ACCOUNTANT TRAINING NETWORK

Less Paper vs. Going Paperless:
A Pain-Free Implementation Strategy

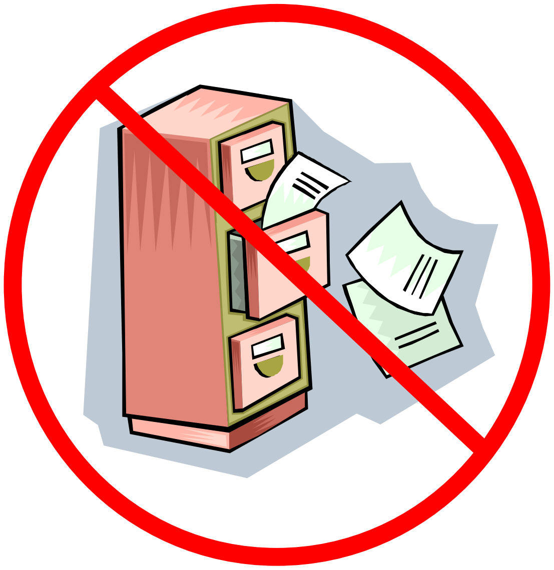


Table of Contents

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE 4
Typographic Conventions
Terminology

INTRODUCTION 5
The “Less Paper” Office
Benefits of the “Less Paper” Office

START SMALL 7

KEEP IT SIMPLE 9
Begin With Printing

SCANNING COMES SECOND 11
What to Scan & When
Scanning Strategies

EVOLVE 17

CONCLUSION 18

APPENDIX: USING MULTIPLE MONITORS 19

How to Use This Guide

This section is designed to give you an understanding of the conventions and terminology used in this guide. These reference materials are designed to complement the information presented by the instructor(s) and not act as a stand-alone training guide. There are areas to take notes and exercises at the end of each chapter that should also supplement the information presented.

Typographic Conventions

We use certain typographic conventions throughout this manual. These conventions should help you use this manual more efficiently. The following is a general guide identifying each convention that may be presented:

CONVENTION	MEANING
F	Represents notes or other important information.
P	Indicates tips or other timesaving information.
&	Signifies the beginning of the chapter exercises.
[Text in brackets]	Generally used to indicate keystrokes.
📁	File folder
📄	PDF (Portable Document Format) file

Terminology

Some of the terms used in this guide are program specific, and some are related to the technology used. Use the following table as a reference for any necessary definitions:

TERM	MEANING
Right-click	Click the secondary mouse button.
TWAIN	A generic device driver that is required to be compatible with many software applications.
WIA	Windows Image Acquisition (WIA) is a new standard for scanner drivers to be written.

Introduction

In this section, you will learn:

s The difference between a “less paper” office and a “paperless” office workflow

- The benefits of a “less paper” office
- How to use a tiered approach to implementation

The “Less Paper” Office

When considering the benefits of going “paperless,” you will generally use one of two ways to implement a transition strategy, either a paperless filing system or a completely paperless workflow. A paperless filing system is simply an electronic system used for storing documents. It can increase your productivity, reduce expenses, and eliminate the need for storage space. It is simple to implement, easy to adapt to, and relatively inexpensive. We refer to this as the “Less Paper” Office.

The more robust of the two paperless strategies is paperless workflow. Paperless workflow incorporates a paperless filing system; however in a paperless workflow environment, all work is also performed electronically. In this environment, the benefits of a paperless filing system are all achieved, but usually at a magnified level. To realize these increased benefits requires more planning and a significant commitment, but the accountants we spoke with who have implemented a paperless workflow all felt the added benefits outweighed the costs.

Benefits of the “Less Paper” Office

The five most talked about benefits of going paperless (by accountants we’ve interviewed) are:

- Increasing productivity
- Eliminating storage space
- Reducing expenses
- Working remotely
- Enhanced customer service

Probably the most compelling of these benefits is the increase in productivity. Several accountants felt the increase in productivity that occurred as part of going paperless was the largest benefit of the whole paperless process. Managing your documents in a traditional paper environment can be a time consuming process. It pulls you away from projects you are working on and occupies your time with less important tasks like searching through files, looking for lost documents, faxing, or mailing. In a paperless office all your documents are only a few clicks of the mouse away, greatly increasing productivity.

Eliminating storage space is another great benefit of the paperless office. It may be difficult for you to imagine replacing your file cabinets, or even entire file rooms, but it is happening more and more often. Examples include one accountant that was able to shred 93 boxes of documents and eliminate the need to rent a storage unit.

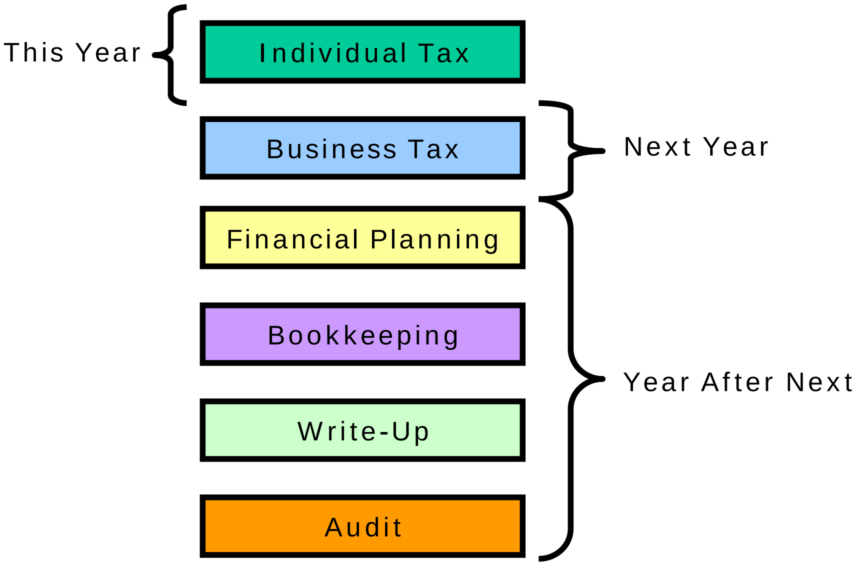
Eliminating the costs associated with paper generating processes can also be a benefit of going paperless. Many accountants reported saving money on office supplies, administrative costs, and storage costs. Examples include one accountant that received a call from his office supply rep who was concerned that his business had dropped off because the accountant was no longer placing the usual number of orders.

