Why every business still needs a fax number

As the business world becomes increasingly digitised and virtualised, it's hard to imagine that corporates are sti stamping fax numbers at the bottom of their business cards. But the truth is that there are still over 100 million fa devices in use globally today - and the numbers are rising, not declining.

"People often tend to think of faxes as those organ grinders that stood in the corner office churning out paper and making screeching noise," said Craig Freer of Vox Telecom. "The truth is that fax has little to do with hardware and paper, and mo to do with efficient document management and storage."

Businesses should not be quick to dismiss the need for faxes in terms of corporate communication, Freer warned. "If it's critical or confidential - fax it. It's the most secure form of digitally delivering documents and is the only form of electronic communication that will stand up in a court of law. This is because of the point-to-point audit trail intrinsic to the technology which means that faxes are sent with date and time stamps. You are also able to track the document as it travels through tl organisation. Companies are able to see whether it's been deleted, forwarded or read by the person they've sent it to."

Fax servers can be configured to log and archive copies of all in- and outbound faxes. By integrating multifunctional peripheral devices (MFPs) with a fax server, all messaging can be logged - which optimises security.

New fax technologies

Freer said that there are several new fax technologies that companies should invest in: "We are now seeing searchable PI fax technology entering the market, which is exciting. Previously, faxes were static documents that you couldn't search through - now the technology is equipped with Optical Character Readers (OCR), which allow users to search for specific lines or words."

Purpose-built routing and barcode-reading may also be of interest to companies who tend to receive several different documents in batches from their clients. "Think of an insurance claim that has to be processed. The client might have to send his identity document, a damage report, a police report, medical records, forms and letters to his agent - and this usually won't get sent all at once. Moreover, the insurance company probably has thousands of clients and dozens of ager working at a particular office. Keeping track of those documents can be a challenge. Now, we're able to introduce purpose built routing where documents are sent to a specific person based on a predetermined business rule, so that all the documentation pertaining to a specific case is kept in a central location and is easy to find."

Faxes aren't the digital equivalent of snail mail anymore either. "The data is transmitted safely and securely at Internet speeds. Moreover, it can be accessed via mobile platforms from Windows or iOS."

Freer is confident that fax won't be replaced soon. "Email has its place, but it can't replace faxes. There is no other technology that allows you to receive and archive documentation safely in quite the same way. The fax machine as we knc it might very well disappear, but fax - as an electronic document repository - will never die."