Article

Running an Effective Business – Say Goodbye to Paper and Implement a Document Management System (DMS)

Paper based filing was supposed to be a thing of the past.

We were supposed to all be working electronically in the 21st century.

No paper at all.

Yet, many small and medium sized companies are drowning in paperwork.

They need to print on paper, receive paper documents, keep paper records and archive paper filing.

Paper based filing is notoriously cumbersome and can fill filing cabinets with documents that are rarely, if ever, seen again.

However, the paperless office is a reality for some businesses.

The journey to the paperless office begins with an organized approach to filing business documents and having a process to store and retrieve those documents online.

The journey ends in the world of the Document Management System (DMS).

A DMS helps your business store and centralize important business documents online and provide controlled access to sensitive information.

You can now find information more quickly, with less work. This in turn helps you provide a more efficient service to your customers. Once you have implemented a DMS in your business, you will see the benefits on a daily basis.

In our experience there are 3 key features that underpin the effectiveness of a DMS.

1. **Archiving** – **one place to find ALL your documents**

   Once you have your documents archived in an online DMS, you have secure access to them 24 hours a day. No more looking through filing cabinets or in desk drawers to find the information you need. Your documents are now archived in one place.

2. **Automatic Indexing** – **the quick way to organise your filing online**

   An important feature you should look for in any DMS is 'Automatic Indexing'. This feature will automatically scan your documents and create an index for easy reference and searching. This saves your business the time of building your own index, document by document.

3. **Search and Retrieval** – **find your information right away**

   Once you have created your archive of documents in the DMS and the automatic indexing is in place, you are ready to search and retrieve your information.

   This will be a pleasant experience compared to a paper based system with an easy to use interface that allows you to find the document you need in seconds, not hours.

Combine the benefits of archiving, automatic indexing and advanced search and you have a powerful system for helping you run your business more efficiently. You can guarantee that if a piece of information is in the DMS, you will be able to find it.

Taking your business to the world of online document management may sound daunting but when you partner with technical experts who also deeply understand how a DMS will help your business, then you have a recipe for success.

Contact us to find out how Docuplus can save your business money and improve efficiency every day.

Article

The 8 key reports you must make available to potential buyers of your business

If you are looking to sell your business or are acting on behalf of a business owner who wishes to sell, you no doubt understand the importance of the correct disclosure of your company information.

The due diligence process offers buyers the opportunity to review documents and ask relevant questions of the current business owner. This gives buyers the complete picture of the business they are looking to buy and ensures the seller meets all disclosure obligations from a financial and legal perspective.

The more company information a business owner can present in the first instance, the quicker the sale process is likely to become.

Buyers will see less risk in the purchase if they have their questions answered before they have even thought to ask them.

So what is a proven way to organise your company information during the due diligence phase of a business sale?

In our experience, we have found the following 8 key reports to be critical in helping describe the company for sale and answer any questions buyers may have.

1. **Legal Situation**

   Seen as the foundation report for all other reports. Establishes the legal entity(s) involved in the transaction, contracts, key legal documents, outstanding or impending litigation and other legal matters.

2. **Tax Situation**

   Tax returns, tax audits and current and future tax liabilities.

3. **Financial report**

   Provide the last 3-5 years financial information, a complete breakdown of the company's balance sheet, audit reports, financial planning for next 12 months and more.

4. **Market, Industry and Strategy**

   Overview of the market in which the company operates. Economic, industry factors affecting the business – positive and negative. How is the company differentiated from competitors? What is the marketing strategy? Sales pipeline.

5. **Environmental**

   Are there environmental impacts on the company? Are there environmental obligations?

6. **Insurance Coverage**

   Confirms the types and level of insurance in place. Confirms any claims made on insurance policies.

7. <u>Technology</u>

What is the technology used by the company to manufacture/create/deliver its product or service? What is the technology used to support the administration of the business?

8. <u>Employees</u>

This is a human resources report. An overview of employees, their roles and positions in the company. Level of experience within the company, pay levels and achievements.

These 8 reports outline a wide selection of documents that need to be presented, most likely to multiple buyers, as part of the due diligence process.