A paperless office can also enhance your experience when working remotely, and for many of the accountants we spoke with this was a primary reason for going paperless. One accountant explained how nice it is to no longer have to carry files around with him when he wants to work from home. For others, going paperless meant they could work remotely on a more permanent basis. For example, one spends his summers in Maine away from his New Orleans based office; the other hires seasonal help that works completely remotely during the tax season. In both of these cases, it was essential that documents could be delivered and received electronically.

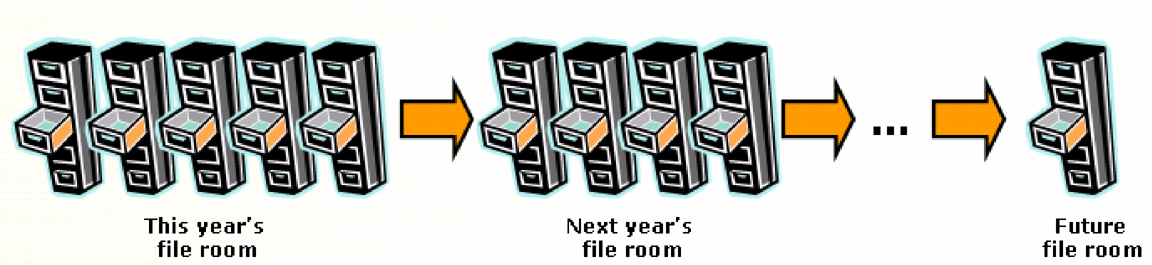
Finally, a paperless office can significantly enhance your ability to provide better customer service to your clients. Examples include accountants that commented on how amazed customers were with how quickly document requests could be filled. In many instances a document could be e-mailed or faxed to a client before they hung up the phone. Your clients may also feel that a paperless office is a more sophisticated office. One accountant said that clients often commented on how high-tech his operation looked after sitting down at his desk and seeing the two monitors hooked up to his computer.

Start Small

For many practitioners, the idea of “going paperless” is overwhelming. The concept of using a tiered implementation strategy is that it allows you to modify a few routines at a time, instead of overhauling your entire workflow process. Begin your paperless transition with a well-defined part of your workflow, such as Individual Tax. As you get comfortable with your new procedures in that part of your business, you can then expand to other parts much more easily.


This Year
Individual Tax
Business Tax
Next Year
Financial Planning
Bookkeeping
Write-Up
Audit
Year After Next

Don’t worry about addressing prior-year documents. If you really want to do this, save it for a slow time of year. Over time, your database will grow and your file cabinets will shrink. Remember, this is an evolution, not a revolution.


This year’s file room
Next year’s file room
...
Future file room

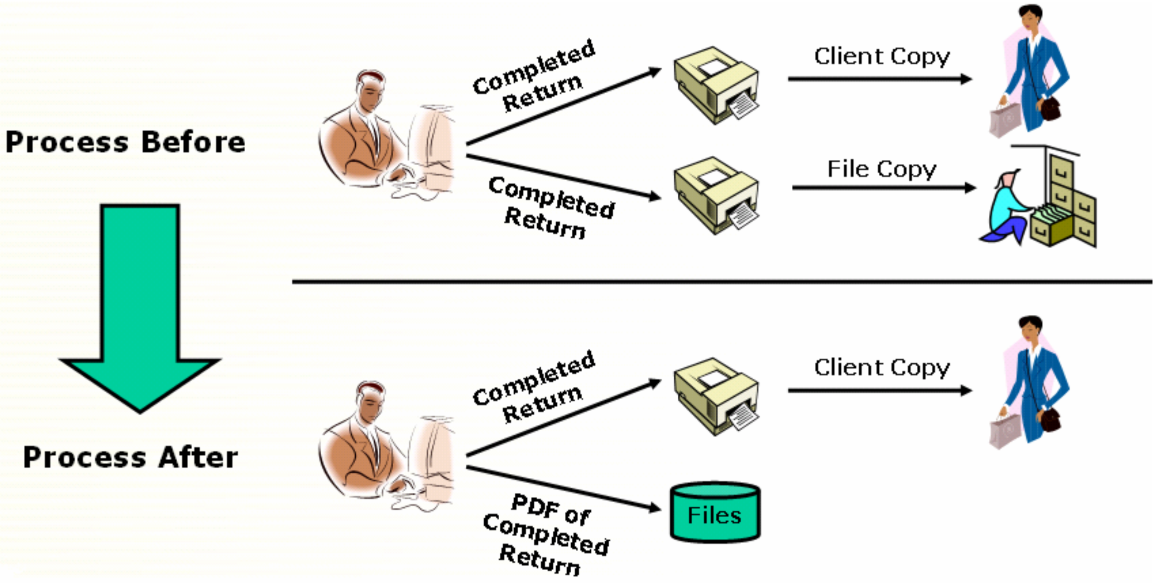
Keep it Simple

Getting documents into electronic format happens in two ways:

1. By printing from a software application using an electronic print format, such as Adobe PDF, or TIF, instead of a physical printer.
2. By scanning paper documents into your computer and storing them in electronic format (again, PDF or TIF, for example).

