



## *The Death Of The Paper Trail*

*A report by WorkMobile, an award-winning  
mobile data capture solution.*



**WorkMobile**  
OUTSIDE DATA | INSIDE KNOWLEDGE

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# Introduction

Adapting to a paperless working environment has been on the business agenda for quite some time – the government set in motion earlier this year plans to be fully paperless itself by 2020.

Constant advances in mobile technology, such as the extremely powerful smartphones we have in our back pockets and the birth of The Cloud, have made it entirely possible to ditch paper for good.

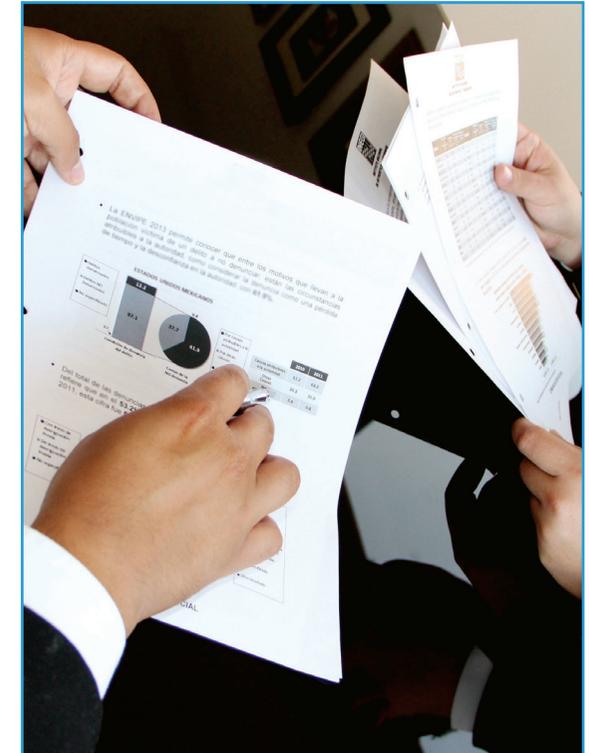
And we've been seeing more and more companies across many different sectors taking advance of this tech to move towards a digital working environment.

In fact, the traditional office that used to sit at the centre of business and that most of us will be used to working in is now losing its importance.

We're now in the era of the 'mobile worker'. Most people now only spend about 46% of the average 43-hour working week in a traditional office.

What was once a fanciful idea for technology analysts and 'future gazers' has become an everyday reality. Digital technology, such as tablets, laptops, smartphones and apps, mean it is now easier to work mobile than ever before.

*continued overleaf...*



But, having said that, not all businesses are utilising the power of this technology that is right at their fingertips. Just 5% of large enterprises have the technology infrastructure in place to be classed as a digital business.

Despite many businesses trying to implement paperless processes into their practices, there are still some sectors that are falling behind when it comes to adopting digital solutions – some companies are still printing off unnecessary documents on a daily basis.

Each worker in the UK uses an average of 45 pieces of paper a day, with two-thirds of that considered as waste – this includes those who regularly work outside a physical office. And shockingly, there are even firms still using fax machines.

And just think of all the security risks and compliance issues that relying on paper can result in. Confidential files could be accidentally lost or misplaced, or an employee could leave important documents out on site when working remotely or on public transport, for example.

For a large number of companies, becoming a paperless, digital entity is still just a pipe dream.

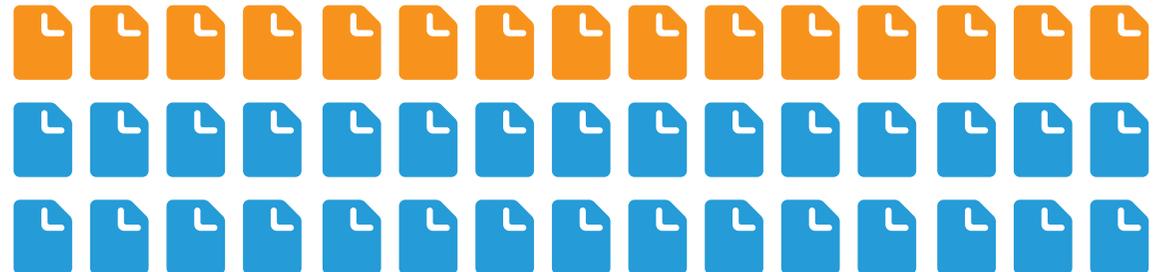
But it doesn't need to be. Shifting to paper-free processes allows businesses to be greener, reduce costs, and enable more flexible, mobile working for employees in today's digital economy.

