

Timothy Perrin

Winning the Paper Chase: a New Look at Scanners



When was the last time you made a trip to your file storeroom?

Did you look around in despair at the boxes and boxes of old files, paper than hasn't seen daylight since Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister—the first time?

One of the great inventions of the computer age is the scanner. If you spend a bit of money on a good scanner and use it wisely, it will pay you back many times over.

A good scanner is not a \$50 bargain flatbed unit. Scanning more than a few pages on such a machine is nothing but a bother. For a scanner that will help you in your business, you're going to have to spend a little money.

A good scanner has four characteristics.

- First, a good scanner must be FAST. It should process many pages per minute, not just a few.
- Second, it must have a sheet feeder for unattended operation. I should be able to load up a stack of paper and go away to do something else.
- Third, it must scan documents into a useful, commonly used format,

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not a proprietary one. I should not be tied to one company and its hardware and software.

- Fourth, it should be no larger than absolutely necessary. Desktop real estate is a precious commodity.

An example of a “good” scanner is the Fujitsu ScanSnap series (<http://www.fujitsu.ca/products/scansnap/>). There are undoubtedly others.

I tested ScanSnap—a tiny unit, smaller than most fax machines. It takes up only a bit of desk space, a fraction of my flatbed scanner's footprint. But ScanSnap took double-sided pages and turned them into Adobe Acrobat PDF files at the rate of 15 sheets per minute. And, since it takes a stack of sheets in its sheet feeder, you simply load in a group of documents, hit scan, then go about your business.

Before you know it, the scanner is done. You rename the document file,

move it to an appropriate folder on your computer, and you are done.

This scanner is so fast that I found myself tearing books apart to scan them onto my computer before my European trip. I wanted to have the book with me but didn't want to have to carry it on paper. While I love the feel of a book in my hands, if you're living out of a van for a year, you want to keep your possessions to a minimum. Putting my library into electronic form was a real advantage. ScanSnap did that for me.

When I had to send it back, I did something I have never done before; I asked if I could hang on to it for a few more weeks until it was time to leave on my trip. The good folks at Fujitsu said Yes, for which I was extremely grateful.

I play with a lot of hardware and software in preparing this column. Much of it, you never even hear about because it's ho-hum. It almost always goes back without a fuss. This one I wanted to keep. In fact, when I get back from my year away, I expect I'll be buying a ScanSnap. It's a great machine.

The ScanSnap also allowed me to finally get a start on cleaning up those boxes of old law files taking up space in my garage. By spending a few minutes each day scanning them while I was working at other things, I was slowly

making headway on getting rid of the boxes of files I don't really need. I'm burning the scanned files to DVDs, which I can put on a shelf in my office.

And that is what you should be doing in your office.

How many boxes of old files do you have? How much do you pay each month for storage? How much of what is in those files really needs to be on paper? A few Certificates of Title and not much more. The rest could just as easily be scanned.

Ah, but there's a large staff cost in such a project, you say. Actually, not that much. When I was practising law, a very bright young woman from the local high school came in each afternoon to handle filing and send clients their copies of material going into the file. There is no reason you couldn't hire such a student. Teach this person what NOT to shred and always to ask if there's any doubt about a particular document. Then sit back and watch your fileroom gradually empty.

File-Closing Procedures

Scanners are only part of the picture. In the end, there really is not a whole lot that needs to be scanned; an aggressive stripping of a file on closing is also part of the key to keeping paper clutter to a minimum. In my office, when we closed a file, we stripped out the following.

- Anything we had originated. We already had that on our hard drive—and backup.
- Anything that had originated in another office. They should have that in their files.
- Anything that had been filed in court or any other official agency. There was a copy there.

We could do this because we also had been very diligent about ensuring that clients got copies of every single piece of paper that went into their files. Every week, every client received copies of all correspondence, phone notes, filings, and everything else. If a client

ever asked for the file, I simply pointed out that she already had it. If she wanted another copy, I charged for it.

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Another kind of scanner worth a look is even smaller than the ScanSnap and its brethren. It is a pen scanner.

These come in two flavours.

First are the scanners that are literally the size of a pen but with a wider tip. An example of this is the QuickLink Pen (<http://www.quicklinkpen.com/>). You swipe the tip across the text you want to scan, as you would use a highlighter; it picks up the letters for later transfer to your computer.

The others are a bit longer—too long to fit in your pocket. Take a look in your flatbed scanner. See the part that actually moves? Imagine taking that out and putting it in your hand. Now, you move it down the page by hand. Now you've got the picture.

An example of this is the Planon Docupen (<http://www.planon.com/docupen.php>). These types of scanners are very useful when you want to capture material while you are doing research in a library, for example. You really can't take your flatbed scanner with you and libraries frown on people tearing out pages to feed them through a single-sheet scanner, so these kinds of pen scanners are a perfect solution.

Scanners of all kinds have made the digitalization of printed material an easy task. Though the paperless office still seems like it will never arrive, it's only because we haven't made it happen. You can have it if you want it. Good computers, good electronic filing protocols, good indexing software like X1, and good scanning procedures make it all possible. ▲

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