Begin With Printing

Imagine what your workflow would be like if your office did not have a printer. Not easy to do, and it is not even a reasonable expectation that you would ever be able to work without a printer. However, the first step towards your "less paper" office involves significantly reducing the amount of paper you are using. Anything that you would normally print and put into a file cabinet, or otherwise store, can be filed electronically. This step alone will significantly reduce the amount of paper that you use in your workflow and store in files.

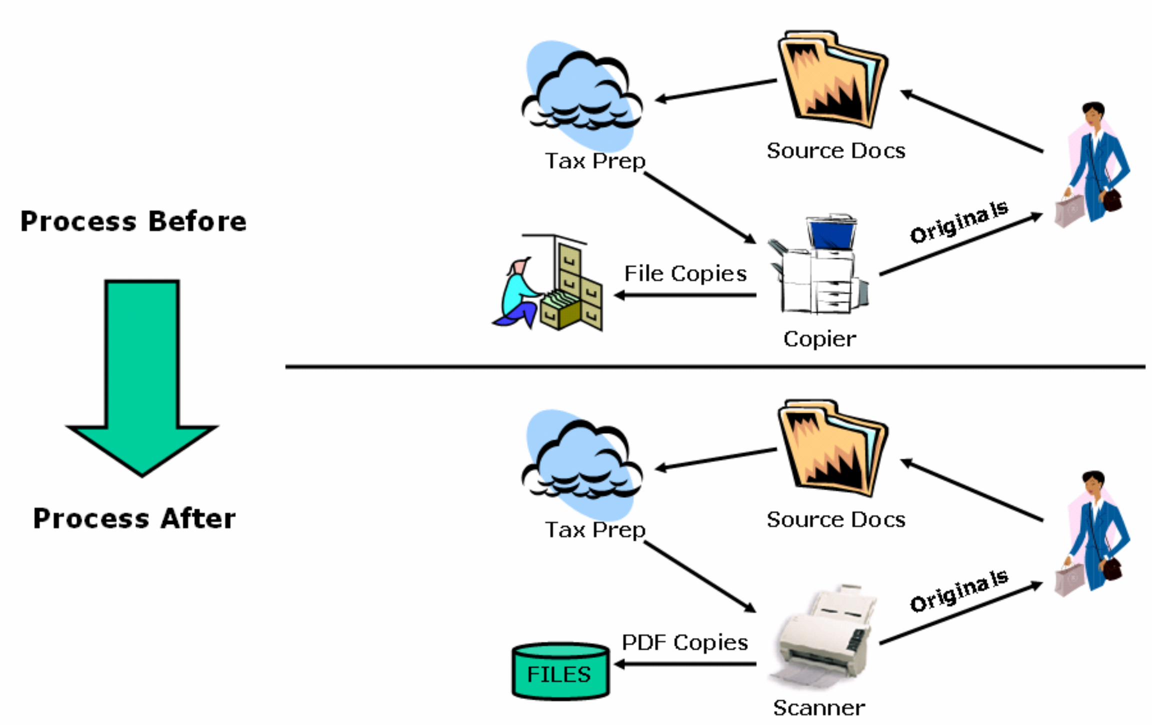

Process Before
Completed Return
Client Copy
Completed Return
File Copy
Process After
Completed Return
Client Copy
PDF of Completed Return
Files

Printing file copies (PDF or other) should NOT be an additional step in this process – in fact, it should replace a step or two. Automation is the key to efficiency so make sure that you've got the right software solution and the right process in place.

Note: If you have "soft copies" (electronic versions) of documents, you can also just store them in your document management system. You may still wish to store PDF versions to ensure integrity.

Scanning Comes Second

If you already have a scanner, great! This phase will be easy for you to understand and implement, but if you don't, that's okay. Once you have mastered the storing and filing routines, you can then "go to the next level" and begin scanning documents not currently in electronic format or that you receive from clients, such as source documents. This process is contingent on having the right equipment and understanding the "ins & outs" of scanning.



Process Before
Process After
Tax Prep
Source Docs
Originals
File Copies
Copier
Tax Prep
Source Docs
Originals
PDF Copies
FILES
Scanner

Some of the difficult decisions in this area also relate to "what to scan" and "when to scan," and this section will provide some guidance that should help with these decisions in your office.

What to Scan & When

Determining what to scan may be a function of what you might make paper copies of in your office, or what source documents you already store. This may also be a function of when you scan source documents. Once you have determined exactly what documents you want to keep on file, you'll need to determine when the scanning should occur. You might choose to scan source documents as soon as you get them, which helps facilitate on-screen tax review. Or, you may decide to scan documents after the return has been prepared, allowing you to make sure you have everything before you scan the documents and return them to the client. Whichever way you decide, be sure to keep it consistent.

You should also only scan items you deem necessary, and be sure the source material is properly ordered. To ensure this, you may want to consider having whoever prepares the return do the scanning. We have spoken to accountants who use administrative personnel to scan documents, but this was usually only done if the return was sorted beforehand by someone who knows the procedures, or if the administrative person knew exactly what was needed and how to order the documents.

