How Digital Document Processes Are Shifting From Best Practice To Business Necessity
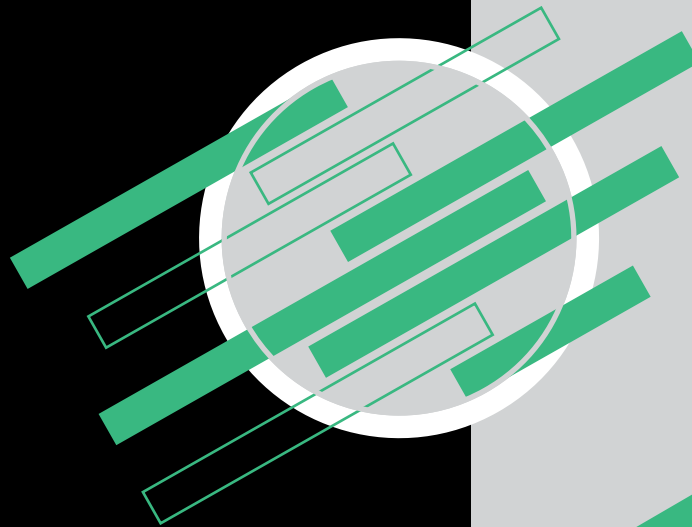
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ABOUT FORRESTER CONSULTING

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Executive Summary

In just a few short months, a global pandemic has disrupted the way we work and live. Decision makers at organizations are being forced to rethink how they empower their remote workforce and continue to serve customers. This disruption is causing an acceleration in adoption of digital collaboration and productivity technologies, bringing digital document solutions with capabilities including file sharing, e-signatures, and cloud storage to the forefront.[1]

How can these solutions support an agile workplace during a crisis? And how can they facilitate recovery? What are the implications for companies with minimal digital document processes?

Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to answer these questions by evaluating how digital document processes are supporting business resilience. Forrester conducted an online survey with 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Western Europe, and Asia Pacific (APAC) with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organizations. We found that as companies continue to acclimatize to virtual work en masse, it is increasingly important for employees and customers to share, review, sign, and store digital documents virtually and securely without the need for hard copies. Once considered a best practice, these capabilities are now becoming core functionality, and they will endure beyond the current crisis to become foundational elements of both the customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX) moving forward.

KEY FINDINGS

› **Digital document processes help organizations maintain business resilience.** Organizations are leveraging their digital document processes to serve their customers and increase employee productivity and collaboration while operating remotely. In light of the pandemic, 72% of respondents agree that digital document processes support business continuity amidst unforeseen circumstances.

› **Digitizing document processes reduces business risk and opens up revenue opportunities.** Organizations with digital document processes in place are better equipped to continue to operate remotely without interruption. Respondents from those organizations report 10 times less at-risk customers and two times less at-risk revenue than those with companies that do not have these solutions in place. Reaping the benefits of these solutions even more, 47% of respondents say that it is enabling them to pursue opportunities and gain new customers during the current crisis.

› **Digital document processes are becoming standard practice and will help improve CX and EX in the long term.** New business imperatives have shifted the perception of digital document processes from operational tools to true enablers of good CX and EX. In fact, 54% of respondents predict that the benefits of increased employee collaboration will last beyond the pandemic, and 47% say the same about increased customer satisfaction.

72% of respondents say that digital document processes enable their organizations to better maintain business continuity amidst unforeseen circumstances.

"Digital document technologies allow individuals to continue working off-site while protecting the content through secure processing."

Marketing senior manager, financial service company, Hong Kong

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2020: A Paradigm Shift For Workplace Practices

