

Survey

## The paperless office – fact or fiction?

**How realistic a goal is it for businesses?**





# Introduction

A paperless office is a work environment in which the use of paper is eliminated or greatly reduced. Going paperless can save money, boost productivity, save space, make documentation and information sharing easier and help the environment. But how realistic a goal is it for your organisation? What do you see as the biggest barrier to going paperless?

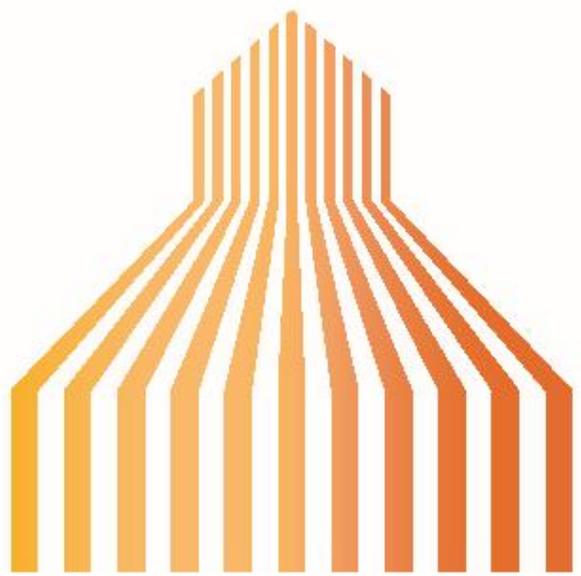
While this topic has been discussed many times over a number of years it is important to consider where Irish businesses are in relation to realising a paperless office. Most businesses will be aware of the potential benefits of turning digital; increased process efficiencies, reduced costs, more transparency and many other reasons but how close are they to achieving the 'Paperless Office Dream' and what are the barriers associated with going paperless?

***Our survey reveals the opinions of businesses across a range of industry sectors about transitioning paper out of the office. We have compiled their thoughts on how achievable this is, what they believe are the biggest barriers and the positives and negatives of turning digital.***

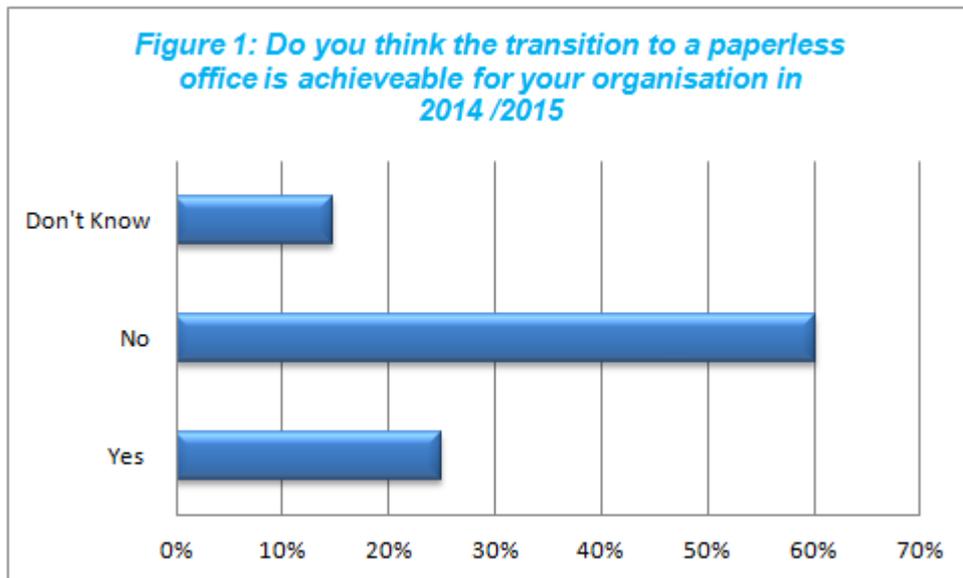
To further understand how well Irish businesses are transitioning to a paperless office we have also included statistics from leading research conducted by our partners AIIM, (The Global Community of Information Professionals). AIIM provides independent research, education and certification programs to information professionals and gather survey results from their members across Europe and America.

