

When Making Paperless Decisions: Why Choose i?

By Ryan Rhodes

Document imaging and management solutions typically fall within a second tier realm in the hierarchy of IT process importance. On the one hand, it's fairly important to maintain your documents and other business data in easily accessible formats—both for functional and regulatory reasons—and is therefore one of the most important IT investments to consider. On the other hand, a company's IT datacenter won't necessarily collapse and experience downtime due to an operational hiccup with a document imaging and management solution.

Because document imaging and management haven't traditionally been considered "mission critical" IT datacenter functions, they're often run on secondary company servers or other hardware far removed from the platforms that run the core, mission critical business processes. However, a question some companies should ask themselves—particularly companies with a strong existing IBM System i (IBM i, iSeries, AS/400) presence—is: "why not run document imaging and management solutions on our primary platforms?"

When you consider that the IBM System i platform—or any one of its numerous branding iterations, including the current Power Systems brand—is still one of the most secure

and stable business server platforms in the marketplace today, you have to wonder why a company wouldn't want to house its document imaging and management solutions on that same secure server and leverage its operating system (OS) as well.

The IBM i OS has been and continues to be an outstanding OS on which thousands of companies rely to support many mission-critical IT business processes, such as ERP, transaction processing and much more. There's generally plenty of available capacity to run other applications and processes on the platform. Also, IBM i partitioning capabilities can keep IT processes and applications as separate as if they're running on different servers. So, why not take advantage of that increased security, stability and scalability and extend it to your document imaging and management requirements?

"There's no question that the System i and its operating system deliver an amazing platform," said David Gerber, president and CEO of Irvine, Calif.-based Tallega Software, a provider of information capture and content

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management solutions. "It's been a unique and powerful server since its inception, and it has probably the most loyal user base of any server out there that I know of."

Provided a company has a dedicated and knowledgeable team of System i loyalists on call in the IT datacenter, it makes logistical sense to leverage the trusted platform to run as many business processes natively on the server as possible, including document imaging and management solutions. The System i server and the IBM i OS bring a lot of computing power and functionality to an IT datacenter, and it is supremely capable of serving even the most demanding document imaging and management requirements.

Different industry markets have different record retention needs. Due to regulatory legislation such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), for example, the health care industry puts a higher premium on safeguarding and managing its electronic documentation. Such an increased emphasis on security and stability make the System i an ideal platform on which to securely house health care document imaging and management requirements.

Similarly, the Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) Act of 2002 also requires an increased emphasis on creating and maintaining an extensive database of business documentation. SOX affects some industry segments more than others, but the focus on secure and stable document imaging and retention is still

extremely important. Again, for businesses complying with SOX that already maintain a System i footprint on their IT floor, it makes sense to leverage the security and stability of the platform and OS with an imaging and management solution tailored specifically to run on the server and IBM i OS.

Considering that the prevailing trend when it comes to document imaging and management is one that promotes increasingly more data archiving, oversight and transparency, it's reasonable to assume solutions that deliver in these areas are going to have to be increasingly powerful, robust, scalable and secure, all hallmarks of applications and processes running natively on a System i platform.

While there are plenty of reasons why businesses heavily invested in System i hardware and software may want to consider housing their document imaging and management processes on board a System i server, cost considerations sometimes inhibit companies from going in that direction. This is unfortunate, because those cost considerations are often misunderstood.

Conventional wisdom currently often assumes Windows- and Linux-based hardware and software cost less than System i hardware and applications. That understanding is logically

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extended to include document imaging and management offerings, even though there are System i-tailored offerings that are very cost-competitive with their Windows-based counterparts.

Additionally, while that conventional wisdom may occasionally be true from a short term, point-of-sale perspective, it's important to look at the long term cost savings businesses can realize by hosting applications on a platform and OS that's both very secure and highly unlikely to experience any unscheduled downtime. Eventually, the costs of dealing with outages and other problems associated with Windows-based solutions can easily outpace whatever cost benefits may have been realized at the point-of-sale.

Just from a simple IT datacenter physical footprint standpoint, housing document imaging and management processes natively on a System i running the IBM i OS offers a chance to reduce IT sprawl and complexity.

If your company is already fortunate enough to have one of the most reliable and secure workhorse servers in the IT marketplace on your IT shop floor, you should seriously consider all the benefits you can realize by running as many business processes and applications as you can on that stable System i platform and IBM i OS. IBM i is equipped with strong virtualization capabilities, which can dynamically reallocate system resources—such as memory, disk and CPU—based on specific operational needs,

and can easily manage multiple workloads and applications running simultaneously. These benefits can seamlessly be extended to include document imaging and management functions, delivering a more robust and dynamic solution overall.

A document imaging and management solution tailored to the System i and its OS can deliver everything promised by solutions designed for Windows or Linux environments, with the added peace of mind of knowing the System i—with its world class security, stability and reliability—is the platform running it all for you.

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