The good news is that the technology is now readily available to all businesses to make this transition as smooth as possible.

*Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile, an award-winning mobile data capture solution.*

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# About the report

Although the benefits of switching to paperless working practices are constantly being discussed and welcomed, a large number of businesses still fear making the switch.

Whether this is due to concerns around safety, or the cost of changing practices that have been embedded in the company for years, barriers to adoption are holding back digital transformation.

To investigate the current state of digital use in businesses and adoption rates of mobile technology, this report will identify the worst offenders when it comes to using paper and explore the risks with snail mail and physical filing, particularly with the growth of the 'mobile workforce'.

How is the reliance of paper affecting businesses, both commercially and reputationally?

And how many are actually working to reduce reliance on paper to reduce issues and give more employees the freedom to work remotely?

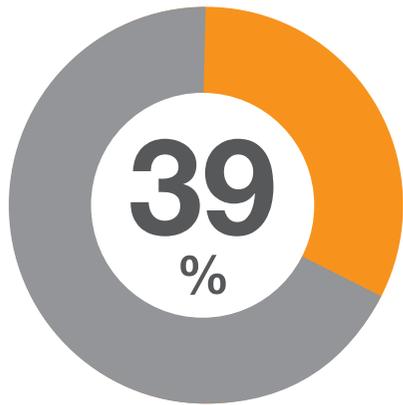
After analysing how digital is fairing commercially, we will explore how mobile technology can help businesses achieve greater productivity, efficiencies and levels of compliance, and discuss the benefits that adopters are driving in terms of competitive advantage over "slow-to-innovate" sectors.

By reading the report, we hope business owners will gain a better understanding about the implications of relying on paper, particularly when they have mobile workforces, and how they can achieve greater efficiencies and lead the way towards innovation within their sector by adopting digital solutions instead.



# Key findings

To gain an insight into which sectors are still reliant on paper-based processes, and the pitfalls that businesses often encounter by working in this way, we asked 1,000 employees that work in various businesses about their companies' working practices.



**39%** of businesses have not yet implemented a paper-less policy to try and reduce paper usage.

The education sector is the worst offender when it comes to relying on paper processes – **80%** of respondents from the education sector said their organisations still rely heavily on processes like paper forms and posting mail. This is followed by finance (**68%**) and trade/utilities (**67%**), a sector that often sees workers operating on site.

The legal sector, which is often perceived as traditional, is actually ahead of other sectors, with **80%** of employees saying their bosses have introduced paper-less working.

Almost a third (**29%**) of all employees, office-based and mobile workers, print out paper documents daily.

**53%** of workers find it extremely hard to file important documents correctly, increasing the risk of this information being lost or misplaced. And **43%** waste a lot of time filling in forms, when they could be doing more productive work.

**11%** of employees have witnessed the loss of important documents, which has resulted in a major compliance issue for the business. And **11%** have seen their business suffer huge financial losses as a result of the failure of paper-based systems.

**5%** have seen other colleagues injured or have witnessed an accident occur due to reliance on paper-based processes.

**89%** of British workers want businesses to invest in technology to replace paper.

Surprisingly, **46%** want their employers to invest in email services, suggesting that many businesses have not yet implemented this basic paper-less procedure.

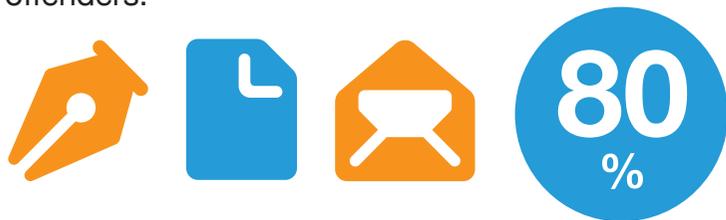
# Education, finance and trade are the worst sectors for relying on paper

With mobile technology readily available, more and more companies say they are trying to go digital - **80%** of businesses claim they are working to embrace digital solutions.