The storing of critical documents must be done in such a way as to give each potential buyer an equal opportunity to review the company information and ask any due diligence questions.

The security, confidentiality and access to these documents must be tightly controlled through the due diligence process.

The docurex cloud based "dataroom" is a popular solution that helps the seller organise and control access to confidential information as part of the business sale.

Article

The 7-step checklist to finding the best web hosting company for your small / medium sized business

Not all web hosting companies are the same.

Choosing a web hosting company is an important decision for your business and we think there are 7 main factors you need to consider.

Evaluate potential web hosting companies (including ours!) against this list and we are sure you will make the right choice.

1. **Reliability**

   Your business web site is a critical part of your business – it provides information to potential customers, it allows customers to contact you and you may sell goods and services directly from your website. No matter how big or small your business, you cannot afford for your website to be off-line and unavailable.

   Make sure your web hosting company has a track record of reliable web hosting - their web servers do not go off-line and they have spare capacity to handle extra busy times.

2. **Security**

   Every day there is a news story about another company losing important information to hackers. You need to know your company information is protected at all times.

   Make sure your web host provider has the latest anti-virus, anti-malware and firewall software installed to keep your data safe.

3. **Data Backup**

   If you lose or accidently delete website data, you need to know your website hosting company is backing up your information.

   If disaster strikes and your website is off-line because of the loss of data, your hosting company should be able to quickly retsore your information.

   Disaster avoided.

4. **Technology**

   Your web hosting company should constantly be investing in proven, reliable servers and network equipment.

   A web host company must evolve as quickly as the Internet and ensure their technology can meet your business needs.

5. **Performance**

   As a business user, you want visitors to your website to have the best possible experience.

   One of the most important factors is speed – how quickly do your web pages load on screen? If it takes a long time to load a web page, you may lose customers and orders.

Check your web host company has fast servers and a fast connection to the Internet. Your business depends on it.

6. **Ease of Use**

As a business user, you don't have time to spend hours managing your website.

Your web hosting company should give you easy access to your own website with a simple, easy to use interface.

7. **Expertise**

As a business owner, you need to know your web hosting company are experts at what they do – web hosting for small and medium sized businesses.

A web host company that only supports personal blog sites or one that only works with large corporations is not going to fully understand the needs of small or medium sized businesses.

We would be very happy if you'd like to compare veryHost to the above list.

Contact us today to talk through how we can provide top quality web hosting to your small or medium sized business.

Article

Access your Documents on the go – anytime and anywhere

Work is a mobile experience for many people.

If you are not working at your desk, you may be using a laptop from home, on a train or at a customer's office.

The future is a mobile workforce

IDC Research predict that by 2020, 75% of the US workforce (105 million people) will be considered mobile workers.* The growth of mobile working is coming from the adoption of smartphones and tablets for working as well as company Bring your Own Desktop (BYOD) policies.

It is essential companies give their mobile employees easy access to company files and documents via PC, tablet or phone.

Even a few years ago this could be a challenge for many organizations. The technology to make this available was slow and not that user friendly. You had to hope you could remember file names, use a number of different software solutions and hope the tech support team were answering their phones.

Help your mobile workers with easy information access

Today, things are very different. High speed broadband and Wi-Fi make wireless access to files in the cloud possible from almost anywhere. Improved mobile technology gives businesses options they have not had before.

Mobile staff benefit in a number of ways from accessing information on the go:

- When a staff member travels and has mobile access to company files they do not have to take gigabytes of sensitive company information with them. The information can remain secure on the company servers and the employee only accesses the information they need over a secure, password protected link.
- When staff make different copies of documents and files, it is very easy to lose track of the latest versions. Having information stored in one place on the company servers makes it easier for all employees, wherever they are, to know that they are using the latest information. No matter the time of day or location, employees who are travelling can access the correct versions of documents.
- Have you ever been on a business trip and forgotten some critical information? With mobile access to your company files all you have to do is log in to your company files via a web browser, search for the information and download to your laptop. No more waiting for a colleague to send the files by email!

Access your organized information from anywhere

So while mobile access to documents is very common these days, giving access to files and documents that are poorly organized is of little help to your staff.