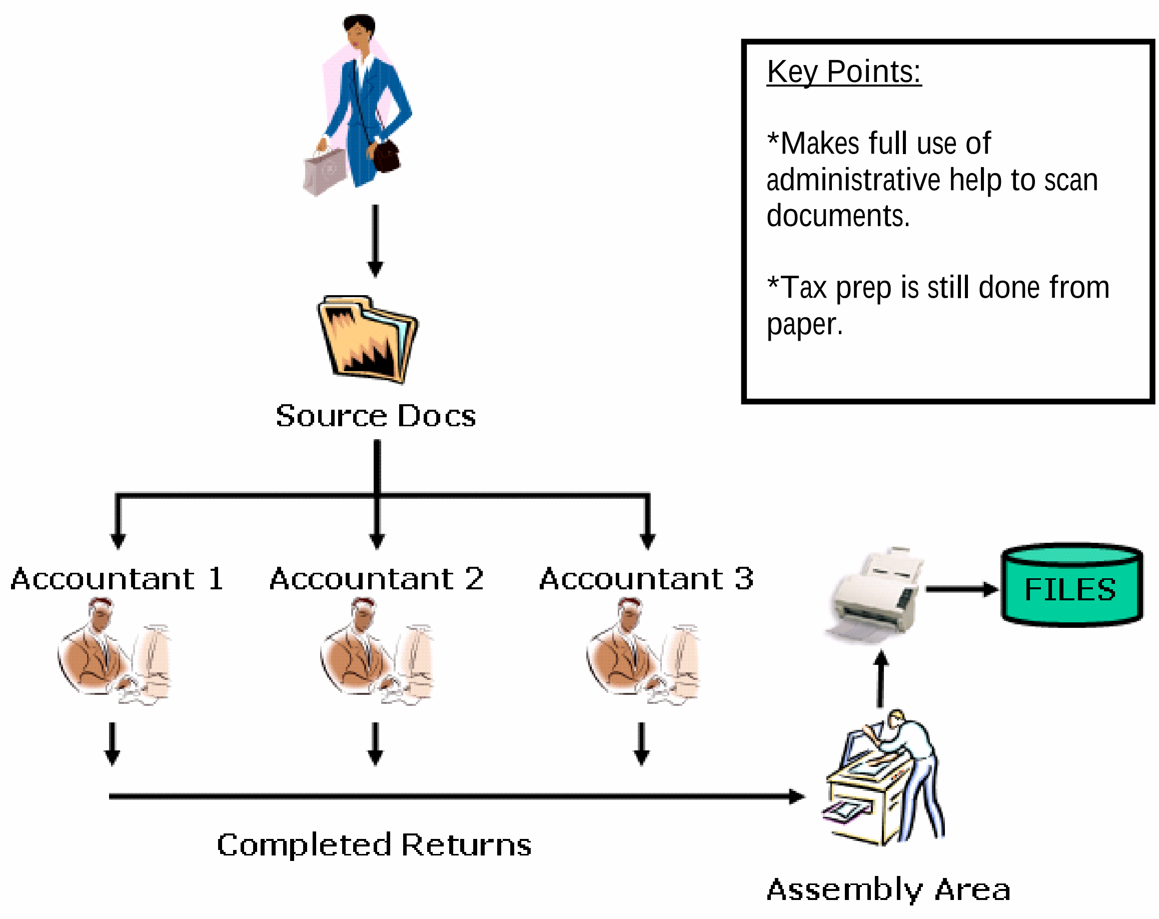
Scanning Strategies

Your workflow will determine what scanning process is right for you. There are typically two different ways the scanning process is handled - centralized, with one scanner, or localized (decentralized), using multiple scanners.

Centralized Scanning

Using the centralized scanner methodology, you employ a single primary scanner. Then one person can scan in all documents, or everyone can go to a single location to scan documents. This may work well in offices were the scanning job is designated to only a few individuals. Either way, a high-speed scanner is highly recommended for this type of process. Keep in mind; scanning documents from a centralized location can cause a bottleneck in your workflow, as it can take a few minutes to scan, name and transfer large or multiple documents to the appropriate folder. So if you have multiple people scanning at a single station, productivity needs to be considered.