But, bearing this in mind, it's quite surprising to see that many are still not introducing the most basic of steps to reduce paper. Our research found that almost two-fifths (**39%**) of businesses have not implemented a paper-less policy to try and reduce the amount of paper that's used.

This reliance on paper doesn't represent a tech-savvy approach to business, with some companies still opting to use outdated processes, such as paper-based documents and posting mail. For those working out in the field on a regular basis, being expected to rely on paper is not practical or effective. So, which sectors are the worst at relying on paper and have the most work to do to reduce their usage?

From our research, the education sector, financial sector and the trade industry (including construction and utilities) were the worst offenders:



**80%** of respondents in the education sector said their companies still rely heavily on processes like paper forms and posting mail.

This is followed by finance (**68%**).

It's particularly shocking – and even worrying – that the financial sector is still using paper quite excessively. Businesses in this industry constantly deal with extremely sensitive data, that if in the wrong hands, could result in huge compliance issues or losses to the company or its clients. Of course, paper may be needed in some areas of the business – say if documents need a physical signature. But if personal information such as this was lost or misplaced, it could even go as far as to leading to cases of fraud or identity theft.

Trade and utilities ranked third for heavily relying on paper (**67%**). But with a large proportion of workers often operating from various locations, using paper is not the most effective or practical method of document management. Juggling paperwork with no permanent base is far from ideal for employees working between sites.

It's easy for documents to go astray, get damaged or be filed incorrectly. When document management is poor, it can lead to incomplete audit trails, wasted time searching for information, miscommunication or even failure to complete a project, not to mention potential compliancy issues.

Surprisingly, the traditional legal sector, which is often known for being set in its rigid ways, is leading the way in paper-less innovation. **80%** of employees in the legal industry say their bosses have introduced paper-less working. If such a long-standing sector, that hasn't seen much change for centuries, can reduce its paper usage, then why can't other sectors follow suit? Encouragingly, **80%** of people working for government organisations have seen paper-less policies introduced into their workplace too.

# Businesses are risking compliance due to paper

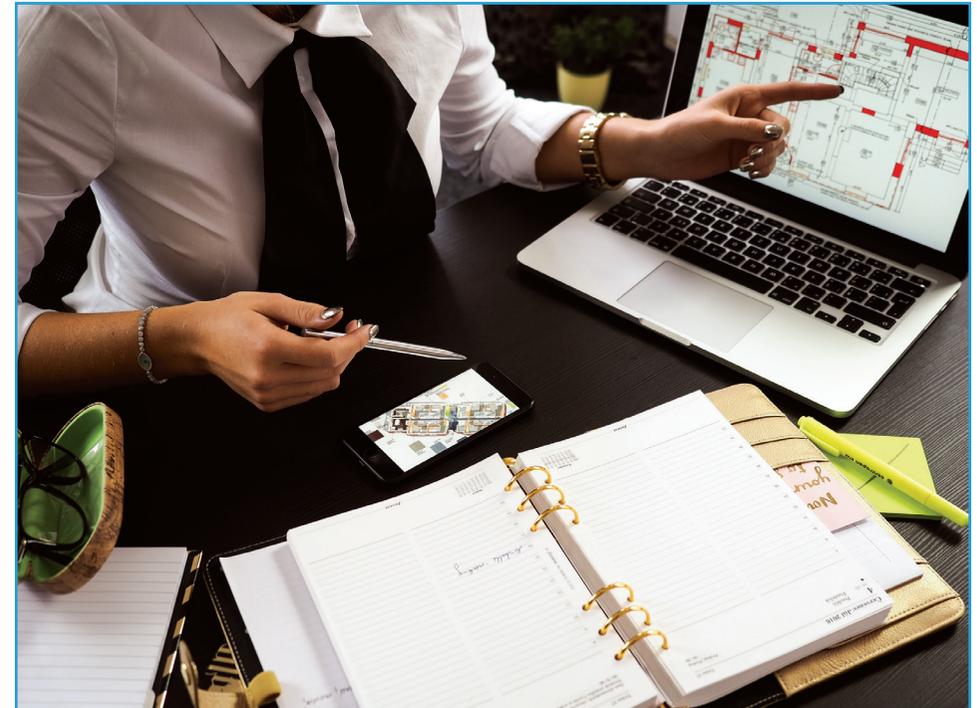
As many companies will know, using paper isn't always the quickest or most accurate method of getting things done – today's business world is becoming increasingly fast paced, and we rarely have the time to wait for important documents to arrive in the post.