It is vitally important to provide your team with well-organized information they can search and access easily. Storing files on a file server is rarely the best answer.

An alternative solution, one that provides flexible access to files and documents for travelling employees, is a web accessible Document Management System (DMS). The very purpose of a DMS is to make information easily searched and found. A DMS is designed to be the most efficient way to access your company information whether you are in the office or on the road.

Docuplus is a leading Document Management System (DMS) for today's mobile workers. Docuplus keeps information centralized, secure and searchable to allow your team to remain efficient wherever they work.

Contact docuplus today to find out more.

Article

Cloud backups: A simpler way for companies to backup their data

Cloud backups have changed the way businesses safely store copies of their data away from their main business premises.

For many organisations, making successful and reliable backups of data has been one of the most challenging aspects of their day to day IT support.

One of the biggest obstacles was the ever increasing amount of data that had to be stored. Initially it was gigabytes of data, then it was terabytes and now it's petabytes.

In order to store this data a business would have to buy dedicated storage devices, compress the data and house the equipment away from their main data centre. This is a costly exercise and a complex one to manage successfully.

While cloud backups do not solve every problem, they do help businesses streamline their IT support and reduce the capital outlay on backup storage devices.

In the first instance, the client will pay only for the storage they have been allocated. This is in the form of a service fee, typically paid monthly. The backup vendor will have built, or rented space within, the data centre associated with the backup storage and they will ensure the storage devices are available to receive backup data.

The client does not have to manage the IT backup infrastructure - this is now handled by the cloud backup vendor. The key IT infrastructure requirement is a network connection between the client and the backup vendor to transfer backup data within the required timeframes (typically overnight).

As the amount of backup data grows, the client simply purchases more storage space with their cloud backup vendor. The client does not need to invest in further expensive backup hardware in their own disaster recovery data centre. Backup is now a service, not a capital outlay.

When time comes to restore some or all of the data, the client has complete control over how and when the data is restored and in what order.

There are a wide range of cloud backup vendors and solutions. IT operations managers should talk to experts who can best match their backup requirements to the most appropriate cloud backup solution.

Article

A leader in Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) Consulting

At Agile BI, we offer our clients specialised Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) Consulting. This is just one of a number of services provided by our Microsoft SQL consulting team.

What are Agile BI's qualifications and expertise in Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) Consulting?

Agile BI is a Microsoft Gold Business Intelligence Partner. The Gold Partner certification process, training and support ensures our clients have access to expert knowledge and priority access to the latest SQL product information from Microsoft.

Agile BI ensures project planning, design and implementation meets the standards recommended by Microsoft. This approach is critical for all client SRSS implementations to achieve ongoing support from Microsoft.

How does Agile BI consider people, processes and technology as part of Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) Consulting?

While the technology is often the focus of project and implementation plans, to achieve a successful project both Agile BI and the client must review the goals and objectives of the organisation, people involved and processes affected.

This applies to all projects, including Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) projects.

A SQL Server implementation is complex by nature. An SSRS implementation could be part of a wider project including SSAS, DQS, SSIS and MDS. Consideration of other key SQL services is critical in any plan. Consideration of interfaces into Visual Studio and any 'Report Builder' requirements will also be reviewed.

How does Agile BI approach a Microsoft SQL Reporting Services (SSRS) Consulting project?

We ensure that before any SRSS design work is begun, there is a clear definition of reporting in place and any new requirements that will be required of SRSS are clearly identified and agreed by all parties.

Our technical consultants work closely with the key client stakeholders to develop a realistic plan to implement SRSS. We work with our clients using an Agile framework. This is an approach that has delivered measurable success time and time again.

Contact us today to discover how we can help your organisation successfully implement Microsoft SQL Reporting Services on time and within budget.

Article

When is the right time to sell your business?

Business owners work hard to provide a good quality service to their customers but there can come a time when it makes sense to sell the business.

It's not an easy decision and how do you know it's going to be the right one?

5 reasons business owners choose to sell their business

Let's review 5 of the main reasons owners consider selling their business.

1. **Retirement planning**

There comes a time when it is more important to relax and enjoy life rather than work in your business every day. A retiring business owner is often someone who is keen to get the best value from selling their business but not at any price.