# Key Findings

- There is still work to be done to achieve a paperless office. **Just over half of respondents, 60% believe that a paperless office is not achievable in 2014/2015.** With only 25% of businesses confident that they can go paper free in the same period.
- **The biggest barrier to a paperless office appears to be the 'legal obligation to maintain hard copy records'.** Interestingly only 20% cited the 'investment in digital records management' as barrier to digital.
- Possibly one of the strongest arguments for going paperless was based around efficiencies and productivity. **63% of respondents agreed that paper processes hinder productivity and increase costs, with 19% strongly agreeing.**
- **47% of respondents agreed that paper negatively impacts on security and trust** while 40% disagreed with this statement.
- **The majority of respondents agreed that that digital is key to attracting new talent and going green.** 32% strongly agreed and 58% agreed while only 10% disagreed.
- **The biggest negative of paper use was 'limited space' at 70%** while risk of 'damage or loss' was cited at 60% and 'high cost' at 52%.
- **The most popular benefit of going digital was 'increased efficiency' at 86%** and the 'ease of filing and maintenance' at 79%.



# Transitioning paper out of the business



**Figure 1: Do you think the transition to a paperless office is achievable for your organisation in 2014 /2015?**

Figure 1 Overall, businesses felt that the transition to a paperless office was not achievable for their organisation in 2014 / 2015. 60% of respondents believe that this was just not an achievable goal within this timeframe. 25% of businesses stated yes, a paperless office was achievable, while 15% didn't know.

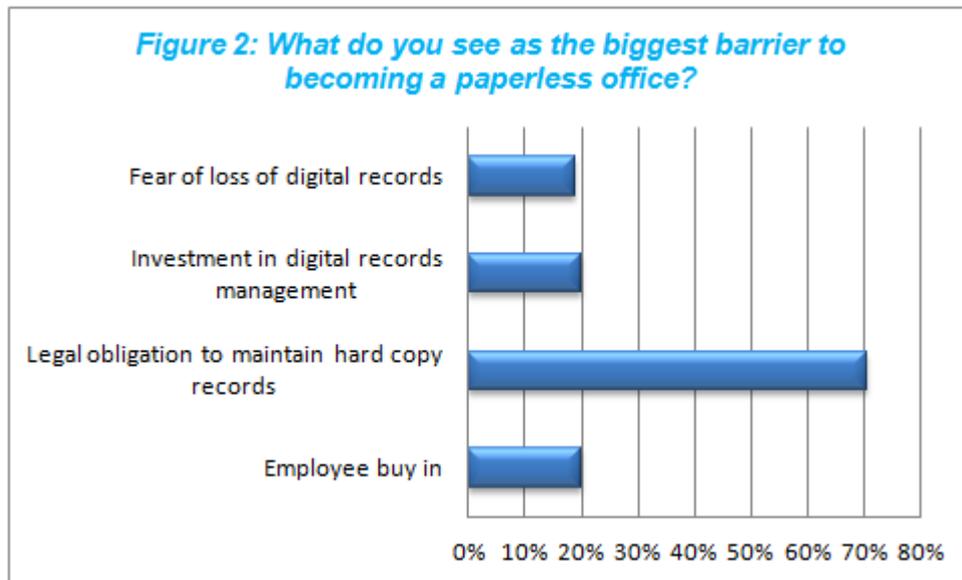
From a high level perspective the transition to paperless seems to correspond in many ways with our European and American counterparts. **According to a recent study by AIIM 'nearly half of organisations have made only a 5% progress towards processes that could be paper free. 18% haven't even started yet.'** \* AIIM, *The Paper Free Office – dream or reality? Whitepaper 2012.*

**Figure 2: What do you see as the biggest barrier to becoming a paperless office?**

Figure 2 When we asked respondents what they saw as the biggest barrier to becoming a paperless office unsurprisingly the 'legal obligation to maintain hard copy records' was cited as the most popular reason at 71%. 'Employee buy in' was at 20%, 'the investment in digital records management' was also at 20% and the 'fear of loss of digital records' were also chosen as barriers to going paperless.

Other comments respondents made were more focused on internal business change and the fear of new processes, transitioning away from traditional processing methods staff are accustomed to which may affect the changeover. Employees becoming familiar and confident with a new system or process must be factored in to this change. While it is

important to get employee 'buy in', adequate training and transparency should enable staff to move forward and see the advantages of the paperless approach. Another response was the 'fear factor' and the apprehension of not maintaining a paper copy of a record or document as evidence which is critical for some businesses. The 'audit trail' issue was also documented as a factor in a recent AIIM industry watch report. 'As regards benefits of paper-free processes, 'better records for audit trail or compliance' beat 'faster response and improved productivity'. Better monitoring of process status and workflow was also a significant benefit.'\*AIIM, *Winning the Paper Wars*, industry watch report, 2013.