Relying so heavily on paper has caused some issues for businesses and their employees, particularly when it comes to working efficiently:

- Of those employees who work in companies that rely heavily on paper, over half (**53%**) find it hard to store paper files and keep them organised.
- **43%** think it takes too long to properly fill in paper forms and documents.
- **30%** spend too much time sending documents to the correct recipients.

But what's more concerning is that some organisations have actually encountered major issues due to their reliance on paper, aside from employees just working a little slower because it takes a while to fill in paper forms.

**11%** of workers have seen extremely important paper documents lost or misplaced, resulting in major compliance issues. This includes confidential documents being left lying around rather than stored safely, and also copies of signed contracts lost. This comes back to the point that when employees are operating remotely, it heightens the risk of paper documents being lost or damaged.



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**53% of employees find it hard to store paper files and keep them organised**

What's most concerning is that **19%** of government workers noted that important documents have been lost during their time with the company. Earlier this year, Weybridge health centre lost a lot of important paper-based patient information in a devastating fire.

Much of this data was completely destroyed and unrecoverable, which could have had serious consequences with doctors not having access to patients' health history. Aside from documents being lost, **19%** of workers have seen vital information filed incorrectly, which has led to losses within the business, with customers moving to competitors with better, more reliable, modern processes.

Getting information back to the office or to colleagues out in the field or those in different departments, and ensuring it ends up in the right place, is no easy feat. But, if information isn't filed correctly and is difficult to find, this isn't going to fill clients with confidence that their needs are being handled professionally or with care and due diligence.