Centralized Scanning – After Tax Preparation

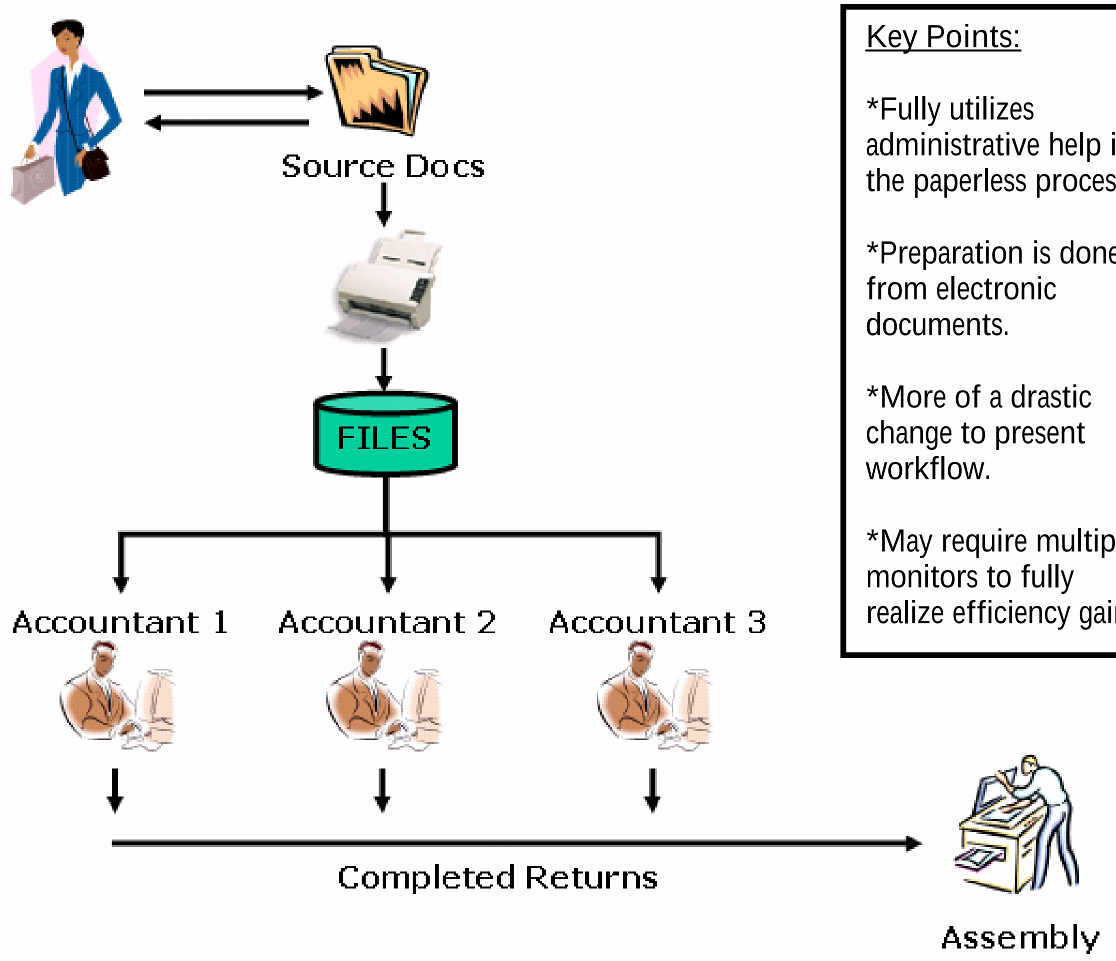

Source Docs
Accountant 1
Accountant 2
Accountant 3
FILES
Completed Returns
Assembly Area

Key Points:

*Makes full use of administrative help to scan documents.

*Tax prep is still done from paper.

Centralized Scanning – Before Tax Preparation


Source Docs
FILES
Accountant 1
Accountant 2
Accountant 3
Completed Returns
Assembly

Key Points:

*Fully utilizes administrative help in the paperless process.

*Preparation is done from electronic documents.

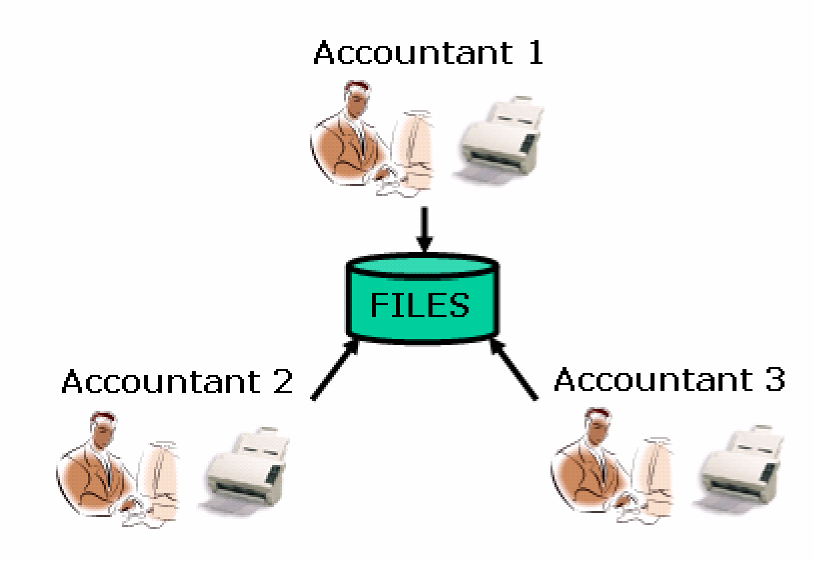
*More of a drastic change to present workflow.

*May require multiple monitors to fully realize efficiency gains.

Decentralized Scanning

The other option is to place a scanner at the desk of each preparer so they can scan their own clients' documents. Even then, you still want to be sure your scanner has sufficient scanning speed and has a document feeder. You may also want to consider a scanner capable of scanning double-sided pages (duplex) if you think you will often be receiving double-sided documents. The advantages of this approach are that scanners will never get tied up, and it will be more convenient for every user. However, these advantages must be weighed against the cost of buying multiple scanners.

Decentralized Scanning



Key Points:

* Scanning is done during the tax preparation process, usually by the tax preparer.

Evolve

One of the key benefits of using a document management system program is the ability to quickly find documents that you have stored, and then print, fax, or e-mail them as necessary. Having this functionality allows you to provide a level of service that you may not be able to provide now.

Other things to consider:

- Viewing & Annotating Documents
- Faxing & E-Mailing Documents
- Printing Documents
- Burning to CD
- Customizing Client Folders
- Non-Client Folders
- Issues
- Exporting Clients and Folders
- Rights & Passwords
- Database Backup

Tackle the Entire Workflow

After printing, scanning, and using your document management system for storing, faxing, and e-mailing documents have become second nature, you will naturally begin to discover other areas of your workflow that can be done more efficiently by eliminating paper processes. Some of these include:

- e-filing
- on-screen tax return review
- e-mail for client copies of returns
- multiple monitors
- scanning and shredding older files
- e-fax or equivalent

Conclusion

Going paperless is not as difficult as many people may think. It will take some planning and there is a small learning curve, but any office of any size has the capabilities of being successful. Remember, it is alright to phase in the paperless concept in different parts of your business at different times. However, when you do decide to take your business completely paperless, or just create a “less paper” environment, follow theses simple steps:

- Identify your objectives
- Decide what you will store – begin with printing
- Decide on a scanning, filing, and workflow process
- Create a backup and disaster recovery plan
- Select and install your equipment
- Test your equipment and procedures
- If necessary, modify your procedures
- Train your employees
- Start using it

Once you have actually implemented a process and are working in a paperless environment, you will experience the many benefits of a paperless office. Your need for storage space will decline over time instead of increasing. You will be able to receive and deliver documents to clients much more efficiently. You can start working remotely from almost anywhere, and you will see a reduction in costs and an increase in productivity. The benefits of a paperless office are clear and easily attainable with the proper planning and a good document management system. So, take your time and you will have a paperless office before you know it.

Appendix: Using Multiple Monitors

This appendix is designed to examine the functionality and usefulness of a multiple monitor environment: how it works and the benefits you might see in the tax and accounting workflow.

