



Which Records Should I Scan?

Selecting and prioritizing records to digitize.

Records are good candidates for digital imaging if:

1. they are stored in expensive space.

Office space is expensive, so storing records in an office makes little economic sense unless the records have a very short retention. Even if you don't pay actual rent on your space, storing paper in an office wastes money because it incurs opportunity costs—the loss of potential gain if that space were being used for other purposes. The cost of scanning records is usually lower than the cost of storing them in office space.

On the other hand, storing paper records at a low cost off-site facility can be less expensive than scanning them, as long as the records are not retrieved often (see Item 2) and the off-site facility protects the records properly (from unauthorized disclosure, theft, fire or water damage, etc.).

2. they need to be retrieved frequently and/or rapidly.

The cost of scanning records can be significant, but properly indexed digital records are easier to find and faster to retrieve than paper records. Records that are retrieved infrequently may not be good candidates for scanning, but those that you need often may be.

3. they need to be viewed by more than one person at the same time.

As physical objects, paper documents can be retrieved and used by only one person at a time. Digital images, on the other hand, can be retrieved and used simultaneously by many people at the same time.

4. they must be protected from damage or theft.

It is almost impossible to make physical duplicates of paper records and store them far away for use in the event of a disaster. Digital images, on the other hand, are easy to duplicate and store far away from the original records. In the event of a disaster they are easy to retrieve and use. Digital images can also be used to reduce the handling of original records that are susceptible to damage or theft.

5. they require only minimal preparation before scanning.

Single sheets of flat paper are the easiest and least expensive to scan. Records that have been stapled, rubber-banded, or folded may require very labor-intensive (in other words, expensive) work to prepare them for scanning.

Which of your records meet one or more of these criteria? This will help you decide if the benefits of scanning outweigh the costs.