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The power of data capture

Amy Wright of Storetec offers a timely and informative summary of the various data capture technologies that are empowering greater data accessibility for users

The process of electronically extracting information from paper documents, and converting it into legible data, isn't a new concept. In fact, data capture has revolutionised the flow of information between employees and departments throughout the 21st century.

At Storetec we provide expert data capture services to a number of organisations across the UK and worldwide. Unique to the client's requirements, we can employ a combination of manual and automated capture services to extract any data required.

Before the advent of capture technology, document processing was performed by data entry clerks who would read and manually key in data from paper documents into electronic forms on a computer. The two key types of data capture are Machine Capture and Manual Capture.

Machine Capture involves the use of software to read documents, i.e. OCR, ICR and OMR. With machine capture, software systems have been specifically designed to read printed characters or marks and deliver the results in a useful electronic format. The more sophisticated the software has become, the more accurate it can be; therefore clients can save valuable time and resources.

Manual Capture is the process of

physically typing specific data/information. This form of data capture is a low-tech solution which is particularly useful if the data is handwritten. Software can be poor at reading handwriting as everyone has their own unique style, neatness can depend on speed, and layout isn't always horizontal. The major downsides to the manual approach are speed, accuracy and space required.

MACHINE CAPTURE EXPLAINED

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is the recognition of printed or written text characters by a computer. This involves turning a page or picture into an electronic image. The electronic images are then processed through the OCR software engine which will break down any potential letter shapes, character-by-character, and analyse/translate the electronic image into text characters. The result is a string of characters and spaces, matched from the database of different font characters held within the OCR software.

Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR) is a more advanced form of OCR and can involve multiple OCR engines, providing a higher level of accuracy. It can also be used to capture some handwritten information, especially on forms where the location, size and format of information

can be restricted. ICR is also used in reading barcodes and QR codes, and is used in systems which employ artificial intelligence or machine learning.

Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) is used to detect the absence or presence of a mark in a given location. It is normally employed when capturing data from surveys, assessments, predetermined forms and examinations. The process involves a master document being compared to a document marked by a human. The location of the marks in relation to the master document provide a result set, for example a multiple-choice form with tick boxes. The marked areas denote the subject's responses.

INVOICE PROCESSING

Storetec provides a range of Data Capture services which can be exceptionally useful when dealing with a large influx of invoices, surveys, correspondence or form styled documents. Collecting invoices for example on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, we can digitise and capture any relevant information including invoice number, date, supplier name and price. We can export and transfer the data to your preferred office finance system, whether that's Oracle, SAP, Pegasus or Sage.

Invoice capture is a common solution for accounts departments who deal