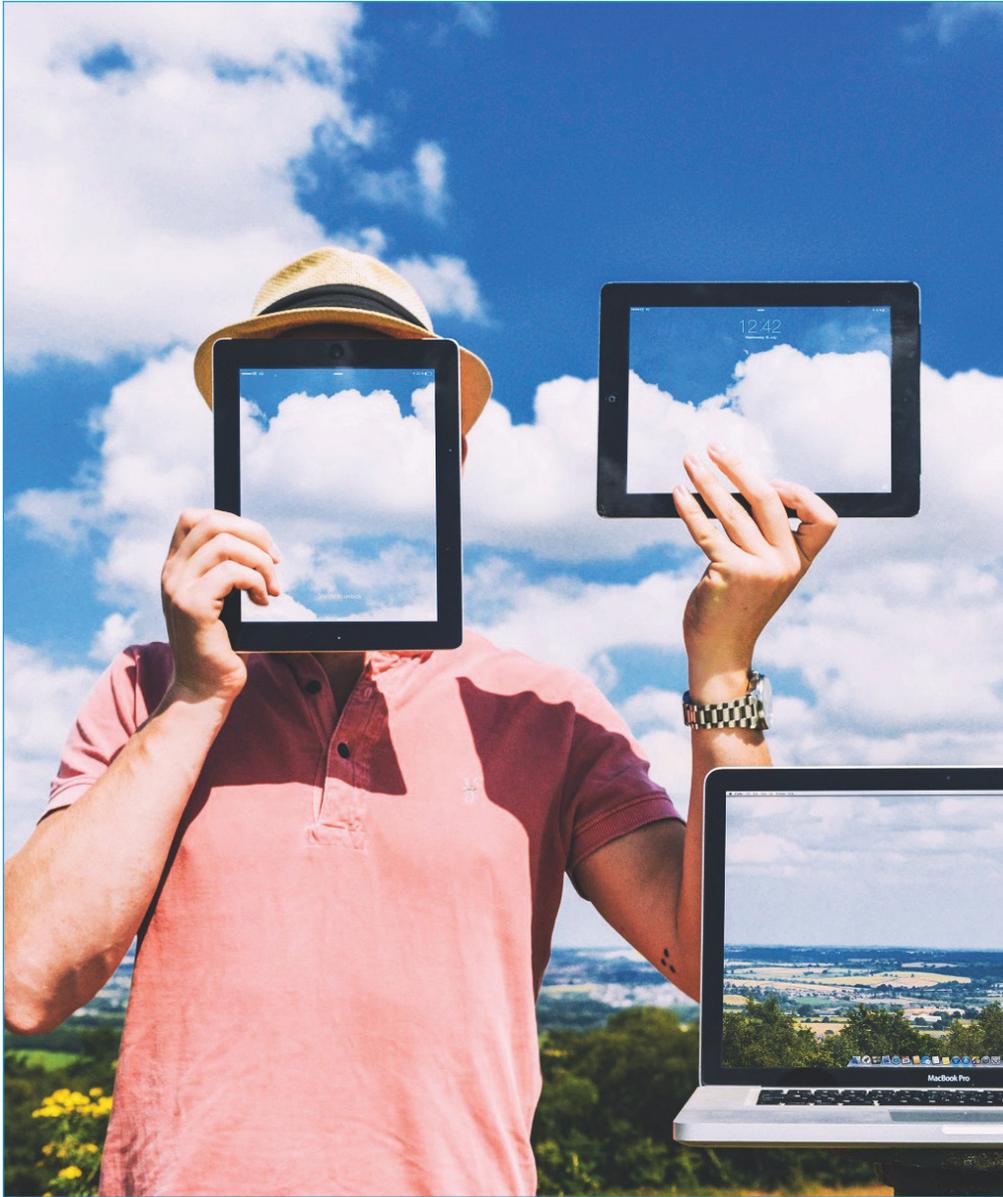
Two-fifths (**20%**) of those operating in the finance sector have witnessed incorrect filing – which has the potential to result in huge monetary losses, given the sector's high net worth. It's one thing for companies to lose important data, but it's another story when employees are injured or hurt because of a reliance on paper. Our most shocking find from the research revealed that accidents have actually occurred due to paper-based processes:

- **One in 20** workers have spotted an accident happen because their company was too reliant on paper, and as a result an employee was injured – for instance, employee handbooks being lost and a member of staff being injured due to correct procedures not being followed.

- The retail sector sees the most paper-based accidents, with **one in 10** employees having seen an accident occur.

A large number of accidents happen because work processes are not followed correctly. This comes down to the fact that many businesses are still relying on ineffective, inefficient paper-based processes that are not being updated.





In our [previous report](#), we found that **13%** of employees said their company's safety handbook had never been updated since they first received it – mainly as it was paper-based, which made it too difficult, expensive and time-consuming to keep it up to date.

As a result, a fifth (**20%**) would have no idea how to report an issue or hazard at work. If employees don't know how to operate safely, particularly if they're working remotely, then this just leaves the door wide open for more accidents to occur.

The documents and information a company has on file are extremely valuable – they can contain personal information, bind agreement terms and outline contract details, just to name a few examples. Therefore, this information must be treated with the utmost care. If it's lost, it could result in a whole host of compliancy issues and headaches.

That signed contract that was on your desk this morning is now nowhere to be found – how can you prove that the client agreed to the terms of the agreement? Or your job sheet with all the work you've undertaken has been misplaced while you were out in the field – how can you prove to your customer that the work was completed?

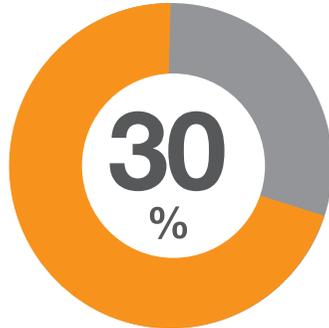
Mistakes like this can cost a company immensely – not just financially but also reputationally. If a company can't manage it's documents properly, then how will it manage a client's business? No one wants to be caught up in a data breach scandal, or to waste money on a company that can't provide the quality service it offered.