Ensuring business continuity during a global pandemic introduced a paradigm shift for organizations across industries and across the world. It required new workplace strategies to adjust to the new normal, which means some practices shifted from "nice to have" to business necessities. As organizations enter the recovery phase, some of these practices are here to stay as companies look to embrace a new future of work. Our study found that:
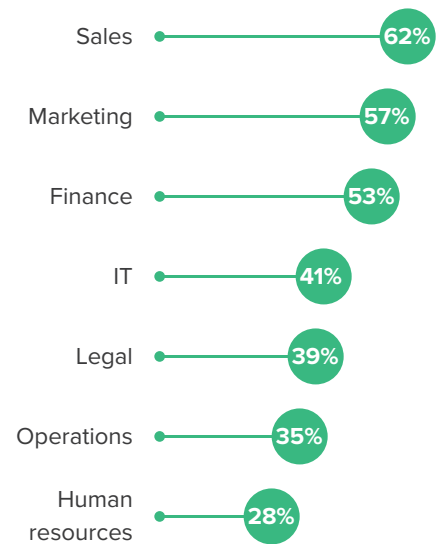
› **The proportion of the workforce working remotely has skyrocketed, and it will stay that way.** Sixty-seven percent of the workforce is now working remotely on a regular basis.[2] That's up from 20% pre-pandemic. As expected, remote work will continue to play a significant role post-pandemic, with respondents anticipating 39% of their workforce continuing to work remotely on a regular basis

› **Organizations are adapting to the surge in remote workers by providing employees with more collaboration and productivity tools that improve document processes.** Sixty-four percent of respondents say their organization has provided employees with technologies to assist or improve remote work, and another 30% say their organization intends to do so within the next six months. This includes digital document processes, which half of the respondents (47%) say their organizations use today.

› **The use of digital document processes span across departments.** Most respondents say their organization uses a mix of paper and digital processes (72%), while organizations that are more digitally mature use digital processes exclusively (13%). Departments vary widely in their use of digital document processes with sales, marketing, and finance employing it the most, while human resources, operations, and legal use it to a lesser degree (see Figure 1). Considering the effects of paper processes becomes more pertinent as decision makers increasingly see digital document processes as required. For example, HR often sets the tone for an organization's EX, yet these departments use the most paper-based processes. This is especially prevalent in the higher education and life sciences industries where one in four (24%) HR departments uses fully paper-based processes.[3]

› **New challenges are arising during the pandemic.** The crisis is bringing significant budget restrictions and adding an extra layer of complexity as respondents perceive greater challenges around training and change management in a remote work environment. To add, organizations also report regulatory and compliance risks impacting the deployment of digital document processes. This is despite the regulatory environments that promote and support the use of digital document processes in many jurisdictions. Increasing awareness of the regulations supporting the deployment of these solutions and weighing the implications of not deploying these solutions from both a customer and an employee point of view will help organizations avoid creating unnecessary barriers to adoption.

Figure 1

"To the best of your knowledge, to what extent are the following departments employing digital documentation tools?"
(Displaying "fully digital" answers)

| Department	
Sales	62%
Marketing	57%
Finance	53%
IT	41%
Legal	39%
Operations	35%
Human resources	28%

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

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Organizations Are Increasingly Recognizing The Importance Of Digital Document Processes

In comparison to other digital transformation initiatives, digitizing document workflows hasn't necessarily made the top of the priority list in the past. However, the pandemic has shifted how decision makers view these tools. While they've traditionally seen digital workflows as operational tools with the primary benefit of reducing printing and storage costs, they now consider them to be strategic imperatives to keep business moving. Our study found that:

› **Decision makers increasingly see digital document processes as enablers of good CX and EX.** Forty percent of respondents say they link increased customer satisfaction and increased employee productivity during the pandemic with digital document processes, which is up from 28% pre-pandemic. Further, they say they anticipate this will last beyond the pandemic. Improving employee collaboration (54%) and increasing customer satisfaction (47%) rank among the top three benefits linked with digital document processes post-pandemic (see Figure 2).

› **The shift to a virtual working environment has emphasized the role digital document processes play in maintaining business continuity.** The pandemic has brought to light the importance of features including document sharing, real-time collaboration, workflow automation, and e-signatures. Seventy-two percent of respondents say that digital document processes support business continuity amidst unforeseen circumstances, and 77% of respondents with organizations in North America say that e-signatures are very important or a critical requirement to supporting business resilience.

› **Digital document processes are complementing other digital initiatives, not cannibalizing them.** Decision makers now view digital document initiatives at much higher levels of importance, equal to or greater than previous leading initiatives such as expanding automation capabilities, moving to the cloud, and developing agile capabilities (see Figure 3). Due to the far-reaching business impact and potential for business acceleration of digital document processes, decision makers now see them as foundational elements required for continuity, agility, and ongoing resilience.