In the tax workflow, we see several uses for displaying applications side-by-side:

- Last year next to this year
- Tax return next to Document Management System (source documents)
- Trial Balance next to tax return
- Tax return next to tax planner

The list of applications goes on: time and billing, e-mail, spreadsheets, QuickBooks, etc. Chances are, at any given point in the workday you may have several different programs running.

Many users who are working in this environment have also used this technology as part of a paperless workflow that virtually eliminates the use of non-electronic documents. While that may be a lofty goal for some, this step is simple, affordable, and may just represent the single biggest leap in productivity you have experienced in years.

Who Should Read This

This appendix contains information about setting up a work environment that utilizes dual/multiple monitors. You will find the information beneficial if you:

- Believe in the benefits that new technology offers
- Are curious about multiple monitors and want to learn more
- Find the technological aspects of setting up a multiple monitor environment challenging

This document may not be useful if you are already using multiple monitors or do not see any benefit to working in this environment.

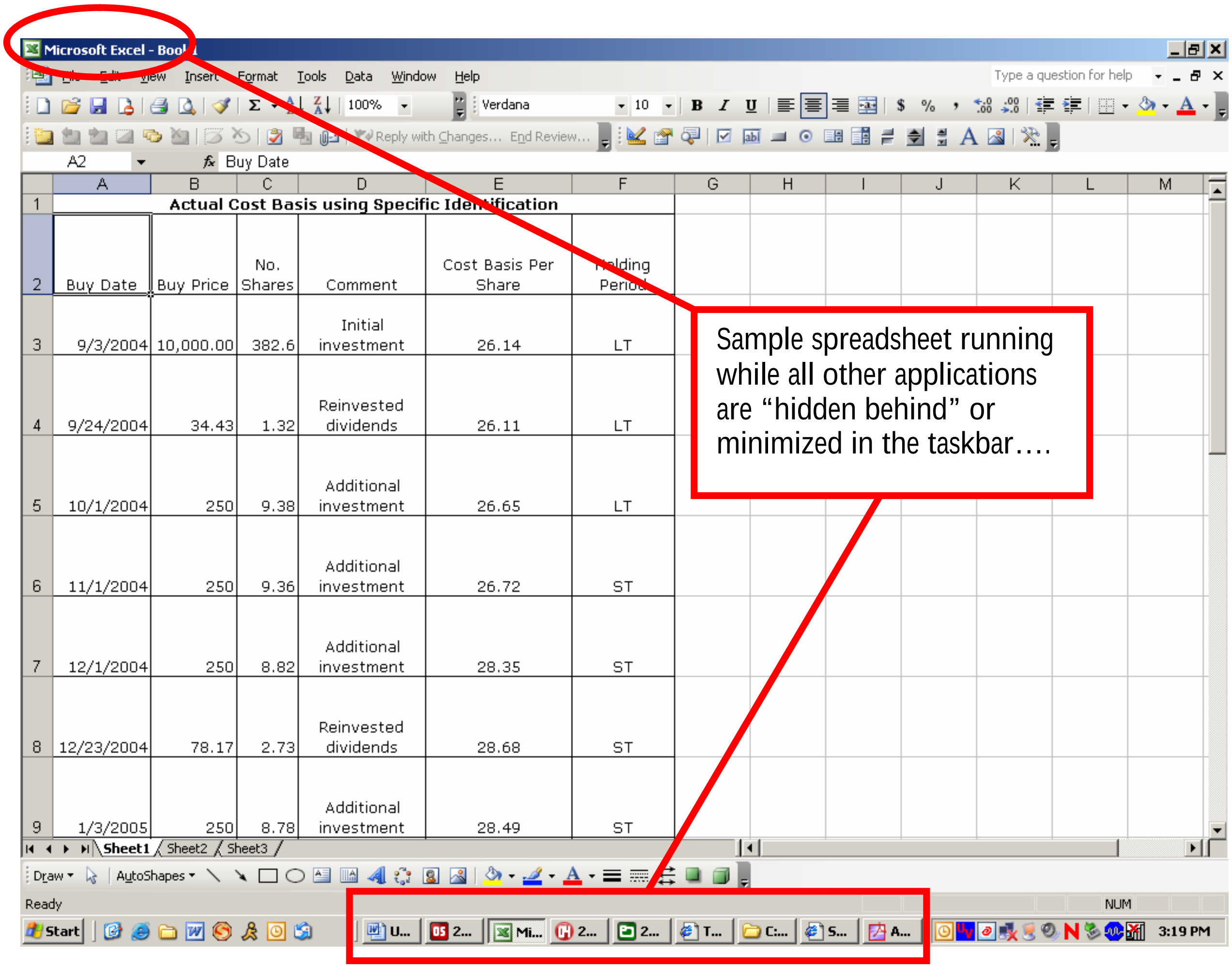
Contents

This appendix is designed to answer these questions:

- What is the purpose of using multiple monitors?
- How does it work?
- What are the hardware and software requirements?

What is the Purpose of Using Multiple Monitors?

At the basic level, there is the simple argument of real estate. In a single-monitor environment, running a single application “maximized” uses all the screen real estate.

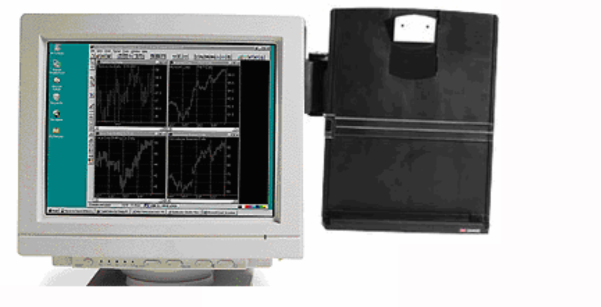

Microsoft Excel - Book1
File Edit View Insert Format Tools Data Window Help
Type a question for help
A2
Buy Date
Sheet1
Sheet2
Sheet3
Draw
AutoShapes
Ready
NUM
Start
3:19 PM

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Actual Cost Basis using Specific Identification					
2	Buy Date	Buy Price	No. Shares	Comment	Cost Basis Per Share	Holding Period
3	9/3/2004	10,000.00	382.6	Initial investment	26.14	LT
4	9/24/2004	34.43	1.32	Reinvested dividends	26.11	LT
5	10/1/2004	250	9.38	Additional investment	26.65	LT
6	11/1/2004	250	9.36	Additional investment	26.72	ST
7	12/1/2004	250	8.82	Additional investment	28.35	ST
8	12/23/2004	78.17	2.73	Reinvested dividends	28.68	ST
9	1/3/2005	250	8.78	Additional investment	28.49	ST

Sample spreadsheet running while all other applications are “hidden behind” or minimized in the taskbar….