2. **New investment required**

Sometimes the owner has taken the business as far as possible and without new investment it cannot grow anymore. New money and management may be needed to take the business to the next level.

3. **Change in the market**

Sometimes a particular type of business becomes popular: video rentals, tanning salons, payday loans are just some types of business that have become very popular at one point in time.

This could be an opportunity for an existing owner to cash in a heated market and get the very best possible price for the business at the top of the market.

4. **Change in the legal / regulatory landscape**

A business owner may sell because the government has introduced new legislation that affects how their business runs.

Examples include new environmental controls for building firms, new privacy laws for technology companies or a change in government subsidies for medical firms.

The owner may choose to sell the business rather than adapt to the new laws or regulations.

5. **New opportunities**

A business owner may have been offered or seen another business opportunity in another industry. Selling their current business can provide the capital to begin a business elsewhere.

Whatever the reason for selling a business, every business owner will need to consult a wide range of professionals including lawyers and accountants to ensure all the financial and legal implications from the sale are fully understood.

Preparing your business for the due diligence process

An important part of the sales process is preparing your company information for the due diligence process. The smoother the due diligence process is for potential buyers, the more likely an owner can sell their business.

A proven way to ensure the most efficient due diligence process for a business sale is to create an online data room where all documents relating to the sale. Documents are available in a secure online location and the ability to review these files is limited to prospective buyers.

Docurex provides organizations with a secure, online data room to ensure transparency and fairness in critical business sale transactions.

Contact Docurex for more information today.

Article

Organize an online backup - the most important task you can do today

Think of data backups as insurance for your computer files.

If something goes wrong with your computer system and you lose all your files, your entire business is at risk. You need to protect your files and documents by having an online backup (also known as a cloud backup) in place.

65% of businesses do not recover from a disaster

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the USA, 40% of businesses do not reopen after a disaster of any sort and 25% fail within 12 months of the disaster.*

With a combined total of 65% of businesses failing within 1 year of a disaster, every business needs to prepare for a disaster event. The simplest way to protect your company's information is to set up an online backup.

It is vital every business has a second copy (backup) of all their data held at a different location. If your company's data is destroyed or lost through fire, flood or theft, you have a copy safely stored elsewhere.

If you think backups are not that important, just imagine the effect on your business if you lost all your data in the next hour. How would your payroll, accounting, production, customer service systems continue? How many sales would you lose? How happy would your customers be?

An online data backup ensures you do not lose your critical business information even if the computers have been temporarily affected. You can buy or rent new computers but you cannot buy your data once it has been lost. Every organization is responsible for their own data.

What to look for in an online backup service provider

An online backup is the perfect solution for most organizations because the data will automatically be saved to a separate location away from the company offices.

So what are the top 5 features to look for in an online backup service provider?

1. **Secure data center -** Make sure your backup provider uses a professional data center to locate their servers and hard disk storage.
2. **Easy to setup –** As the customer, you should have access to an easy to use control panel to organize your data backup.
3. **Tech support -** Tech support should be able to respond quickly to any problems because you will never know when you need your backup data.
4. **Expandable storage space** - As you backup increasing amounts of data, your online backup service provider needs to have the capacity to increase the disk space available to you. You cannot ever afford to run out of disk space!
5. **Clear pricing** - Do not get caught out with hidden fees and costs. Ask your provider for all their fees for online backup.

An online backup service provider should be an important part of company's IT strategy. Make sure you do your research to find the right one for you.

veryHost are an established provider of website hosting and online backup services to a wide range of companies. Contact us today to find out how we can help your organization.

Article

Why a Document Management System (DMS) is a leap forward over your paper based filing system

The days of the paper based office have not yet disappeared.

However, paper based filing systems can no longer cope with the variety and volume of information we receive every day.

According to a Coopers & Lybrand report on document management, professionals spend 5-15% of their time reading information, but up to 50% looking for it. How more efficient everyone could be if their information was better organised and easily found!

Rather than have some information printed on paper and other information stored on a computer, many small businesses and freelance consultants have chosen to file ALL their information in an online (cloud based) Document Management System (DMS).