### How do you feel about the following statements?

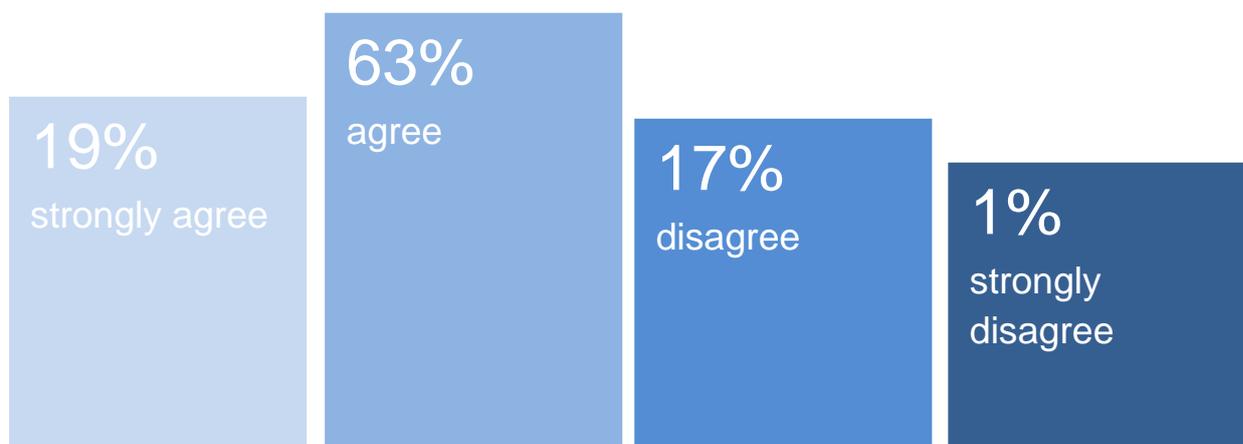
- Paper processes hinder productivity and increase costs – Figure 3
- Paper negatively impacts on security and trust – Figure 4
- Digital is key to attracting new talent and going green – Figure 5

### Figure 3: Paper processes hinder productivity and increase costs

Figure 3

The overall result was that the majority of businesses were in agreement - paper processes hinder productivity and increase costs. 19% strongly agreed and 63% agreed while 17% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed with the statement. This result would suggest that while some businesses may not be practicing a paper free approach they believe it to be more efficient and inexpensive than a paper based one.

*'Driving paper out of the process would improve speed of response to customers, organisations and staff by 4 times. Those with more experience of paper-free processes report an even greater speed, up to 4.6 times.'*



According to the same study by AIIIM, **‘Driving paper out of the process would improve the productivity of process staff by 29.7%, rising to 35.4% for those with more experience.’** \*AIIIM, Winning the Paper Wars, industry watch report, 2013.