› **Decision makers don't consider digital document processes as a "point solution" anymore, but as an integral part of their organization's IT landscape.** Sixty-five percent of respondents say integrating digital document processes with everyday productivity applications is very important or a critical requirement. Digitizing workflows holistically with end users in mind is helping organizations reap all the benefits from their modernization initiatives.
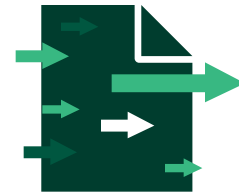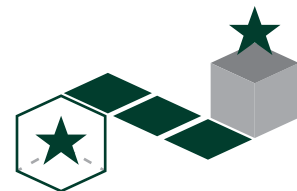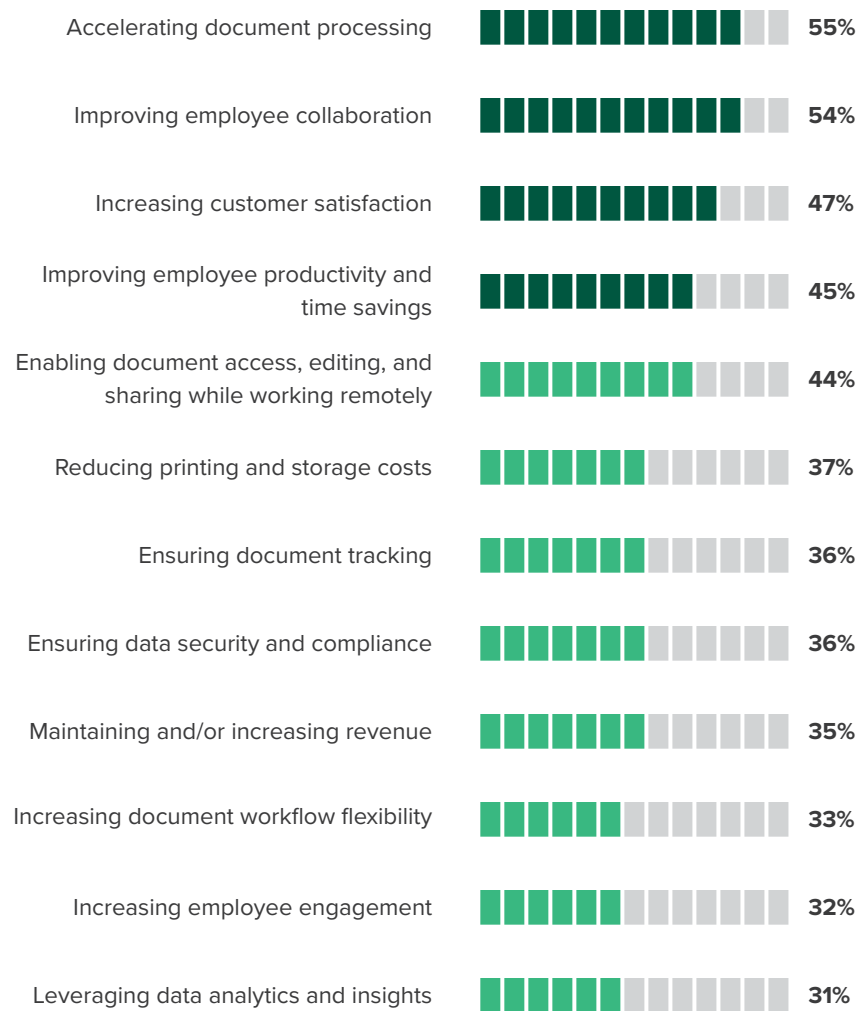
77% of respondents with organizations in North America say e-signature is very important or a critical requirement to support business resiliency.

Figure 2

"We've listed some of the benefits provided by digital document processes and tools below. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, please select the most important benefits from these solutions to your organization."
(Displaying "pandemic recovery" answers)

Benefit	Percentage
Accelerating document processing	55%
Improving employee collaboration	54%
Increasing customer satisfaction	47%
Improving employee productivity and time savings	45%
Enabling document access, editing, and sharing while working remotely	44%
Reducing printing and storage costs	37%
Ensuring document tracking	36%
Ensuring data security and compliance	36%
Maintaining and/or increasing revenue	35%
Increasing document workflow flexibility	33%
Increasing employee engagement	32%
Leveraging data analytics and insights	31%

Organizations are reassessing the role of digital documentation processes, from operational tools to enablers of good CX and EX.