A DMS is an online (cloud based) system that stores all your business documents in a way that makes it easy to search and retrieve information about your business. A DMS saves you time and effort by organising all your company information as digital files.

Automatic Indexing Saves You Time

A DMS saves you and your team lots of work by automatically indexing all the files you upload to the DMS. The automatic index allows you to search your files in the DMS and find the information you need quickly from any related document.

This is far more efficient than a paper based filing system that requires you organise your own index system and ensure everyone else in your office understands how the files are organised. Automatic Indexing within a DMS does all this for you.

Securely Access your Filing from anywhere in the World

Security of your information is much higher with a DMS as employees, according to their job descriptions, can be assigned different levels of security access to the files within the DMS. A paper based system relies on physical security such as keys, doors and locks. All of which can be more easily broken than today's computer encryption.

A web based DMS can be accessed from any Internet connected location in the world. This makes your office filing available to your staff wherever they are working – office, home or client's site. Compare this to physical paper based filing cabinets which are only accessible to those employees in a specific office and who know how the paper files have been organised.

Protect your Files from Fire, Flood and Theft

Paper based archives and filing are subject to the risk of fire, flood and theft. In this case, your business would need to copy and archive all your paper based filing and store the information in another building. A cloud based DMS automatically stores information in a secure data centre - well away from your office. With a DMS, your information is safe no matter what disaster happens to your office.

Search and Retrieve Information from any document

Searching for documents and information in a DMS is far quicker and more efficient than a paper based filing system. A DMS makes all your business documents available through a powerful and intelligent search function.

A DMS user can enter a search query and the DMS will display all documents the user has security clearance to view. This helps find information wherever it is, in whatever format in any document in the filing system.

If you search for information you hold on a client "Mr Smith", you will be presented with all your documents that refer to Mr Smith; projects, tax, legal, invoices, anything that contains his name.

These are just some of the big benefits a DMS can bring you and your business.

For more information, contact docuplus today to discuss your document management requirements.

Article

Selling a Business? How to Organize Documents for the Due Diligence Process

There are many aspects of selling a business that have to considered. Legal, accounting, financial, operations, human resources and much more.

Potential buyers of a business need to know they can access all the relevant information to the sale.

Providing business information in a logical, organized format for all buyers not only helps build trust during the sale process but can reduce the time it takes a potential buyer to complete their due diligence analysis.

The 3 Critical Steps to Organizing Information when Selling Your Business

We believe there are 3 critical factors in providing information for the due diligence process:

1. The seller must make sure all relevant documents are provided. There is no missing information that buyers will have to additionally request. It is important the seller anticipates all questions that a buyer may have.
2. All documents are organized in a logical manner for potential buyers to review. No time is wasted by buyers trying to find information about the business or claiming they were not given the information. All documents must be clearly labelled and organized for easy review.
3. All documents are in a single, secure location that gives equal access to information for all buyers. By locating all the documents in a secure, online location the sellers can guarantee security and control of their information. The buyers know they all have equal access to the same sale information.

By taking the time to locate every relevant document, organizing the information in a logical format and presenting this information in a secure, online location, business sellers reduce or even eliminate any frustration in the due diligence process.

The 7 Groups of Document to present for Due Diligence

Every business is unique and every business sale will have its own distinctive characteristics.

However, every business sale has common documents and information that must be provided such as legal, financial and tax. Knowing this helps us group and organize information for due diligence.

The 7 main document groups we suggest the sellers of businesses use to organize their information are:

1. Legal Situation
2. Tax Situation and Financial & Economic Situation
3. Market, Industry and Strategy
4. Environmental
5. Insurance Coverage
6. Technology Situation
7. Employee Situation

This framework provides an easy to understand reference for buyers.

Storing documents for the Due Diligence Process

Once you have organized your documents for due diligence, they can be presented to all potential buyers via a secure but easy to use online service.

You need to make sure that potential buyers see the same version of each document and no altering of documents can be undertaken by the potential buyers. This usually requires sellers to use a specialist, online data room service to securely hold their due diligence documents.

For more information on this proven approach to organizing your key documents for the due diligence process, visit www.due-diligence-checklist.net to download a free, detailed 30 page checklist.