If we put the reality of relying on paper into figures, **70%** of businesses would fail within three weeks if they suffered a catastrophic loss of documents, perhaps due to a fire or flood.

# The environment is paying the biggest price

Alongside the costs that businesses incur by using paper, we can't forget the costs it has on the environment, especially when **50%** of all waste generated from businesses is paper-based. On average, companies are spending around **£20,500** per year on document management processes to handle about approximately 5,000 printed pages per month. But, **45%** of paper documents are thrown away within 24 hours of being printed, which is a huge waste that is negatively affecting the planet.

Despite increased awareness around how paper usage is damaging the environment, businesses are still using masses of paper on a daily basis, rather than only printing off the most important documents. Our research found that:



**30%** of workers print out physical documents every day, and **30%** print them out every couple of days.

- Respondents to the survey admitted that huge amounts of paper are often wasted when documents are printed off incorrectly, or there are errors in the information
- Over a third (**36%**) of businesses are stuck in the past and still use a fax machine.

*“Over recent years, there has been a lot of focus on becoming more environmentally friendly as a society and reducing wastage to protect the planet. But despite attempts by government organisations and campaigners to raise awareness around the implications of using paper and cutting down trees, it’s clear from our research that a large number of businesses are not taking note.*”

*“It’s shocking to see that 60% of workers print out documents at least every couple of days – especially when a large proportion of this paper is just thrown away. It’s even more surprising that so many businesses are still using fax machines. Technology has developed way beyond chunky fax machines, and with more and more employees now working remotely on mobile devices, we shouldn’t be wasting so much paper.*”

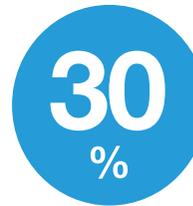
*“Companies must look to introduce paper-less policies to help protect the planet – we all have a responsibility to protect our Earth’s future.”*

**Colin Yates**

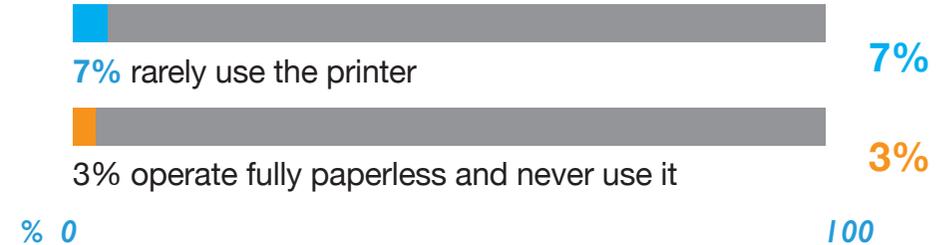
Chief support officer at WorkMobile.



Reassuringly, some employees are trying to cut down their paper usage:



30% only print out physical files when absolutely necessary.



So, how can other businesses take note and help to save the planet by reducing their paper usage?

- The golden rule is simple – **think before you print**. If you don't need a paper copy, don't print it. Introduce a paperless policy to instil this thinking into workers.
- Make sure any paper that is used is properly recycled. If every person in the UK recycled just **10%** more paper it would save approximately five million trees each year.
- Ditch paper for digital, environmentally friendly solutions, such as mobile data capture or online storage of documents. This will also help to save the business money - on average over £2,000 per employee per year.
- Allow workers to operate remotely using devices of their choice, such as tablets, laptops and smartphones. This way, they'll be less likely to print out documents.

# Workers want bosses to ditch paper for good

A massive **89%** of workers believe it would be more beneficial for businesses to invest in digital technology to replace paper. This just goes to show that a large proportion of employees would prefer to work for businesses that are more digitally savvy, rather than those that rely on paper. If companies want to hold on to their talent and ensure their staff are content in their work, they need to be meeting their needs and requests for improved working processes.

PWC calculates that if organisations remove paper from their operations, they could increase employee productivity by as much as 30%.

So, why would employees rather go digital?

- Well, almost half (**46%**) think it would save companies a lot of money.
- **44%** of employees believe it would make documents easier to fill in and store, especially when working remotely.
- Two thirds (**36%**) feel it would reduce errors or documents from being lost when out on site. According to PWC, 11% of printed documents are lost by businesses.
- **35%** believe it would make employees more productive and effective.

