

Internet fax serves as bridge to paperless future

North Bay firms start shifting away from paper to email faxes

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NORTH BAY – You hardly use it anymore. But you pay for it. It takes up room. It's on day and night, burning energy. And we won't even go into the evils of spammers.

So why do we still have fax machines?

"You'd be surprised how core the fax is to a number of businesses," said Steve Adams, vice president of marketing for Ottawa-based MyFax, one of the largest Internet fax services.

Payroll, purchase orders, real estate flyers, insurance and tax forms all go over fax machines. But that doesn't mean they have to. More and more small and medium-sized businesses are shifting to Internet faxing and pulling the plug on the office fax.

Teri Beauchamp of Napa has transcended office practices entirely. She essentially runs Gone Grape from her cell phone, selling women's apparel to 150 winery tasting rooms and gift shops.

"My company is growing fast. I'm constantly on the road and constantly training new sales reps," she said.

When somebody told her about Internet faxing, she jumped on it. She figures the service saves her \$30 to \$80 a month and allows her to receive and send faxes on the road. "Mobility is everything when you're building a company like mine," said Ms. Beauchamp.

The cost advantages are obvious: Most phone lines run about \$40 a month, and a fax machine sells for \$100 to \$200. MyFax and other similar services start at \$10 a month and require no software installations or equipment beyond a PC, laptop or even a cellular phone. Since there's no phone line involved, there are no long-distance charges.

Fax machines are energy hogs too, Mr. Adams said. They burn electricity even when they're not in use.

Elise Paisley of Paisley Consulting, an SMB consultancy in Mill Valley, shifted to Internet faxing when she subscribed to a VoIP service and her fax machine

wouldn't work. She didn't keep the VoIP, but she loved the convenience of MyFax.

"My clients send me payroll and timesheets, and I can file them without printing, which saves paper and toner. When I need to return information I cut and paste just what my clients need, instead of sending it page by page. "For document management and efficient office practices, the service tops traditional faxing. I'll never go back," said Ms. Paisley.

The growing popularity of Internet faxing is borne out in the growth of services like MyFax and eFax, the two largest. MyFax has more than 250,000 subscribers.

"Some people just like the idea of putting a piece of paper into a machine, others use nothing but e-mail," said Mr. Adams. "That's why Internet faxing serves as a bridge between the two technologies."

Faxes sent to the subscriber's number are converted into PDF files and sent to the recipient's e-mail, where they can be printed out or stored electronically.

"You can send and receive multiple faxes. And the fax doesn't sit on the machine where anyone can see it," said Mr. Adams.

John Smith, a North Bay area territory manager for forklift seller Pape Material Handling, also values the mobility Internet faxing allows. He's on the move between lumber mills in Mendocino; wineries in Lake, Sonoma and Napa counties; and large retailers all over the North Bay.

"I'm an on-the-road salesman. I can send quotes and get purchase orders by Internet fax from my laptop in coffee shops. If there's a problem with an invoice, the customer can fax it to me wherever I am, and I try to resolve it immediately," said Mr. Smith.

Sure, there's a fax machine back at his office in Santa Rosa, he said, but it's gathering dust. "I was using it so infrequently I forgot the number," said Mr. Smith.