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Figure 3

"In your opinion, how important are each of the below initiatives and technologies in elevating your organization's digital maturity?" (Displaying "very important" and "critical requirement" answers)

70%
Leveraging data analytics and insights

64%
Developing Agile and DevOps capabilities

62%
Migrating to the cloud

61%
Adopting digital document processes and tools

59%
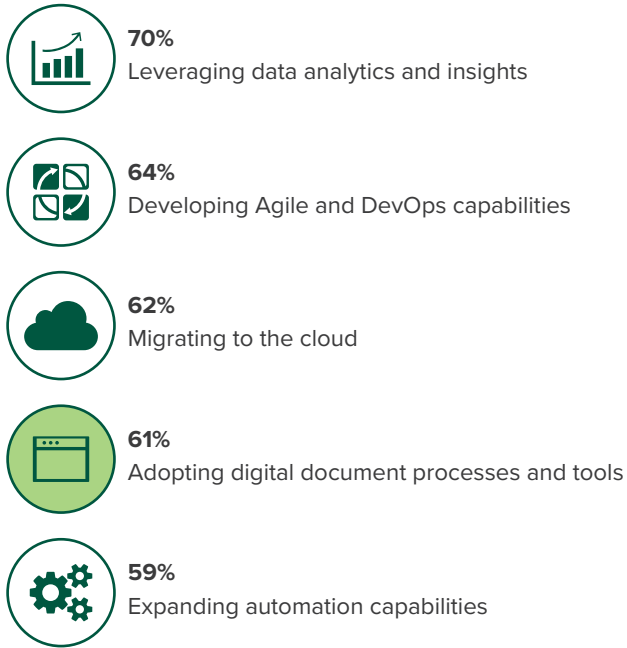Expanding automation capabilities

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Digitizing Document Processes Unlock Business Opportunities

The ability to maintain business continuity is dependent on digital document processes. The more that companies use digital document processes, the more agile and flexible they are to continue to serve their customers. As a result, companies exclusively using digital document processes are seeing a five times improvement in maintaining business continuity compared to companies with minimal or no digital document processes. Our study found that:

> **Organizations with digital document processes have less business at risk than other organizations.** Respondents from organizations with digital document processes in place say their companies have 10 times less at-risk customers and two times less at-risk revenue than respondents from companies that do not have these solutions in place (see Figure 4).

Respondents from organizations with no digital document processes report **10x more at-risk customers** and **2x more at-risk revenue** than those from other companies.

Figure 4

"In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the best of your knowledge, please indicate the percentage of at-risk customer and at-risk revenue at your organization due to a lack of digital alternatives."

	At-risk customers	At-risk revenue
We mainly use manual and/or paper-based processes and have implemented minimal/no digital document processes.	**44%**	**51%**
We use a mix of paper-based and digital processes and tools for document management.	**23%**	**37%**
We mostly use digital document processes, but a number of our processes still require paper-based or manual steps.	**15%**	**29%**
We exclusively use digital document processes.	**4%**	**27%**

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Figure 5

"In your opinion, which of the following features provided by digital document processes and tools are the most important in supporting your organization's business continuity and agility?"

(Displaying a selection of "very important" and "critical requirement" answers)

72% Document sharing

66% Document workflow automation

63% Real-time document collaboration

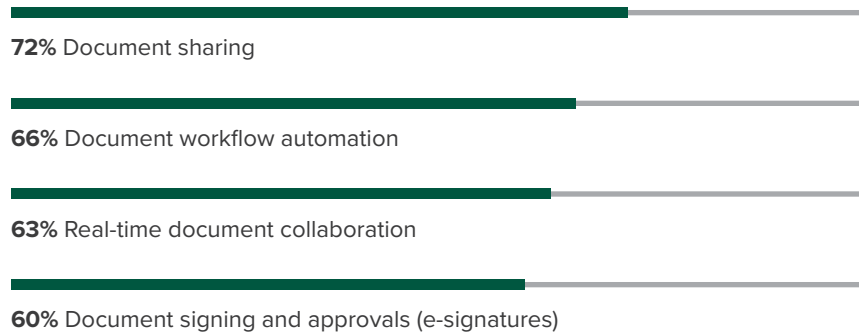**60%** Document signing and approvals (e-signatures)