Article

The Do's and Don'ts to Create a Strong and Memorable Password

We live in a world of passwords.

We need passwords to access our Internet banking, our email, our work computer and much, much more.

I'm sure we have all been faced with logging into a new service and being asked to create a new user ID and password.

What do you do? Think of any word that pops into your head? Add a few numbers and type it in?

You may have created a strong password combination but how will you remember it? A password we may think of as being obvious when we sign up may have left our memory the following day!

Passwords are something of a paradox - it is important that our passwords are easy to remember but they must also be impossible to guess.

Randomly thinking of words and phrases with numbers, special characters, upper case and lower case letters can be daunting. In this article we are going to give you some help by showing the tips and tricks the top technical experts use to create safe passwords.

Password Creation – Good Practice

Create passwords of 8 characters or more in length. Some experts recommend 12 or even 21 character long passwords but we think that is going a bit far for most people in day to day use.

Use at least 1 upper case letter in your password. This is a requirement of many systems but it is a good habit to get into.

A mix of letters and numbers. Again, many systems require you to have both numbers and letters but it is better you already have the habit

Add special characters - !@#$%^&*(). This is the best way to make a password truly unique. However, try to avoid using an exclamation mark "!" to replace a "1". This is too easy for people and hackers to guess.

Use a sequence of letters and numbers that means something to you and no-one else. So, you might say "I Walk My Dog Every Day" and then take the first character of every word "IWMDED" to become part of your password – you can add numbers and special characters.

Password Creation - Things NOT to do

The rules of what you should not do are just as important as the things you should do.

Do not use one password for every service you use – no matter how tempting! This would mean as soon as someone has got your email password, they would have your online banking password as well

Avoid names, places and dictionary words in your passwords. Hackers can use special programs to crack your passwords and names, places and dictionary words make it easier for them to crack.

Do not repeat one character e.g.; aaaaaaa. This may sound obvious but it is one of the top 6 most common ways to create a password.

Do not write your passwords down in an easy to find place or type them into a document called 'passwords.doc' and save that document to your desktop. Again, this sounds obvious not to do but many people still keep their passwords in an easy to find document on their computer.

If you take the time to create strong passwords, you will have a safer time online.

Create your strong passwords today!

Article

Choosing the Best WordPress Hosting Company for your website

WordPress is the most popular platform for building websites. It is estimated that 25% of all websites on the Internet are built using the WordPress content management system (CMS).

A CMS is an online system for creating pages for your website and WordPress is the most popular CMS in the world – over 74 million websites across the planet are powered with WordPress.

WordPress became popular in part because it was free to download and install on your own server or hosting account. WordPress also has a strong user community to help improve the software on a regular basis. However, perhaps the most important aspect of WordPress is that it is easy to use and helps you create great looking websites.

Choosing a WordPress Hosting Company

If you're looking to build a website, WordPress is an excellent choice.

You now need to choose a company to 'host' the website for you. A WordPress hosting company will provide you with a server on which you can install WordPress and also provide you with the necessary disk storage and fast connection to the Internet.

However, not all web hosting companies are the same and you will need to check the following:

> **Fast, Reliable Service** – you need to know your WordPress website will be available to visitors all the time. After all, it's your reputation on the line. Ask your WordPress hosting company about the speed and reliability of their service.

> **Optimized for WordPress** – your hosting provider must have their servers optimized for WordPress. The minimum requirements are PHP 5.6 or greater, MySQL 5.6 or greater and the mod_rewrite module in Apache.

> **Easy to install WordPress** – make sure the installation of WordPress is automated and simple to complete in a matter of minutes. You don't want to waste time trying to understand how to copy files to the server.

> **How many SQL databases are you allowed?** – WordPress uses a MySQL database to store your information. You use one MySQL database per WordPress website. If you need to build more than one WordPress website (many companies build a test site), then you will need more than one MySQL database.

> **Excellent Customer Support –** while there is a great wealth of online knowledge to support WordPress users, your hosting company must also be WordPress experts. If you have any issues with your WordPress installation, they must be able to diagnose and fix any problems.

Make Your WordPress Hosting Decision

When choosing a WordPress hosting service make sure you call the company to discuss their service before you buy. How they respond to you on the phone will give you an indication of the future service you can expect from them.

