



Faxing: A Healthcare Disaster

10 Ways Faxing is Holding Back Your Business

A Medforce Technologies White Paper

We Need A Fax Revolution

Faxing is one of the most common forms of communication in healthcare. It's a point-to-point solution, where there is little-to-no opportunity for the message to be intercepted between machines. Because of this, it is often considered the most secure way to transmit personal health information and share documents across locations. It's because of this perceived security that faxing endures in the healthcare industry, even though many other industries consider it antiquated technology.

Healthcare companies use faxing for a variety of things such as referrals, prescription management, communicating with CMS and payors, communicating with physicians, and sharing documents internally across locations. The list goes on and on. Even though it is an everyday communication method in healthcare – and the way many businesses receive critical documentation — a long time has passed since there has been an advancement in faxing technology. The introduction of fax servers and electronic faxing certainly was a big step forward, but progress has stagnated since. The processes around fax handling and management are often rife with inefficiency and lost productivity.

We think faxing is here to stay in healthcare, and we're hoping to help you do a better job at it. The first step to making a change is identifying the challenges that faxing presents in building an efficient organization and highlighting opportunities for improvement. Sometimes, companies don't realize how complacent or willing to put up with subpar processes we are until someone sheds a light on it. We're here to shed that light in this report, demonstrating 10 ways faxing is holding back your business.

1. Physical fax machines waste time



This may be one that seems quite obvious, and you may have already moved to electronic faxing, but it felt important to cover the basics first. Walking to and from the fax machine is a non-value-added activity. It is not doing anything to improve your bottom line. It's not bringing in more money or cutting costs or building client loyalty. It is simply making a daily process take longer than usual. And, as you know, time is money. Any time spent on this non-value-added activity of going to/from the fax machine is time not spent doing something to further your mission.

Beyond the best case scenario where you go to the fax machine and the fax you are waiting for is there, there remains a lot of opportunity for inefficiency. There is no real-time notification of when a fax arrives. This may result in swinging by the machine “just to check” without positive results. There is no automated routing of

the fax to the appropriate person, it must be done by hand. When a fax is picked up by someone who happens to be cruising by the machine, human error enters into the equation. Multiple faxes could get picked up as one by accident and documents go missing. The fax could be mistakenly routed to the wrong person. It could arrive at the right person's desk, but that person wasn't there when it was dropped off and then they keep checking the fax machine. An obvious solution here is to get a fax server. Electronic faxing gets less and less expensive as technology advances. The ideal fax server to minimize inefficiency is one that integrates directly with your business process management and/or document management software.

2. Electronic faxing is not necessarily HIPAA compliant



This point is incredibly important: you absolutely cannot assume that your fax service follows HIPAA privacy rules. If you don't know the answer to the question of whether your current fax server is HIPAA compliant, please put this report down and go investigate immediately.

Most electronic fax solutions were built for a general business audience. The default is typically not set up to handle personal health information (PHI). There are two steps to ensure you have HIPAA compliant faxing. The first is to have a secure FTP connection for receipt of faxes. This is the prevailing practice for most electronic faxing services, but it doesn't hurt to confirm it is how yours is set up.

The second piece is to examine how the documents get from your fax server to your staff. The most common practice is for the faxes to be distributed to an email, and this is where security can be compromised. The fax itself may be received securely, but transmission to an email server may not be. If you receive PHI through electronic faxing, you may have to purchase an additional security product to ensure HIPAA compliance.

3. No oversight or control over fax assignment



Email was not designed for fax management. While it's convenient to receive your faxes in your inbox, it presents a number of management challenges. There is no manager portal for seeing faxes sent to email boxes, for confirming the fax was received and is being worked.

When faxes are routed to an email inbox, they can easily be overlooked. We all get hundreds of emails a day and an important fax can get lost in the shuffle. There is no way for a manager to check in and confirm a fax is being worked. If the fax-email recipient is absent, there is no way for a manager to quickly reassign that fax to someone else.

A further complication happens when a fax number is routed to an email distribution list that goes to several people. There is danger of duplication of effort, with more than one individual addressing the fax. There is also the danger of a fax not being addressed at all because everyone assumes someone else on the distribution list is handling it. At a minimum, using a distribution list adds in additional effort to notify everyone who is working the fax – clearly not the most efficient system.

4. No guarantee a fax is being worked according to protocol



Even with electronic faxing in place, only one part of the fax-handling process has been automated (the removal of the need to walk to a physical fax machine). The rest of the process remains manual. Any manual process is more susceptible to whims and variations between employees. This is even more of an acute problem for offices without efaxing.

Without a well-defined process and the tools to enforce it, there is no way of guaranteeing faxes are being worked according to your business rules. Even slight variations across employees can cost time and money. Or, in a worst-case scenario, become a compliance issue.

5. No ability to track progress or generate reports



Faxing is rarely subject to the same analysis as other processes, even though sometimes the most important and urgent communications come in by fax. Some fax servers will provide you with a report that is similar to one a physical fax machine can produce – how many faxes came in and were sent out, and to/from which numbers. But it can't give you any more information than a physical fax machine can. In a lot of cases, companies won't even know their overall volume – how many faxes they send and receive in a month, let alone what happens to individual faxes within the system. There is no detailed reporting or business analytics to provide the insight you need to improve performance.

