

Automation & Technology in Mailroom

...Why is technology & Automation very important in a mailroom?

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...Why is Automation & technology very important in a mailroom?

When all other departments of a company are technology enabled and automated, mailroom cannot lag behind. If mailroom lags behind, it could be the worst holdup in the entire system of corporate communication, for it can never be detected. The main disadvantage is that it is not under the direct surveillance of the IT department of any organization; being part of facilities it rarely gets the attention it deserves.

Automation of mailroom is important to track the very way mails are moving within and outside the organization. It exercises an indirect control over the document movements & thus the vital communication channels. Mailroom Automation prompts employees to respond to a job more quickly. It can consistently and in a cost effective manner track whether the mails that have been sent out are delivered at the right time. It integrates the mailrooms of branches and synchronizes the work pattern, thereby cutting down on redundancy of mundane jobs; It can track the type of mails coming in, to which department, action taken, whether replies have been sent in time.

An efficient automation or technology adoption can promote productivity and can even keep check on productivity. It can be used to deduce errors and in the long run enable a near error free system at the mailroom level itself. Automation enables reduced misuse of mails, increased security measures, early detection of frauds or lost/ misplaced mails.

...Trends in mailroom automation

Corporates concerned about automating the mailroom. The mailroom software has to be developed in-house based on the operational requirement. In fact most of the companies are happy with managing the mailroom requirements in "Excel sheets". However, there are rare cases, wherein independent mailroom companies offer integrated mailroom solutions which, among other things also includes a software.

Each of these software solution predominantly takes care of all data entry options, and even some integration of latest technologies like PDA's, scanners, etc. Digitization of signatures are also widely talked about for high value items. Though the above system, addresses all the required elements in terms of automation and technology enablement, more often than not, the mailroom software is like "an ill fitting glove". Most of the time is spent just adjusting the software fit to the process than harness benefits.

...Pre-requisites of mailroom automation...requires combination of skill sets

Though prima facie, mailroom software/ automation tools deal with inbound & outbound mail management, for harnessing maximum benefits, the system should monitor and circumvent all the accumulated inefficiencies the conventional process is laden with. This is typical for each industry and corporate culture/ work style.

The main reason for a fool proof automation solution not to be developed till date is that it requires a combination of skill sets such as micro level planning, logistics background, end user industry background, thorough knowledge of automation and technology, six sigma controls & procedures, quality control planning, manpower management skills.

Extent of automation in a futuristic mailroom software -

...Process has to be redefined...

The conventional process in terms of inbound mail management includes sorting the mails and storing them in pigeon holes in a particular order (logic) to be retrieved and delivered later. Similarly in terms of outbound mail management the normal process followed includes collection of mails to be sent, forwarding at the prescribed mail dispatch time.

But within this process itself, lay scope for substantial redefinition depending on - the type of industry, the rate of retrieval, the type of mails, - and thus this is the primary step towards successful automation and instant mailroom processing.

...Multi-lingual capabilities ...

It is to be understood that mailroom staffs are more process oriented and are not white collar executives. Therefore, mailroom software has to be multilingual and very user friendly to accommodate even non-English speaking manpower. This enables instant capture of every mailroom activity by the field staff themselves, rather than depend on data entry manpower. This also facilitates employment of lesser number of manpower, lower skilled manpower. Further, for multi national companies, it can synchronize mailrooms across continents seamlessly. That is to say, the branch in USA can operate in English and the one in France in French, with another one in Japan in Japanese, but the core software & process will remain the same, enabling easier communication.

...Its all about personalization & customization...

Mailroom environment is dynamic as every corporate has different work culture, communication culture. Therefore, any automation tool should be capable of absorbing the work culture of the organization in toto. To the extent that right from the colour code of the display till the language of the employee reminders the culture & the pulse of the organization has to be followed to enable effective reminders for collection of mails, query resolution, communication reminders, etc. This way the mailroom employees, even if outsourced or frequently changed, are more looped into the business style of the corporate and hence are better motivated.

Similarly, every mail received can have multiple course of action. Such as a mail can be high priority, normal or any other type, based on certain pre-defined parameters. The recipient may be present or could have gone on a business trip/ holiday or might have even resigned for good. All the above are highly personalized and leaves enough room for errors in further course of action. This is of grave importance since, the mailroom manpower are characterized by high turnover rates and less commitment/ motivation about the job. Therefore there could be a deliberate or non-deliberate neglect by the mailroom manpower causing total discomfort and thus significant hidden corporate costs.

Thus, the mailroom software should define & lead every mailroom action. Irrespective of the mailroom manpower, each of the above cases should have a standard course of action defined that will prompt the employees - such as hand delivery only in case of high priority mails, auto reminders to employees who are on a holiday, auto forwarding to compact room if recipient is no more on roles.

