# Too Much Information

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Do you ever feel that you are drowning in paperwork? Do the piles of documents and data seem to grow from day to day? Are you constantly chasing paperwork from field workers? There must be a way to reduce this mess.

Sounds a bit drastic, but there is an element of truth in that for many small businesses running with fully or partially manual systems. By its very nature, there are inherent delays and costs involved with running a paper-based business that, even with the most efficient processes in place, cannot be avoided.

A big problem facing companies running paper-based systems is that of data duplication. Because information must flow from one point to the next along the job-processing chain, incompatible processes require information to be re-entered once, twice, perhaps even four or five times. Let me give you an extreme example of a completely paper-based system.

- A customer calls in with an urgent job request. A job card is written up.
- The field worker is called over the phone to relay the job details. He writes them up in his job book – duplicate 1.

- The work is done and completed. He updates his job book with the details.
- Time is entered into his weekly time sheet.
- The field worker eventually brings his job book and time sheets back into the office.
- The admin person updates the job with the completed details – duplicate 2.
- An invoice is raised from the job and sent to the customer – duplicate 3.
- The invoice might then be re-keyed into the accounting program – duplicate 4.
- The time sheets are entered into the payroll system – duplicate 5.

This approach leads to five duplicated copies of information. Assume that two different workers are assigned to different tasks on the same job. This would lead to even more information being duplicated, as each would have to be given their own job card, job book and time sheets to deal with, etc.

Now let's look at the same scenario with a completely integrated job dispatch system.

- A customer calls in with an urgent job request. A job is created in the system.
- The job is immediately transmitted to the field workers' tablet in the field.
- The job details are updated in the field, including parts and time, and are then seamlessly transmitted back to the office.

- The job details are then checked and an invoice is automatically raised from the job details.
- Invoice details are automatically posted across to the accounting program.

This second approach leads to no duplicated copies of information. The information is entered once and flows around the system without having to be re-entered anywhere.

Multiple data handling is time-consuming and inefficient. It can result in a flood of paperwork causing stress, confusion and significantly increases the potential for error. The constant need to enter and re-enter information from place to place also inserts multiple delays in the time it takes to get invoices out the door.

In addition, the very fact that paper needs to pass from point to point in the job management process opens the door to paperwork going missing, not being transcribed to the next point in the process, and thus additional delays, mistakes, or worse – complete failure in generating an invoice at all.

**Susan's story – a new business owner who knows it's time to change**

Susan has just inherited an electrical company from her family that serves both the residential and small commercial customers in her area. The company has been in business for over a decade and built up a loyal and strong customer list. Although she just recently become the business owner, Susan has worked in the business for many years as its admin person, and she is very familiar with the ins and outs of the business.

Her father was traditional in his approach when it came to the business, with most activities being handled manually. The office is a typical old school one, full of filing cabinets, job books, whiteboards and, generally, paperwork everywhere. All job information is handled manually, being written down on relevant pieces of paper and filed in multiple places.

Now being a busy company, they have a lot of paperwork to deal with daily information on customers, jobs, services, products, maintenance, contracts, pricing, stock and consumables, etc. After Susan talked to her father about the paperwork overload, he was reluctant to change but left it up to Susan to work out what could be done.

Some of Susan's frustrations were over things that should be simple. Customer job queries waste considerable time and cause frustration since the information needs to be located or field

workers called to get an update. What should be done in under a minute typically takes fifteen to twenty minutes (or longer in many cases).

There is also a lot of recopying of information to the job, from the job, to the invoice, and so on, that takes up a lot of time and often introduces errors from mistyping. Nothing is automated and the paper flow is heavily reliant on admin staff doing something to move it along the process. Paperwork backlogs regularly occur, especially if someone takes a sickie. Susan believes there must be a better way!

Being the new business owner, Susan needs to take control of her business. The company needs a simple system that automates much of the manual and inefficient processes they currently have. She needs a centralised system that can eliminate duplication by ensuring that information is only entered ONCE at the source and a single point of access to all job information, including customer and site details, billing information, job histories, pricing, etc.

The system need not be complicated and expensive, but it should work and address the needs of the company. It is time to put a stop to the inefficiencies in the business, so that Susan and her staff don't have to waste time on repetitive administrative tasks, freeing up their time to maximise billable work. Susan knows that after ten years of doing the same process over and over again, it's time to make the change.

I had a discussion during a seminar with one business owner who was aware that his business ran inefficiently, but that it sort of worked, so why upset the apple cart? When asked to quantify the cost of these inefficiencies over a twelve-month period, he was at a loss to do so but thought it meant that he had one too many admin staff.

That is the attitude of many business owners. They tend to lose sight of the big picture because everything "seems" to be okay in their business. To be able to understand further how much they are losing, it is always good to show their profit leaks in DOLLAR VALUE. This makes them realise that if they continue these inefficient processes in their business, they will continue to leak profits and be less productive than they should be, often leading to additional expenses, such as overtime costs and wasted man hours.

## Consider this ROI calculation:

Hours saved in administration due to inefficient duplication of data handling per week (across all staff ) x hourly cost x number of working weeks per year

   = 20 hours x $30 cost x 48 weeks
   = $28,800 annually

Now considering this to be a conservative figure, you can look at it this way: even if you realise just a 50% saving, this amounts to more than $14,000 savings annually.

Many businesses have some sort of system, but to completely eliminate duplication you need a system that seamlessly passes information from admin to the field, back into the office, and then through to invoice generation. Cost reduction is achievable if you take a wide-angle view of your business and identify the holes in the processes that leak profits.

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