**Figure 4: Paper negatively impacts on security and trust**

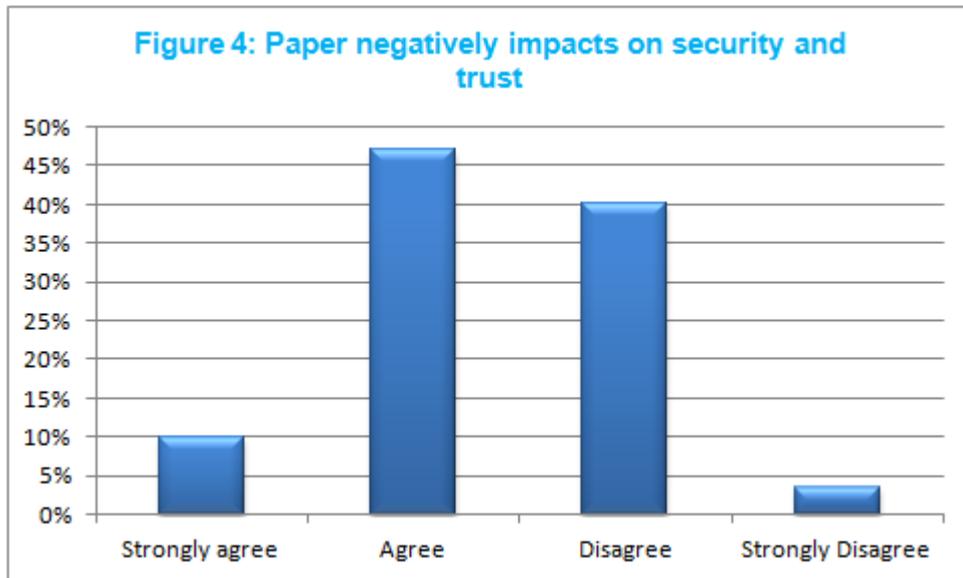


Figure 4

While respondents agreed that paper processes hinders productivity and increases costs they were less likely to agree that it negatively impacts on security and trust. The results here were quite divided here with 10% strongly agreeing and 47% agreeing versus 40% disagreeing and 3% strongly disagreeing.

Figure 5

Possibly the most convincing argument for the paperless office is the belief that digital is key to attracting new talent and going green. Unsurprisingly less paper can usually be associated with a more effective environmental policy. Less paper means less ink used from printer cartridges, less office paper and less duplicate copies of the same document. 32% strongly agreed and 58% agreed with this statement while only 10% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed with this statement.

**Figure 5: Digital is key to attracting new talent and going green**

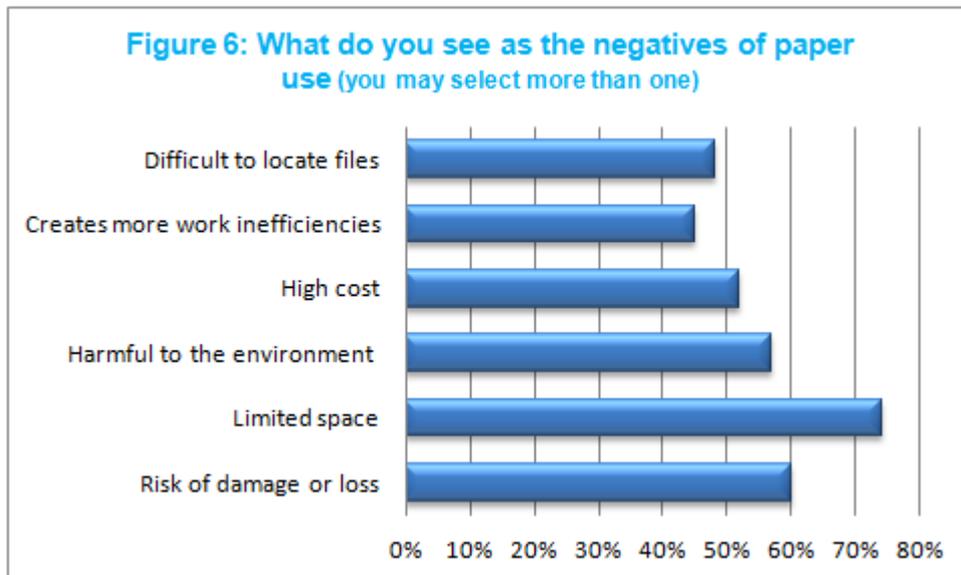
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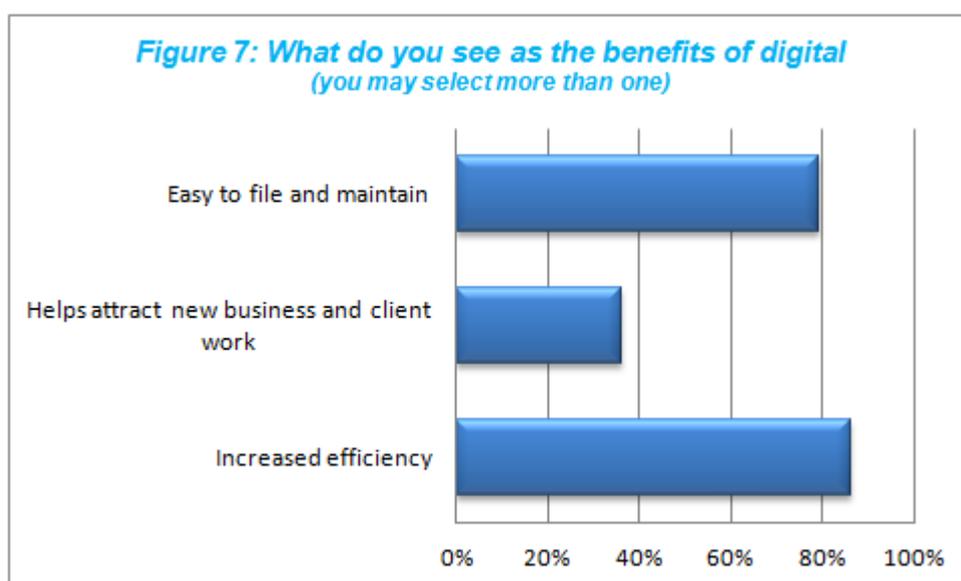