Proper process management requires feedback and information to analyze your procedures and identify areas for improvement. It's the same with faxing. You

need to be able to analyze your company's overall fax volume with some detail to make sure things are running smoothly.

For instance, think about referrals. You might have 2 or 3 people staffing and handling the faxes, but if you have no idea how many referrals you're actually getting in a month, and from who, and which ones are panning out – how can you know if your referral channels are healthy or need attention? Or which are your best referral partners that you want to make sure you nurture a relationship with?

And on an internal level, you must make sure you are appropriately staffing the handling of your faxes and resources are being allocated effectively.

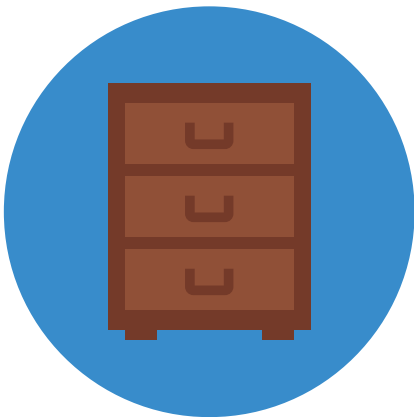
6. All faxes must be read by human eyes



In a traditional system, all faxes must be handled by a human at every step to get routed to the right person. While it's impossible to cut that out human intervention completely, when you are doing a fax volume of tens of thousands of faxes in a month, you need to take any opportunity you can to make the process as lean as possible.

Automating even one hand-off of a fax can save minutes for each fax. It adds up to hours of saved time each week that you can redirect to more strategic activities.

7. No central resource for permanent storage



Fax solutions have a limit for how long they store documents. They are not built to be a long term repository of these vital documents; there is no central resource for permanent storage with traditional fax set ups. Depending on your service, it can range from three months to a year, but the timeframe always culminates in deletion of the faxes.

Audit requests can include documentation from up to seven years ago for adults and 21 years for pediatrics. With those kinds of timeframes, you need a better way to permanently store your faxes and email isn't cutting it. Email is not centralized, and the filing system is made up by each unique user. An obvious answer is a document management program. A document management solution can be transformational for an organization, even well beyond fax storage.

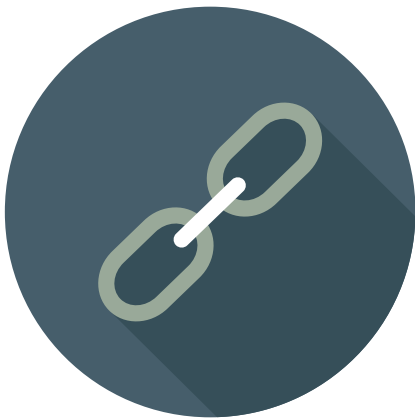
8. No easy way to get faxes into patient files



Even if you have a document management program, chances are your fax server does not communicate directly with it. It will take several clicks to file a document – downloading the fax from your email, making sure it's named appropriately, and then uploading and indexing it into your document management program. Or, if you still rely on a physical fax machine, you'll have to scan the document in before you can get it to your patient file.

Whether you have a fax server or a physical fax machine, if your fax server does not integrate with it, it will take a few additional minutes to permanently save your fax documentation to the right file. As we've mentioned before, adding even a small amount of time to a process that is repeated thousands of times in a month really adds up in overall inefficiency.

9. A lot of opportunity for error, with no back up



Traditional fax set ups introduce a lot of opportunity for error. It all comes down to the heavily reliance on manual processes, which create vulnerabilities for mistakes. Faxes can be overlooked completely, not addressed in a timely manner, misrouted, or simply neglected. It only takes one broken link in the system to have a fax fall completely through the cracks because there are no back up systems.

In the current systems, there is no way of knowing what has fallen through the cracks. Humans are fallible, and technology can be used as a generous safety net, keeping things on track.

10. No timeliness guarantee



A lot of the faxes you receive are documents that are critically important to claims or audits and appeals. They have to be handled by a specific deadline or it could dramatically impact your bottom line.

Without a backup system that uses alerts or escalations you can easily over look these important documents and no one, not even management will know.

What is the solution?

Faxing is a huge area of vulnerability for healthcare companies. Critical information flows through fax channels, but there are few controls and stop gaps to ensure against loss or error. Traditional fax setups, even those that use fax servers, are built upon manual processes. Any investment a healthcare organization can take to use technology to maximize automation, track progress and provide insight will repay itself in peace of mind and money to the bottom line. Business process management and document management tools can keep organizations informed and on track, especially when it comes to vital fax documents.

Medforce Technologies has developed a Fax Management App that focuses on bringing together the critical aspects of electronic faxing, business process management and document management. The Fax Management App takes fax handling out of email and gives you visibility, insight and control to make sure the work is completed fully and on time. It can be used with any third party or on-premises electronic fax solution, or it can be bundled with Medforce's Fax Service. For more information on the Fax Management App or any of the Medforce App turnkey workflow solutions, please visit www.medforcetech.com/apps.

About Medforce Technologies

Medforce Technologies provides productivity-enhancing software and services to help healthcare organizations adapt quickly to change and do more with less. Our flexible and highly-customizable document and process management products work across all areas of the business from intake and claims to procurement, mailroom, accounts payable and human resources, and assist in daily decision making based on real time information and strategic priority. We offer the industry's most feature-rich software that conforms to your preferred way of operating and returns more time and money to fuel your mission. To learn more about the power of productivity, visit www.medforcetech.com.

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