



Processing over 300,000 purchase invoices every year, Johnston Press plc - the UK's 4th largest publisher of local and regional newspapers - faced an enormous challenge in the management and retrieval of these and other documents.

With a turnover of £292 million, the company has a large presence with over 200 publications nationwide. With more than 25 autonomous publishing centres, together with a centralised accounting division at Peterborough (Johnston Publishing Ltd) supporting group companies and managing the centralised purchase ledgers, cash books and nominal ledgers, the company has been committed to using Sage Enterprise Solutions (SES) accounting software since 1982.

The Challenge

Michelle Jeffrey, Systems Manager for Johnston Publishing, faced a two-fold challenge. The company had 2 accounting centres (Peterborough and Milton Keynes) where more than 13 filing cabinets housed just one year's paperwork, and documents had to be stored for 6 years. The current year's documents were kept close at hand and a great deal of time and effort was needed when filing documents to ensure the correct documents could always be retrieved.

"We also rented space externally, but retrieving documents here was a nightmare," Michelle commented. "It took at least a couple of days to access a document and we were charged £20.00 to retrieve and replace each one."



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Mark Knight,
Financial Controller
Group Accounting Centre

"As purchase invoices are registered at our 25+ centres and sent to Peterborough for payment, the regional accountants no longer had access to them, having to rely on a 20-character narrative in SES. At each period end, we were inundated with requests to fax copy invoices and, with 25 regional accountants doing the same, this involved an enormous amount of time and effort."

"We needed to find a document imaging system to integrate with our accounts software. As well as being very tightly integrated into the SES software, DbArchive was the most functional and easy-to-use system that we looked at," Michelle Jeffrey said. "We did some investigation work with Version One and put together a proposal for the Board giving real benefits and cost savings for the whole Group. This justification was centred on increased efficiency and costs savings; Board approval was received."



Implementation

"Once we'd decided on DbArchive, everything was implemented very quickly and smoothly. We scanned the previous 6 months of purchase invoices. Confident in the system, we then took a highly significant step - and destroyed all our original purchase invoices, after Inland Revenue and Customs approval had been given."

Incoming Documents

"We chose a centralised scanning process, which is extremely fast, even with our entry-level system of 50 pages a minute," Michelle said. "Since DbArchive is so tightly integrated into SES, it automatically scans and indexes all our incoming documents - including over 300,000 purchase invoices per year. As we destroy the original documents, we scan everything that's relevant; this could be a one page invoice or a 100 page itemised telephone bill."

Outgoing Documents

The system also automatically stores images of all outgoing documents, e.g. sales invoices, statements. With some Group companies generating thousands of invoices each week, the savings in both time and money for the Group are phenomenal.

"We're using this facility for all our reports - invoice audit trails, cash audit trails and aged debt reports - so there's no printing, filing or storing of these. Unlike paper reports, every authorised user can view these reports - without moving from their desks. We're saving boxes and boxes of printer paper. Additionally, we find DbArchive's search facility a real boon, as it enables us to quickly find any item within these reports," said Michelle Jeffrey.

Using DbArchive

DbArchive is seamlessly integrated with the centralised SES accounting system at Johnston Publishing, so authorised staff can directly view and print document images with just a mouse click, from both purchase and nominal ledgers. Cash book cheque requisitions have been added, as well as archives of sales ledger invoices and statements, so copy documents can be quickly viewed on the central system via a simple query screen embedded within the accounting system.

Dramatically Improved Efficiency

Michelle Jeffrey says that the whole Group has derived extensive benefits from DbArchive. "Overall, our efficiency is dramatically improved. Gaining more time is one of the biggest advantages; as filing has been totally eliminated, we've reallocated people's time into more constructive areas. Unlike a paper archive, retrieving a document now can be done in a number of ways and we're looking forward to using DbArchive's useful annotation facility, allowing us to attach electronic Post It® notes to all our documents."

At a corporate level, DbArchive has also facilitated organisational restructuring. "We've been able to take on company acquisitions without the increase in central resources previously needed. With DbArchive providing the ability for authorised personnel to view images directly, all publishing centres are now self-sufficient in producing their own management accounts, leading to enormous savings in time and giving more responsibility and autonomy. A major impact here is reducing down to just one accounting centre - a significant reduction in both staff and office overheads. Information retrieval is now incredibly quick and easy. It used to take hours to find a document, but now, with a single keystroke, it takes just seconds - and you don't even have to move from your desk!" enthused Michelle.

Financial and Environmental Benefits

"We continue to make massive savings in paper, so we know we're contributing to the environment and moving closer to the paperless office," said Michelle Jeffrey. Since eliminating paper copies of documents, the company has retrieved more than 40 sq. metres of office space as well as saving at least £9,000 every year on document storage. "DbArchive has paid for itself in just a couple of months" said Stuart Paterson, Group Financial Director, "and has provided vast improvements in our working practices, which have proved immensely beneficial to the Group as a whole."

Improved Working Practice

Michelle agrees that implementing DbArchive has certainly improved many working practices. "We're using the technology to its best advantage, making everyone more efficient. The Financial Directors and Accountants from the group offices needed minimal training to use the system and are extremely impressed with the levels of information instantly available, leading to their increased efficiency and autonomy. DbArchive gives us an extremely comprehensive Flexible Search Facility, allowing searches by different criteria not available within SES. For example, one invoice may be coded to 10 different nominal codes

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Stuart Paterson,
Group Financial Director

so we can extract all invoices allocated to that code. The way Version One integrate the viewing of documents within SES is excellent - just click a button on the appropriate SES enquiry screen, and up pops the relevant document image."

Conclusion

Johnston Publishing is, without doubt, a company with vision. Michelle Jeffrey and her team are constantly looking for ways to improve efficiencies using their Version One software. She believes they have a very powerful and flexible tool in DbArchive. Mark Knight, Financial Controller for the Group Accounting Centre, summed up his thoughts on the system: **"Since implementing DbArchive, we've eliminated the time-consuming filing and retrieval of business documents, and we also have a valuable source of data instantly available to all our users. Having the ability to view and print documents on screen from remote UK based sites, has revolutionised our accounting practices within the Johnston Press plc Group. All this, together with the merging of our accounting centres, has assisted in making savings of over £500k per year."**



**VERSION
ONE**

Version One Limited,
London House, London Road South,
Poynton, Cheshire SK12 1YP U.K.

Tel 01625 856500 Fax 01625 856501
+44 1625 856500 +44 1625 856501

e-mail info@versionone.co.uk web <http://www.versionone.co.uk>