before COVID-19.

According to the Office for National Statistics, today, civil servants and other public sector employees are more likely to have hybrid working patterns (35%) than their private sector counterparts (26%).

All respondents confirmed they are providing IT support services to hybrid workers, with 50% highlighting that at least half of their workforce operates outside of the main office on a regular basis.

Around one in six respondents (16%) agree that hybrid working poses security issues and four in 10 (42%) restrict document access and sharing to employees working away from government buildings. In addition, a quarter are concerned about security risks related to scanning, uploading, and digitally sharing documents.

In fact, confidence in the security of digital processes is high. Fewer than one in 10 respondents (9%) say sharing and storing information in cloud-based digital files is not very secure. This compares favourably to digital files that are available on email (25%), and also paper documents (31%).

Digitising processes is evidently a driver of confidence in the secure sharing and storage of documents and data. That means there are clear opportunities for IT leaders across central and local government organisations to take advantage of new technologies that bring not just efficiency, but also peace of mind.





Building on Digital Foundations: opportunities

Scanning for digital security snags

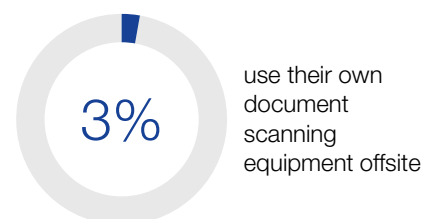
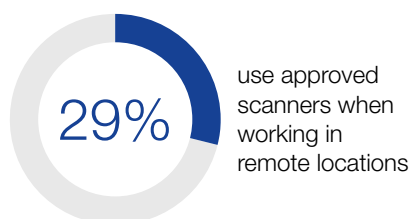
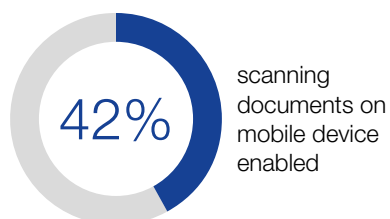
With the security aspects of documenting, storing, and sharing front of mind for central and government IT leaders, 72% say scanning company documents on several types of mobile device is allowed.

This includes:

- Company smartphones 69%
- Company tablets 66%
- Personal tablets 12%
- Personal smartphones 5%

The figures reveal almost one in five (17%) respondents say workforces can use personal devices to scan company documents at present.

As many as 96% of respondents say workforces have access to approved scanning equipment on government premises. A further 42% confirm approved software is provided to enable document scanning on mobile devices. And nearly three in 10 (29%) say employees are allowed to use approved scanners when working in remote locations, including at home. Just 3% state workers are permitted to use their own document scanning equipment offsite.





“In comparison to paper but also other digital devices, respondents believe scanners are a more secure way to save and share information.”

Faster, safer, greener: digital outdoes paper

Respondents regard digitisation of documents as advantageous for a range of reasons. Chief among these are productivity and sustainability.

Almost all respondents (99%) agree that using paper documents takes too much time and cuts productivity, with nearly a third (31%) strongly agreeing this is the case. A further benefit is the convenience of digitised documents. According to 98% of respondents, these can be quickly searched or accessed by their organisation's workforce.

Meanwhile, 94% agree that digitising documents reduces their organisation's CO₂ emissions and can help them achieve their sustainability goals.

In comparison to paper but also other digital devices, respondents believe scanners are a more secure way to save and share information.

A large majority (85%) say digital documents are more secure than paper equivalents. Additionally, six in 10 (60%) believe scanners add more security to the process than smartphones can.

IT leaders are already taking a range of important measures to protect data that is transferred into or across their organisation. These include:

- Passwords for digital documents 95%
- Digital document access permissions 93%
- Scanning encrypted files 91%
- Preventing documents leaving government premises 55%

A focus on the future

With most respondents agreeing that the benefits of using digital documents eclipse those of sticking with paper-based processes, a majority (72%) believe it is possible for their organisation to digitise 100% of their documents in the future.

Furthermore, seven in 10 (70%) disagree with the notion that it's unlikely such a transition can happen in the next five years. All of the respondents believe paper processes aren't too entrenched in the organisation and see that digitalisation is possible to increase productivity and reduce the time taken on many data and information-led processes.

Some employees remain to be persuaded, however. Around a quarter (26%) of respondents believe some employees in their workforce are unsure about switching to digital documents.

Respondents are keen to capitalise on all of the opportunities presented by digitising documents. They also look for a range of key features when buying document scanners for their organisation.

Document security heads this list, with 100% revealing this is the most critical aspect. Connectivity comes next, with 79% saying it is important; while 66% want scanners to be portable.

Further down the scale of fundamental functions is buying eco-friendly models (24%), user-friendly technology (23%), and machines that are easy to maintain (11%).

Recommendations

If you're a business decision maker from a public or private sector organisation — start-up or large corporate — interpreting the Digital Foundations in a literal sense, then adopting each of the four pillars into your organisation may seem out of reach, over-complicated, or even irrelevant. It's important however to look at this as an opportunity to bring your business to a higher digital standard.

Ultimately, all businesses are embarking on their digitalisation journey at their own pace, and understanding how digital workflows are used in your organisation is a good start to recognising how you can adopt digital foundations.

For example, the implications and potential benefits of automating paper-driven processes can first be determined by analysing what documents and general information is used in your business, how, where, by who, and why.

A notable early adopter in the public sector for integrating digital workflows is the NHS. They quickly recognised that the ability to store, search, retrieve, and push patient records into digital processes were imperative for speeding up patient appointments and referrals, and generally standardising its daily workflow.

Thankfully, technological advances mean businesses today don't need to adapt their digital workflow around the solutions available on the market, but rather, can integrate tailored solutions that meet their exacting business requirements.

To this end, Epson works closely with a specialist network of IT hardware and software solutions providers to establish a consultative approach that can support digitalisation across a wide array of organisations, big and small.

Meanwhile, the increased digitalisation standards and the added limelight of the Digital Strategy have created a wealth of opportunities for independent software vendors (ISVs) around customising solutions for forward-thinking businesses. ISVs should look to partner with manufacturers that can offer them open configuration, seamless integration, and technical support, and are adaptable to change.

Sceptics may challenge the UK's ability to align with the Digital Foundations, but technologies like document scanning will continue to play a major role in bringing this to fruition through digitalisation, and I'm excited to see this unfold across different sectors.

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