

Digital Archiving for Construction Documents

Let's face it: the construction industry generates reams of paper throughout the building process! Legally, you need to keep as-builts, correspondence, inspection reports, purchase orders, RFIs, submittals, and thousands of other documents for the project close-out of each building you build. They fill up filing cabinets, cost a fortune to store off-site, and you need to keep it all for at least 10-15 years. Is there a better way to store this information than keeping the paper? Definitely! **Digital archiving is the least expensive and safest way to store your information for the future.**

Even in the construction industry, the computer is one of our most valuable work tools because almost every document, drawing, or image is created on it. If a document is "born" digital, it is easy to store that information in a digital format for the future. If a document is not created on the computer or if it is received in a paper format, it can be scanned to create an electronic copy. This is useful in many ways because electronic documents take up very little physical space. Unlike paper documents, electronic files are in-expensive to store and are easily shared and copied amongst colleagues and clients. By organizing and storing digital information, it can be found quickly and easily, and may be accessed while traveling or away from the office. People working in the field can share or have access to any or all documents, which facilitates communication between the site office and headquarters. All of the paper documents generated from projects can now be stored on-site because hundreds of boxes of paper fit on a few CDs, DVDs, external hard drives, on the internet, or on a server.

From a disaster prevention point of view, it is much safer to protect your information in a digital format. Documents stored on a corporate server can be backed up on a daily basis and/or multiple copies of CDs can easily be made. Paper archives may be misfiled, damaged, or lost because there is usually only one copy of the document; plus, paper deteriorates. The paper information is fragile in a physical sense because it could be destroyed in a fire, flood, or get stolen and then the information is totally lost forever.

From a legal construction perspective, scanned and "read-only" documents are acceptable in a court of law as the archived copy. The laws do vary from state to state and from business to business as to how long they must be retained, but the laws are quite clear that a digital copy, which cannot be manipulated and is identical to the original, is acceptable. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to hold on to the paper copies once they have been scanned. Also, if and when insurance claims and litigation issues arise, the correct information can be provided quickly and readily for such incidences.

The most important question to ask is: what is more important, the paper that the information is printed on, or the actual information itself? Converting all paper archives into a digital format may seem to be expensive, but it is important to weigh the risk of losing all of the information versus the cost of scanning the information. If you adopt a scan-as-you-go policy, the scanning becomes a routine part of a construction project and the information can be filed electronically exactly as it would have been done in a paper format. Even if you decide to outsource scanning

all the paper construction information at the end of the project, the price is usual minimal compared to the cost of the building (0.005% or less of the total cost of construction).

Going forward, it is important to consider the way that business is conducted in the construction industry today and how information is used and distributed. Scanning paper documents and creating "read-only" copies of electronic documents is the most cost-effective and logical way to store information. It will be not only protected against unforeseen disasters, but it will be quickly accessible and retrievable by many people working on the project. Traditional paper archiving methods are now being surpassed by new digital technology and the time has arrived to accept this technology as a construction industry standard way of archiving this irreplaceable documentation. Old habits are hard to eliminate, but digital technology is the wave of the future and should be utilized to its fullest capacity. **Start archiving digitally today!**

If you would like more information about digital archiving, please contact Vivica Williams at archSCAN, LLC. vivicaw@comcast.net, (443) 710-5700.