Using applications in this environment usually involves extensive use of the task bar to “switch” between applications. An alternative to this is “tiling” the relevant applications side by side or on top of each other horizontally. Depending on screen size, this usually results in a less than desirable use of each application.

In many circumstances, the need exists to have visibility into a second piece of data as you are working in an application. For printed items, a document holder almost becomes a necessity.



The concept of “side-by-side” document usage has been around for many years in the accounting profession…..

This concept holds true when you have the “document” in electronic format. The idea is that you can open the reference item on one monitor, while performing a task in an application on the other monitor.

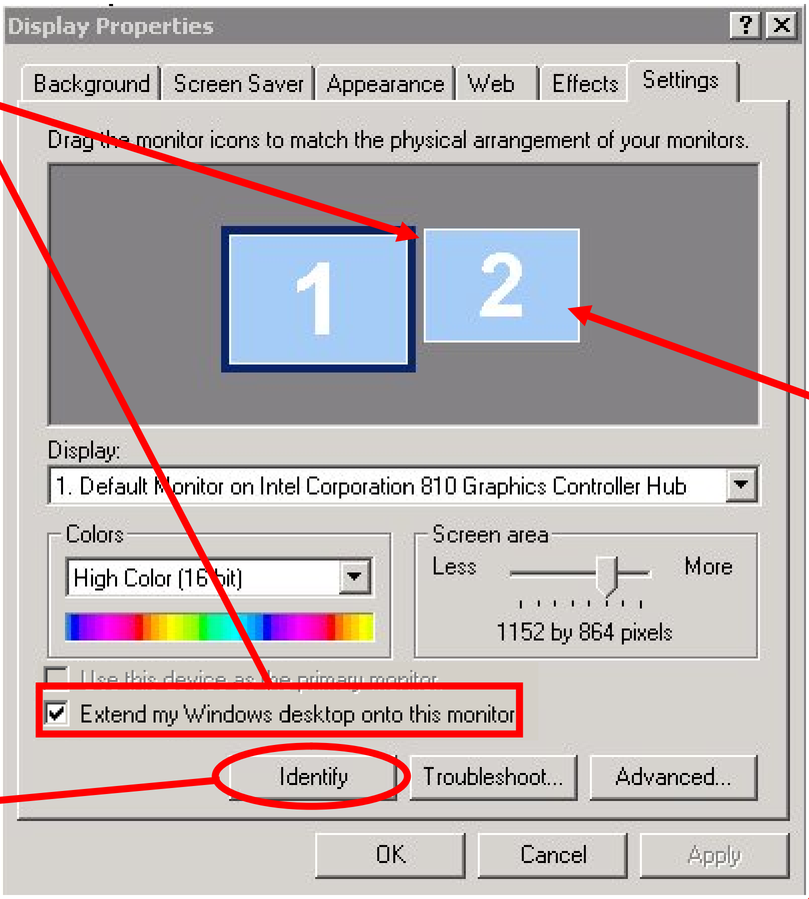
How Does It Work?

Once you have completed the necessary hardware modifications, you can easily configure most versions of Windows to operate in a dual/multiple monitor environment. The idea behind this is simple: rather than having applications tiled on top of one another, and “toggling” between those applications, you can display applications next to one another on your dual monitors.

In your Windows Display properties, you arrange your displays to resemble your setup.

1. Click the secondary monitor and then check the box to extend your desktop to this monitor.

2. Click this button to put a temporary number on the screen of each monitor so you can see which is which.



Display Properties
?
Background
Screen Saver
Appearance
Web
Effects
Settings
1
2
Less
More
Identify
Troubleshoot...
Advanced...
OK
Cancel
Apply

Drag the monitor icons to match the physical arrangement of your monitors.

Display: 1. Default Monitor on Intel Corporation 810 Graphics Controller Hub

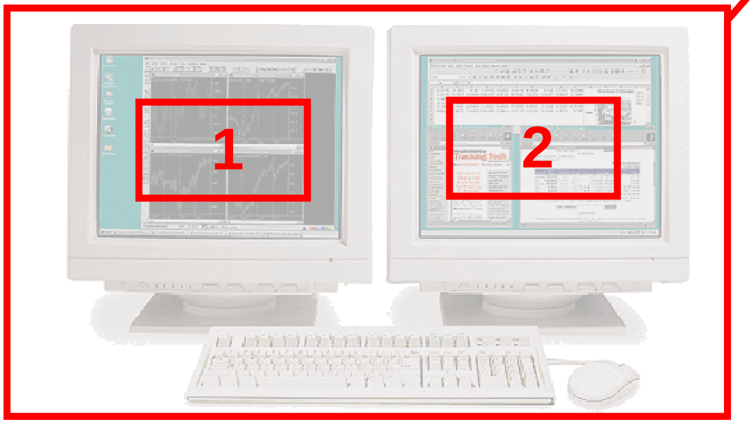
Colors: High Color (16 bit)