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

› **Digitizing document processes better positions organizations to serve customers.** Features like document sharing, collaboration, automation, and e-signatures support business continuity by enabling organizations to serve their customers despite a lack of direct contact (see Figure 5). Companies with minimal digital document processes are missing a key enabler for serving customers and continuing to grow. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents with organizations that exclusively use digital documents say these capabilities allow their companies to continue serving customers to ensure business continuity versus only 15% from organizations with minimal digital documents capabilities. In addition, 47% of respondents with organizations that exclusively use digital document processes say these solutions enable their companies to pursue opportunities and gain new customers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, versus only 9% from organizations with minimal digital documents capabilities.

› **Digital document workflows accelerate business.** Manual or paper-based tasks slow processes, therefore they slow business. That is particularly true during this pandemic as many respondents (56%) say they see accelerating document processes as one of their organization's biggest challenges to keeping the business running. Digitizing document workflows is foundational in helping organizations overcome that obstacle. In fact, 55% of respondents rate accelerating document processing as the most important benefit coming from these solutions post-pandemic.

› **Digital document processes boost employee productivity.** An alarming 97% of respondents from organizations with minimal digital document capabilities are seeing a negative impact from the pandemic on employee productivity, compared to only 18% of respondents from more advanced organizations (see Figure 6). Having digital document processes that support both at-work and work-from-home environments clearly makes a difference in an organization's ability to maintain employee productivity.

Companies that exclusively use digital document processes are seeing **5x more improvement** in maintaining business continuity than companies with minimal or no digital document processes.

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› **Conducting document processes online improves employee collaboration and engagement.** Research from the Forrester Employee Experience Index™ (EXi) shows that having an environment where employees can be productive and get their work done is a key predictor for employee engagement.[4] Digital document processes play a key role here. Forty-five percent of respondents say that digital document processes are improving employee productivity, and 64% say the processes enable effective collaboration for remote workers. More specifically, the pandemic is accelerating user adoption of specific features such as document sharing (77%), cloud storage (73%), mobile access (64%), and e-signatures (58%). These functionalities are having a direct impact on the quality of EX as one out of two respondents (45%) link digital document processes with increasing employee engagement during the pandemic.

Only 18% of respondents from organizations with advanced digital document capabilities see remote working negatively impacting employee productivity, vs. 97% from less-advanced organizations.

Figure 6

"Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement." (Displaying "agree" and "strongly agree" answers)

"The lack of adequate technology and tools is impacting employees' productivity in this virtual workforce environment."
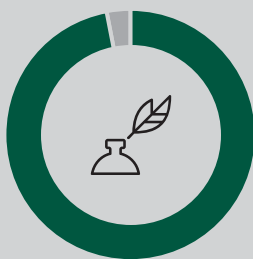
97%

Of organizations with minimal/no digital document processes, and mainly using manual and/or paper-based processes.
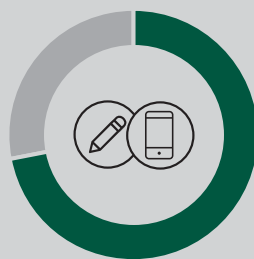
72%

Of organizations using a mix of paper-based and digital processes and tools for document management.
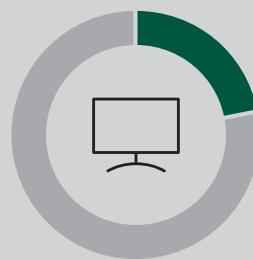
22%

Of organizations mostly using digital document processes, but with a number of processes still requiring paper-based or manual steps.
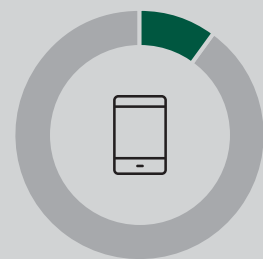
10%

Of organizations exclusively using digital document processes.

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

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Digital Document Capabilities Are Becoming A Business Necessity

In the wake of the pandemic, online interactions augment — and in many instances — replace in-person interactions. In response, organizations are accelerating their adoption and expansion of technologies that facilitate serving customers virtually and support their distributed workforce. With these new imperatives, digital capabilities that decision makers once considered "nice to have" are shifting to become standard protocols. Our study found that digital document workflows is one of these, playing a foundational role in enabling mission-critical activities while yielding benefits across CX and EX.