**Figure 6: What do you see as the negatives of paper use (you may select more than one)**

Figure 6

***In response to the main negatives of paper use, ‘limited space’ was at 70% and ‘risk of damage or loss’ was at 60%, ‘harmful to the environment’ was at 57%, ‘high cost at 52%’, ‘difficult to locate files’ at 48% and ‘creates more work inefficiencies’ at 45%.***

Other comments include; the cost of printing and photocopying, the security issue in the fact that documents can be easily copied without being tracked and the maintenance and filing of paper. An AllIM report states ‘physical signatures and legal admissibility are given as the biggest paper-free concerns amongst staff with legal counsel and finance being the most resistant.’\*AllIM Winning the Paper Wars



**Figure 7: What do you see as the benefits of digital (you may select more than one)**

Figure 7

The most popular reason stated as to the benefits of going digital was 'increased efficiency' at 86%. This was followed closely by the 'ease of filing and maintenance' at 79% while helping to attract new business and client work'. Other reasons provided included: clearer desks, increased staff morale, easier to access detail when searching, instant access to files with no postage.

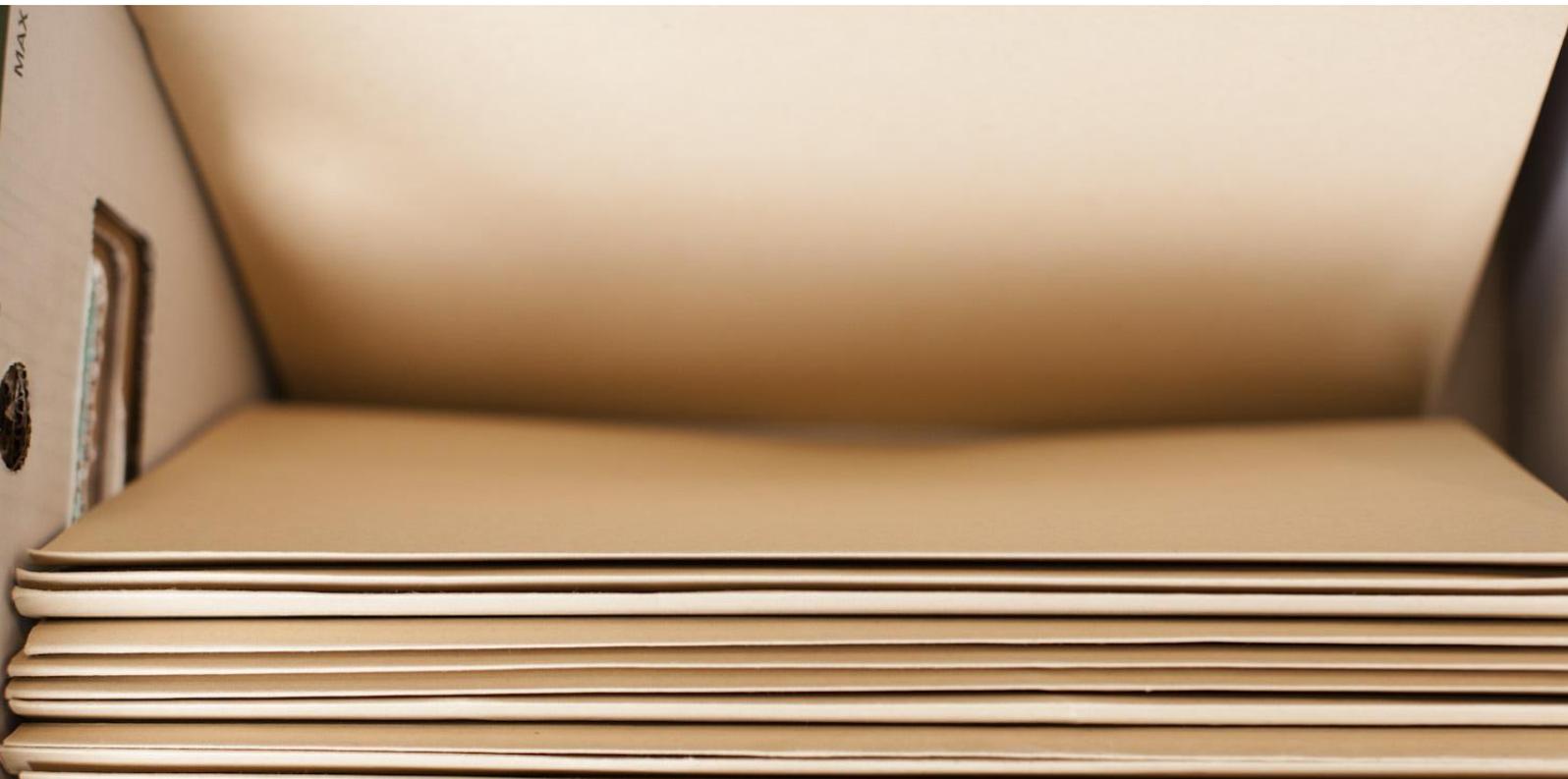
***'Digital offers an easy way to access files from any part of the company making it easy to send and receive files from anywhere.'***