Be confident they are experts in WordPress and experts in web hosting.

As a first step, speak with veryhost to understand how they can provide you with fast, reliable WordPress hosting. They will explain everything in a friendly, non-technical way to help you understand the range of services they can offer you.

*http://marketingland.com/wordpress-used-on-25-percent-of-all-websites-report-151115

Article

If you are Buying a Company are you taking these Due Diligence Steps?

If you plan to buy a company, the due diligence process is probably the most important aspect of the entire transaction.

Due diligence research and analysis ensures a buyer is confident in the true value of the company and how this relates to the price of the company for sale.

Below are the major elements that should be studied during the due diligence process:

Company capitalization

How much is the company worth in today's market place? Are shares publicly available and if so, which stock exchange do they trade on?

Revenue, Profit and Margin

What are the company's figures for at least the last three years? Get information from earlier years if possible.

Has revenue grown year on year? Are profits steady or sporadic? Are profit margins consistent with the industry norm? These are just some of the questions which will be asked during the due diligence process.

Industries and Competition

In what industry (or industries) does the company compete? What are the major trends in these industries? Are there threats or opportunities in these industries arising from new regulations, legal class actions, new technology or new competition?

What is the market position (Leader? Follower?) of the company and how do they compare to their major competitors? What are the dominant business models used by the competition and how well does the company execute this model?

Valuation Multiples

Given the price being asked for the company, what is the valuation multiple and how does it compare to the industry average? If there is a large difference between the price being asked and the valuation multiple of the competition, what is the reason? Is it justified?

Ownership and Management

Who actually owns the company? Do the founders still hold stock? Is it a family run business? What is the percentage of shares held by founders and current management? This helps show how much they have invested in the success of the company.

Examination of Balance Sheet

Use a financial expert to help analyse the balance sheet. Understand the assets, liabilities, cash flow position, debt levels and other key indicators to the financial health of the company.

Stock History, Options and Dilution

How has the stock price performed over the last 10 years? How does the market perceive the company and how is this reflected in the stock price?

Do current stock owners have options to sell stock? Is the company committed to issuing more stock in the near future?

Risks to the Company

Are there any specific risks, legal cases, regulatory concerns or competition issues that threaten the company? Consider all aspects of the business.

Something to remember as part of due diligence is that in the first instance it is simply an information gathering exercise and not one that requires any judgements to be made. Keep an objective mind to the information collected and undertake a full analysis when you have collected all the data you need.

Completing a full due diligence process will ensure you have the best possible understanding of a company's potential.

We recommend you download a free due diligence checklist from www.due-diligence-checklist.net to ensure you have asked all the questions above (and more).

Article

The Business Exchange Marketplace – A World of Opportunity

Each day, businesses are bought and sold in every country around the world.

Both the sellers and buyers of businesses benefit from having a central place to come and evaluate potential deals and transactions. This need for a centralised marketplace, alongside increased use and trust of the Internet, has encouraged the growth of business exchanges in many countries.

How a Business Exchange Helps both Buyers and Sellers

A business exchange saves buyers times as they do not have to constantly evaluate different publications, adverts and networks to find the right business to buy. They can research and analyse thousands of businesses in a single place.

A business exchange works well for the seller. They can advertise their business on an exchange that, by its very nature, attracts serious business buyers with access to the correct levels of financing. A seller can compare their business to others in the same sector and put a value on their business that is realistic in the marketplace. They can have a better sense of an achievable sales price by just researching other business for sale.

The value of the business exchange is well established and seen as a benefit to the wider business community. An exchange presents a business for sale to a wider audience than they might otherwise have – with a successful sale ensuring the business does not fail or close. New owners are given the opportunity to revitalise a business, bring new ideas and provide jobs for communities.

Businesses for Sale – All Over the World

The use of a business exchange is understood the world over. However, different countries will take different approaches to their implementation.

In Germany, www.nexxt-change.org is funded by Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology amongst other government organisations and industry associations. With over 8,000 businesses for sale, this is an excellent place for business buyers and sellers to evaluate the marketplace and conduct transactions.