> › **Despite global economic uncertainty, expansion of digital document processes is set to continue.** In fact, one out of two respondents say their organization is planning to implement or expand its use of these solutions in the next 12 months (see Figure 7) and increase spend by 55%. In addition, 58% of respondents say the pandemic has caused their organization to accelerate adoption of e-signature capabilities. This is a significant increase at a time when business leaders are tasked with reducing spend.

> "We are seeing an acceleration in user adoption of digital document processes. The key factor driving it is the need to increase collaboration and keep projects moving."
>
> *HR Director, advertising and marketing company, Germany*

Figure 7

"What are your company's plans when it comes to digital document process solutions over the next 12 months?"
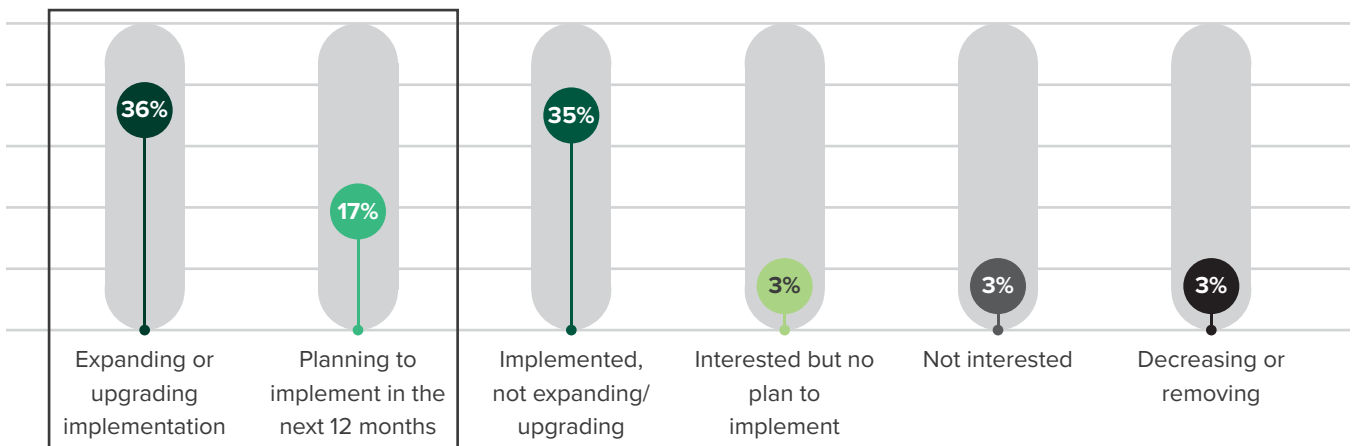
Expanding or upgrading implementation	Planning to implement in the next 12 months	Implemented, not expanding/ upgrading	Interested but no plan to implement	Not interested	Decreasing or removing
36%	17%	35%	3%	3%	3%

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

> › **Companies with minimal digital document processes are also expanding their capabilities.** Among respondents with organizations that do not consider digitizing document workflows a "standard protocol" today, 71% report that this attitude is changing. Similarly, among the respondents from companies that do not consider e-signatures to be a best practice, 46% say this is now shifting to become a standard protocol. The pandemic has unlocked and accelerated opportunities for these organizations, revealing the benefits of using fully digital workflows for everything from document processing to delivering quality EX and CX. The perception at these organizations is now evolving, and decision makers are beginning to consider these solutions as critical/foundational infrastructure required to conduct day-to-day business.

