

Paper faxing still prevalent among businesses, despite more secure and cost-effective alternatives

We have a voracious appetite for new technology. And when it comes to the ever-evolving tools that help us communicate, we crave the latest devices that meet those daily demands for mandatory mobility and instant communication. Yet in the business world, a decades-old dinosaur bound to the office – the traditional fax machine – still plays a prominent role in how we share information.

Transmitting information via this far-from-extinct vehicle comes at a cost – both in terms of a business’s time and its bottom line. The fax machine, after all, constantly consumes paper, ties up a dedicated telephone line and, quite often, tests our patience and wastes our time. Moreover, significant security concerns come in to play as well.

GFI Software™, a leading provider of security solutions for small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), recently surveyed more than 2,000 office workers in the United States and United Kingdom. The survey gauged the role faxing plays in their operations. Of the 1,008 US respondents, 85% said they use faxing, as do 74% of the 1,005 UK workers polled. Survey findings also included workers’ motivation for faxing and their level of concern about faxing sensitive material.

The independent blind survey of organizations with between 10 and 500 employees was conducted by Opinion Matters on behalf of GFI Software.

In summary, GFI’s research revealed that:

- » 85% of all office workers (UK: 74%) use paper, electronic or online faxing
- » 72% of office workers (UK: 60%) rely on traditional paper-based faxing
- » 27% (UK: 29%) use an electronic fax server solution
- » 12% (UK: 14%) use an online fax service

“85% of all office workers (UK: 74%) use faxing in some form as a means of communication.”

“Close to three-quarters of office workers (US: 72%, UK: 60%) rely on the traditional paper-based fax machine.”

- » 54% of respondents (UK: 42%) maintain faxing is a central part of their daily workflow process with customers, vendors and co-workers
- » 29% (UK: 42%) say they fax because companies with whom they work require it
- » 50% of respondents (UK: 49%) who have used a traditional fax machine to transmit data have been concerned about security and privacy
- » About half of workers (US: 49%, UK: 50%) have read a fax intended for someone else while the paper document was sitting in the machine
- » The majority of respondents (US: 46%, UK: 52%) were unsure whether a contract sent by fax is legally binding; 12% (UK: 14%) say they believe a faxed document is not legally binding
- » 44% (UK: 54%) feel email is the most secure method for transmitting information; 13% (UK: 11%) believe sending a paper fax is more secure
- » Among the most likely reasons workers would not fax, 25% (UK: 24%) say email is a better option; 23% (UK: 23%) do not have a fax machine; 16% (UK: 12%) are concerned about privacy issues; and 11% (UK: 12%) consider the process time-consuming.

“54% of respondents (UK: 42%) maintain faxing is a central part of their daily workflow process with customers, vendors and co-workers.”

A major player

Whether the company employs 10-49, 50-99, 100-249 or 250-500 individuals, a common thread existed throughout the survey: Across all businesses, at least 83% of respondents (UK: 67%) said their businesses make use of faxing. SMBs were also grouped into one of 14 categories based on industry sector. In the US, only “Arts & Culture” used faxing (58%) at a rate lower than 78%.

In other words, faxing isn’t an industry-specific means of communication. From healthcare and finance to IT, travel and transport, faxing remains a major means of communication in most fields.

Network faxing lags among smaller businesses

Interestingly, 74% of workers (UK: 61%) in companies with fewer than 100 employees rely more heavily on the traditional fax machine than their larger counterparts (US: 68%, UK: 59%). So it isn’t surprising that an electronic network fax server solution is used mostly among the largest businesses surveyed (32%).

Why are smaller businesses lagging behind their larger peers? Survey responses suggest a fundamental misunderstanding about the relative security and ease with which electronic faxing can be achieved versus communicating with more familiar tools such as email.

In the US and UK, there’s a popular belief that communicating via email is more secure than using a telephone line (US: 44%, UK: 54%). Nonetheless, a significant issue, especially for employees of larger SMBs, is ensuring sensitive data sent by paper fax only reaches the intended recipient.

Fifty-five percent of respondents (UK: 51%) working at companies with

“Half of office workers (US: 50%, UK: 49%) who have used a traditional fax machine to transmit data have been concerned about security and privacy issues.”

a minimum 100 employees said security and privacy are concerns when feeding documents into a fax machine. By contrast, only 46% (UK: 47%) of workers for companies with fewer than 100 employees cited the same concerns.

And such concerns have merit. Forty-nine percent of respondents (UK: 48%) in companies with 10-49 and 50-99 employees said they have read a paper fax intended for others while the document sat at the machine. Likewise, 48% (UK: 53%) of workers in companies with 100-249 and 250-500 employees made the same admission

A money saver

In addition to more securely communicating everything from patient records to invoices, electronic faxing saves money by lowering overhead and eliminating machine maintenance costs. It increases worker efficiency by making files and faxes easier to retrieve and access, and it even enables users to send SMS text messages to customers and stakeholders.

Summary

Faxing continues to be a primary means of communication for businesses of all sizes. But relying on the paper-based model isn't the best approach, especially for businesses in highly regulated sectors. Adopting an electronic network fax solution eliminates potential for a security breach, boosts worker productivity, and produces substantial savings in cost and time – the hurdles traditional fax machines cannot help SMBs clear.

The surveys of 1,008 US- and 1,005 UK-based workers at organizations with between 10 and 500 employees were fielded by noted polling expert Opinion Matters between Oct. 19-24, 2012.

“Nearly one of every two workers (US: 49%, UK: 50%) has read a fax intended for someone else while the paper document was sitting in the machine.”

“44% (UK: 54%) feel email is the most secure method for transmitting information.”



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