Surprisingly, the technology that employees would most like their bosses to invest in is email. Just under half (**46%**) of employees want their companies to invest in email, suggesting that a large number of businesses have not yet introduced this most basic form of technology – despite it being available for well over a decade.

Aside from just email, employees are also favouring more up-to-date tech:

- **44%** would like to see cloud computing introduced into their working practices to make document storage easier.
- A third (**32%**) would like to use mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, to capture and store data remotely.
- A quarter (**24%**) would like to see investment in project management software.
- A fifth (**20%**) support the use of mobile data capture, instead of paper-based forms.



**A massive 89% of workers believe it would be more beneficial for businesses to invest in digital technology to replace paper.**





**Colin Yates**

Chief support officer at WorkMobile.

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*“Investment in mobile technology brings with it a wealth of benefits, for businesses but also for their employees too. Cloud-based services, such as Dropbox and mobile data capture solutions, are currently experiencing a huge growth in popularity. Saving data to the cloud will help reduce paper usage, which will also lead to a reduction in time and money spent on otherwise longwinded administration processes. In fact, [studies show](#) that adopting cloud computing tech allows businesses to grow and work at a faster rate, with profits 26% higher on average than their competitors.*

*“There are even various, cost-effective, digital applications that are now available to simplify the data capture process and allow information to be collected quickly and more accurately than using paper.*

*“Our data capture app, WorkMobile, is an effective paperless solution that can be accessed via a laptop, smartphone or tablet. This solution enables information to be captured in real-time by workers both on or off site and then saved in the cloud. It can also reduce data entry costs and save significant amounts of time previously spent on manual process, such as time keeping or filing documents.*

*“For those who work out in the field regularly or without regular access to a desk, juggling mountains of paperwork is far from ideal. As we’ve recognised from our research, documents can easily be lost, damaged or incorrectly filed. But, thanks to the lightweight, mobile devices most of us carry daily in our back pockets, employees have the ability to literally work from anywhere, at any time, and with the same level of efficiency as they would have in an office with a laptop or PC.*

*“These benefits are hard to dispute when so many companies have already reaped the rewards of switching. But, those remaining businesses that still rely heavily on paper really need to be getting on board with mobile technology to bring their processes up-to-date. Embracing this cost-effective technology will not only help firms to remain competitive and agile, but will also lead to greater compliancy and more efficient ways of doing business.”*



## Conclusion

It's clear that businesses across a variety of sectors are still falling behind when it comes to minimising their paper usage, and are failing to implement effective paperless processes as well as they could be doing. However, the sectors least expected to be leading the way in innovation, such as the legal sector, are actually ahead of the curve.

The legal industry has traditionally been built on paper – legal forms are signed on paper, witness statements are written down, legal documents are often printed off to be checked. Or so was previously the case. If an industry that was so heavily reliant on paper in the past can change its ways, it proves that other industries that often have workers based at different locations, such as construction, can follow in its footsteps.

Those businesses that are still stuck in the past are putting themselves at considerable risk of countless issues, including the loss of important documents, poorer levels of compliance and higher overheads. It is now common for employees to operate across various locations, be this from multiple offices or remotely from home, which makes it extremely easy to lose sheets of paper when moving across different sites.

For this reason, companies cannot afford to ignore the importance of digital transformation – valuable information will be stored much more safely, less time will be spent on trying to fill in paper forms, and workers will be more efficient as they will be able to communicate quickly with colleagues from wherever they are based.

It's undeniable that the digital landscape is expanding at a rapid pace and the technology to remove all reliance on paper is readily available and becoming cheaper to implement.

Those businesses which aren't prepared to innovate and embrace new trends risk falling behind. Adopting technology, such as mobile devices and cloud computing, is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways that firms can become more tech-savvy and should be a serious consideration in order to keep up with competition.

***It's time to accept we're in the age of the digital revolution.***

***For more information, please visit: [workmobileforms.com](http://workmobileforms.com) or call 0161 464 6220***