Screen area: 1152 by 864 pixels

☐ Use this device as the primary monitor

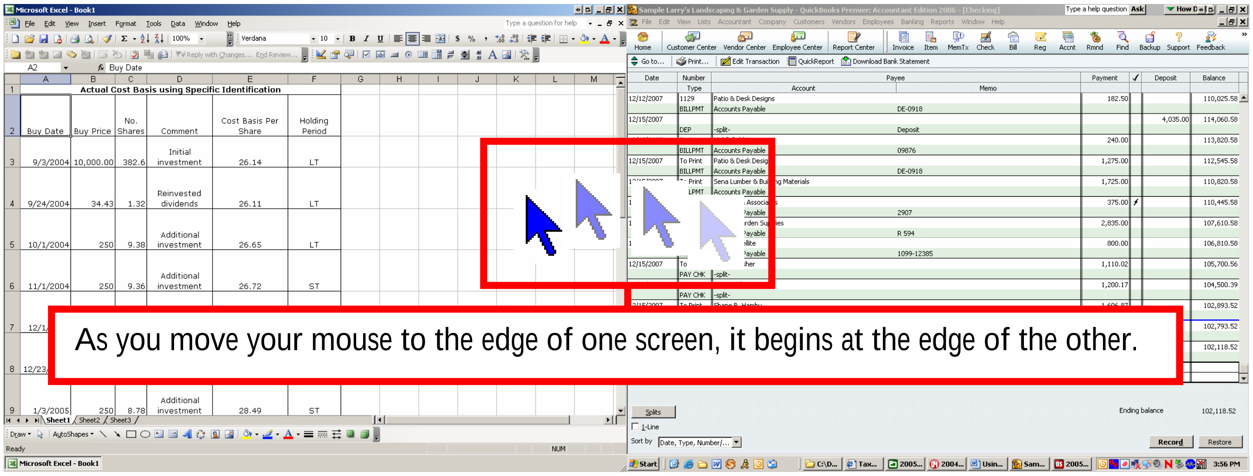
☑ Extend my Windows desktop onto this monitor

3. Click and “drag” the number that corresponds to the correct monitor and move it to “mirror” the physical location.



Once you have Windows configured, you are ready to begin utilizing your new work environment. For example, let’s say you need to enter transactions from a spreadsheet into

QuickBooks. Opening them “side-by-side” gives you the ability to work simultaneously in both programs.



Actual Cost Basis using Specific Identification

Buy Date	Buy Price	No. Shares	Comment	Cost Basis Per Share	Holding Period
9/3/2004	10,000.00	382.6	Initial investment	26.14	LT
9/24/2004	34.43	1.32	Reinvested dividends	26.11	LT
10/1/2004	250	9.38	Additional investment	26.65	LT
11/1/2004	250	9.36	Additional investment	26.72	ST
12/1/					
12/23/					
1/3/2005	250	8.78	Additional investment	28.49	ST

As you move your mouse to the edge of one screen, it begins at the edge of the other.

While you would not literally work in both programs at the exact same time, you can simply “switch” between the programs by clicking in the appropriate screen.

Note: You may experience some “quirkiness” in some applications, such as pop-up windows on a different monitor, drop-down menus not appearing, etc. If this occurs, simply run that application in the primary (number 1) monitor.

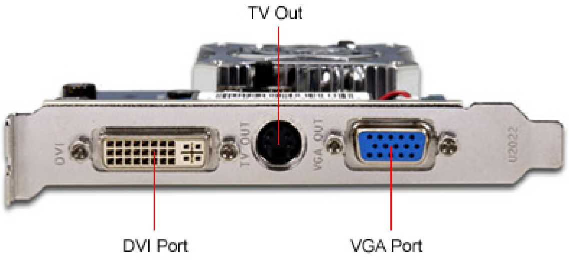
What are the Hardware and Software Requirements?

Note: This section contains terminology that you may or may not be familiar with. When possible, we have created hyperlinks for online reference material to either provide definition or give more detailed explanations.

The needs for using multiple monitors are actually quite simple, and the costs range. For PC’s, you will need a video card with two or more video plugs, the drivers, the correct version of Windows to support it, and the monitors themselves. For laptops, the technology is usually already there. The biggest “hardware” expense usually lies in the monitors themselves. Before we discuss monitors, however, let’s first examine the other needs.

First, we will begin with your operating system. While older versions of Windows may support some of the various video card drivers, most brands list later versions as part of their system requirements. Microsoft Windows 98, 98SE, ME, Windows 2000, XP and 2003 all have built-in support to recognize multi-monitor configurations. Windows NT4 and earlier versions, as well as Windows 95 do not. Play close attention to the requirements of these drivers when you purchase your video card(s).

Next, the main component in this system: the video card. That is the piece of hardware in your computer that your existing monitor is plugged into. Most laptops in use today have the ability to display an image on the panel as well as through the VGA monitor port. PC's have traditionally been limited to a single port, but with the rising popularity of this technology, many that are built (or ordered) today come with newer cards that contain a VGA and a DVI port. There are also many with dual DVI ports.



These devices can even be installed in your existing computers, replacing the existing single port video card, and the prices range from $50 to upwards of $1,000. For standard use in an accounting environment, cards on the lower end of the price spectrum are generally sufficient. For use with dual VGA monitors, you can use a DVI-VGA adaptor. There are also some "less complex" solutions available, such as this USB compatible device, and using old networked machines as monitors as discussed in this article.

Once installed, you can connect compatible monitors to each port to begin the configuration aspect of this setup. As previously mentioned, the monitors can be the most expensive part of the hardware purchase. You might begin by simply experimenting with some CRT monitors that you may have in surplus. An investment in flat panel monitors may not be a difficult decision to make once you realize the productivity benefits, as well as better utilization of desktop space and higher quality images.

Next, the drivers for the video card are installed. This is usually as simple as following the instructions that come with the video card. After everything is hooked up and loaded, you can easily configure Windows 2000 and Windows XP for your exact setup (the setup in most versions of Windows is very similar).