Similarly, each vertical has its own peculiarity. In some verticals, there are high volume of business mails targeted at a high number of internal employees, and in a few more there are high volume of business mails to be forwarded only to a handful employees. For these industries, query resolution across any parameter should be possible through the software. The internal employees should be able to access the mailroom information from anywhere and using any mode. This is vital for the internal employees to offer better customer service and thus overall corporate reputation. Therefore, the software should facilitate storage of info across any number of parameters which would be of significance for these employees. This warrants high level of end user industry understanding.

Similarly in industries such as IT and BPO, there is large number of white collar force with high employee turnover rates and high volume of personal mails. Therefore, the customization for these kind of companies are different, since the internal delivery rounds is not possible and the internal employees only can come to collect their mails from the mailroom. There should be multi modal reminders such as SMS, Auto emails, etc and also multiple displays such as touch screen kiosks in common areas such as library, cafeteria, etc. Even the pigeon hole sorting should enable easy and instantaneous resolution of a request for such a wide employee base. The software should also enable the mailroom employees to recall about

internal employee names, previous queries, and other details, thus facilitating better mailroom employee & customer employee relationship.

...should leverage its position as the vital communication link...

Mailroom has more information on the number of customer queries that have come in, number of payment reminders, number of cheques collected or honoured and other such info. An ideal automation solution should understand this pivotal role and enable the corporate leverage the mailroom info to improve the overall productivity and business communication speed. Upon a first level of data capture, the mailroom software can easily send auto reminders to internal customer service employees prompting early replies to prospective customers, a reconciliation statement to the accounts department on the number of cheques received and honoured, etc. The automation solution should be open to the above additional features, so that the Corporate can leverage on them if need be.

...should adopt easily to multiple countries...

A superlative mailroom automation solution is more pertinent in companies which have cross border interests. Multinational companies require seamless integration of their mailrooms in various countries to enable highly efficient communication system. When each country has its own peculiarity in terms of postal laws, rates, etc., it is imperative that the software is flexible enough to adopt -

- The postal laws (changes), regulations, rates of various regions
- Should have an active database of best vendors & their services in each region

...looks complicated but very vital ...

From the above, it is evident that mailroom automation can be complicated and warrant more detailed planning & expertise, since it has to accommodate user friendliness for both the high skilled internal employees as also low skilled mailroom employees. It should accommodate any time mailroom information and, query resolution on any parameter, which means mapping of total mailroom work flow into accurate data entry & MIS.

Upon a careful analysis, even the very way the mails are sorted might have to be challenged warranting an out of the box thinking. Any automation of an already inefficient operation would only complicate the effort, losing total corporate faith in the mailroom end.

Unless the mailroom is fittingly automated, and inbound & outbound mail management are made more efficient and instantaneous, any amount of investment in augmenting business speed through latest communication technologies will yield only minimal results.

...Latest technologies in mailroom automation ...

As more & more corporates adopt latest technologies and when internal employees get information at the click of button, mailroom cannot be left out. It should adopt technologies, which is widely being used in the corporate.

...reduce frauds & misuse through technology...

Business or personal, receiving mail is a very important routine. But while doing so, it could be quite irksome to check through a long mailroom run sheet and sign for Proof of delivery for the sake of future use. While this manual method is the most prevalent practice, it has the risk of misuse such as some one else signing and receiving a very important business mail, or even a credit card pin number etc.

Using up to date authentication technologies such as Bio metric, RFID tags, HID/Access cards, Signature pads to enable even receiving mails a pleasure. Depending on what a corporate is most comfortable with, it can use any of these technologies to enable an inbound mail management that is more secure, error free and real pleasure.

This has many advantages such as -

- Automatic mailroom data updates, and storage
- Automatic employee verification and hence very secure
- Drastic reduction in inbound mail TAT

Convenience & technology

Mailroom queuing is a big challenge when time management is very crucial in sectors such as IT & BPO. For most of these employees, the corporate address is the point of communication and hence they receive high volume of inbound mails. Using touch screen technology, mailroom info should be made accessible to such large work force in common areas such as Library, Cafeteria, etc. This can reduce queuing in the mailroom premises and causes total delight.

Instant access anywhere & anytime.

For Corporates with high branch network and high volume of inter branch mails, consolidating and tracking mails are a big challenge. Independent mailrooms of various branches constantly communicate with each other to update on mails sent and received, mails consolidated etc. These mails include top priority business mails with emphasis on minimum TAT and immediate response.

If these branches are in different time zones, communication becomes more difficult. It is not enough just to send an e-mail on the list of mails sent, since there could be abundant room for errors. The mailroom software should enable automatic and effective communication within branches through the net. All mailrooms can work in synchronization to harness the benefits of mail consolidation and towards total efficiency of mail communication links between the offices.

...Thus mailrooms should adopt technology & automation in such a way that it can cope with all other modes of communication such as telephone or internet to ensure a true globalization of trade & commerce. If such a solution can be achieved, the mailroom will truly become the POWER CENTRE OF EVERY ORGANISATION by reducing communication gaps, hastening corporate communication, and increasing corporate productivity.

For more information

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