Other business exchange sites serving the German market include www.dub.de and www.firmenboerse.com.

In the USA, business exchanges are run by commercial business brokers. The brokers take a fee to provide an online platform to bring buyers and sellers together as well as a fee for assisting in the sale process. US specific business marketplaces include www.businessbroker.net and www.businessmart.com.

Perhaps the biggest business exchange website is the well-established www.businessesforsale.com. Launched in the mid-1990's, this website lists over 65,000 business for sale in over 30 countries. The website provides an excellent resource for those buyers interested in overseas businesses.

The advent of Crowdfunding

A more modern development, and one that has most definitely been accelerated by the Internet, is that of business crowdfunding. Sites such as www.kickstarter.com and www.indiegogo.com bring

interested investors to start-up companies in crowd-funding campaigns. The more interest in a new company, the more money likely to be raised. It is common for investors from many different countries to pledge money.

Crowdfunding can be an excellent funding source for smaller scale projects and businesses at the start-up stage. Each funder is essentially buying into the business through trust and belief in the product or service – although typically they do not receive a share of the business.

At this time, the crowdfunding process has not translated to the purchase or sale of established businesses which require much higher levels of due diligence and funding.

Today, there are more ways than ever to research, sell or buy a business. The business exchange is one of the very best ways business owners can use to find their next opportunity – wherever it is in the world.

Article

How does a Hosted Exchange service improve your company's email security?

Every company would like to know their confidential email, calendar and contact information is safe and secure.

A hosted Microsoft Exchange service is a popular way for companies to achieve this and at the same time benefit from all the features of this powerful software.

Microsoft Exchange – an Enterprise class solution for email and collaboration

Microsoft Exchange is enterprise class collaboration software used by companies all over the world to manage emails, calendars and contact information. Coming from Microsoft, it integrates closely with the Microsoft Office suite of productivity tools such as Excel, Word ad PowerPoint.

The complexity of setting up and managing an Exchange system has meant that only larger companies have had the resources to install and configure the necessary servers and software.

A typical Exchange server installation requires expertise in servers, email, collaboration software, networking and security. Exchange servers are usually installed at company data centres. For large organisations this has presented a safe but expensive way to deliver email and collaboration services to their users.

How Hosted Exchange has changed the Email landscape

As the cost of hosting servers has fallen, it has become economical for hosting companies to install and configure Exchange servers so they may offer hosted Exchange services to their customers. This arrangement has suited companies both large and small.

Larger companies subscribe to a hosted Exchange service to reduce the management overhead of a complex Exchange installation. Smaller companies subscribe because they can now access the power of Microsoft Exchange but without having to invest in expensive hardware and software.

A hosted Microsoft Exchange service provides all customers with a secure solution to manage their email and collaboration software. In fact, the security aspects of hosted Exchange are often a major reason a customer subscribes to the service.

Protecting your email and collaboration systems

A hosted Microsoft Exchange service offers a number of security related benefits.

- Most hosting providers provide 24/7 expert support to solve any Exchange related issue, including security issues. Hosting companies employ Microsoft Exchange experts to reduce or eliminate downtime for customers.
- While the server may be hosted at the service provider's data centre, customers can still manage their Exchange system through a control panel from desktop or mobile devices. This ensures mailboxes can be created, deleted and managed at any time of day. Any security breaches can be attended to very quickly.

- Hosting providers use professional, secure data centres to host their server and network infrastructure. Access to the datacenter is only granted to authorized personnel, making sure your hosting service is protected from physical tampering.
- Hosting providers build further levels of protection through the use of firewalls, SPAM filters and data encryption at their datacenter. All levels of security are kept up to date with latest software versions and patches to provide the latest protection.
- One of the biggest benefits to the safety and security of information is the fact a hosted Exchange services can be installed in a data centre many kilometres from the customer's offices or factory. Should a disaster occur at the customer premises, the Exchange service and data is safely held by the hosting company and the service continues to be available during a disaster event such as fire or flood. A customer who uses a hosted Exchange service is able to continue to communicate and share information at a critical time.

In times when data security is forever in the news, companies who select a hosted Exchange service can be sure they have chosen a proven, secure way to manage their email and collaboration systems.