AllIM research, 'two thirds of those adopting paper-free processes report a payback within 18 months. 50% see payback in a single 12 month budgeting period. Speed of data availability and keeping their paper out of the process are given as the biggest advantages of mobile capture, followed by better data accuracy and fewer lost or incomplete forms. \* AllIM Industry Watch Report, The Paper Free Office – Dream or Reality?



# Recommendations

- Audit your processes to see where paper slows throughput, adds process steps or restricts transparency and reporting.
- In particular, examine your customer response mechanisms to see if physical mailings or paper processing are slowing things down, restricting visibility or paralleling electronic communications paths.
- Look at how physical handling of incoming mail site-by-site might be better centralised processed and where they might be located.
- Evaluate the latest technology for capturing data from forms and invoices and look to process a higher proportion of your documents automatically.
- Consider using a bureau especially if you are concerned about capital outlay, fluctuating volumes and overall risk.
- Aim to scan documents or capture data as close to the source as possible – in the branch office, on the shop floor or at the customer's premises.
- Brainstorm how the capabilities of modern mobile devices – portable scanners, smartphones, tablets and specialist devices could transform your processes by eliminating elapsed time, lost forms, poor data and re-keying.
- Pick just one of these areas and chances are it will slow a good enough return on its own with other applications and benefits enhancing the potential return.





### **About AIIM**

AIIM ([www.aiim.org](http://www.aiim.org)) has been an advocate and supporter of information professionals for nearly 70 years. The association's mission is to ensure that information professionals understand the current and future challenges of managing information assets in an era of social, mobile, cloud and big data. Founded in 1943, AIIM builds on a strong heritage of research and member service. Today, AIIM is a global, non-profit organisation that provides independent research, education and certification programs to information professionals. AIIM represents the entire information management community, with programs and content for practitioners, technology suppliers, integrators and consultants.

### **References:**

- AIIM Industry Watch Report, The Paper Free Office – Dream or Reality, Betsy Fanning and Bryant Duhon.
- AIIM Industry Watch Report, Winning the Paper Wars – Capture the content and mobilise the process troops, Doug Miles, Head of AIIM Market Intelligence Division.
- AIIM Handbook – The Paper-free Process Revolution Handbook, Doug Miles, Head of AIIM Market Intelligence Division.

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## About Kefron

*Kefron are The Document and Information Management People.*

We simplify the document and information management world for our customers, taking the pain out of your information processing issues, by offering a complete document management lifecycle service.

Our business exists to improve how you manage your information, with our expertise supporting both physical document storage and digitisation of your information.

We create workflows and solutions through our expertise which enhance efficiency and ultimately, productivity. ***We can make a real difference to your business. This is what drives us.***



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