> › **Digital document processes implemented today will endure to become part of CX and EX post-pandemic.** Sixty-six percent of respondents say their organization's customers want improved digital alternatives and interactions. A similar number of respondents recognize that their organization's employees also want more digital alternatives to perform their day-to-day work (see Figure 8). Companies leveraging digital document processes offer more choices to their customers and employees, show that decision makers listen to their needs, and establish stronger connections.
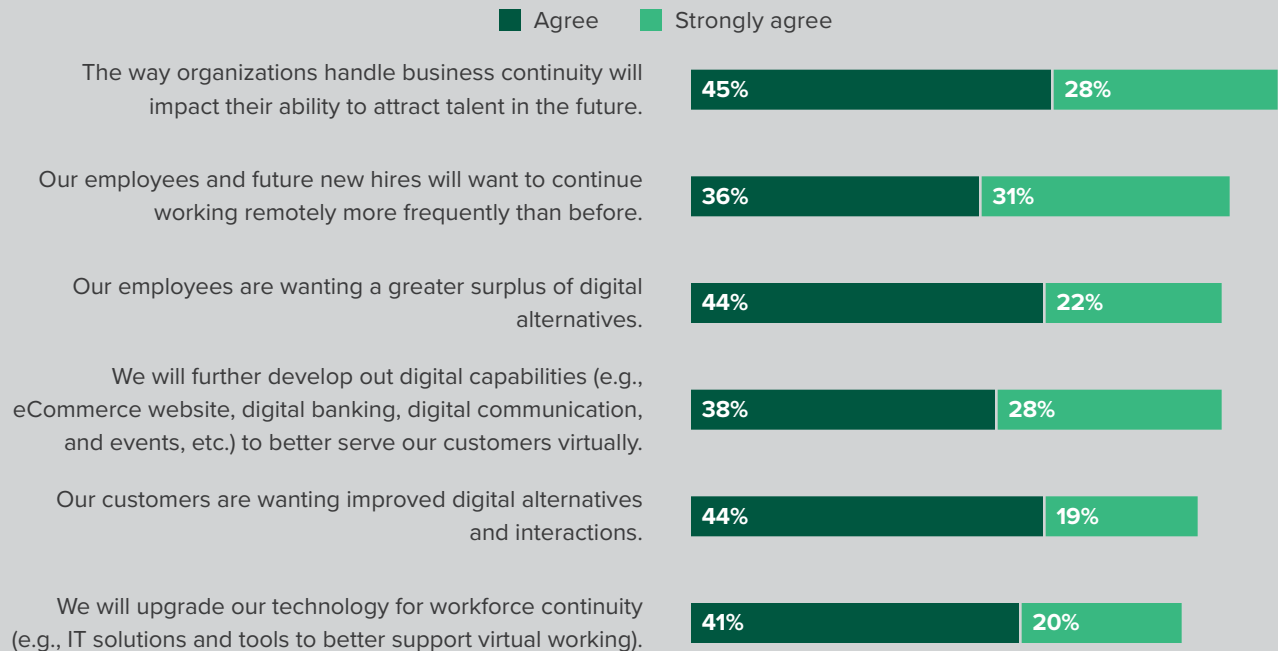
"When using digital document processes there is no need for printing, scanning, or meeting up in person. This saves time and improve employee productivity, but it also helps us follow social distancing guidelines."

IT director, education institution, US

Figure 8

"Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the below statements."

■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree

The way organizations handle business continuity will impact their ability to attract talent in the future.
45% | **28%**

Our employees and future new hires will want to continue working remotely more frequently than before.
36% | **31%**

Our employees are wanting a greater surplus of digital alternatives.
44% | **22%**

We will further develop out digital capabilities (e.g., eCommerce website, digital banking, digital communication, and events, etc.) to better serve our customers virtually.
38% | **28%**

Our customers are wanting improved digital alternatives and interactions.
44% | **19%**

We will upgrade our technology for workforce continuity (e.g., IT solutions and tools to better support virtual working).
41% | **20%**

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

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Key Recommendations

The global pandemic is proving the importance of digital document processes. Forrester's in-depth survey of 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC yielded several important recommendations:

Recognize the importance of digital document processes for protecting business and better serving customers. Organizations must recognize the value that digital document processes provide in underpinning their business resilience efforts and understand their contributions to full digital maturity. In this respect, digital document processes are foundational tools that are cost-effective and quick to implement, whereas more complex digitization initiatives take some time to provide benefits.

Remember that digital document processes are as valuable in the front office as they are in back office. Failing to digitize both front- and back-office departments and processes will erode the benefits of these solutions. Organizations should seize the opportunity now and identify key use cases in every department that slow or delay business value due to manual or paper-based steps. Applying digital document solutions to enable collaboration, sharing, e-signing, and cloud storage brings immediate benefits.

Digital document solutions are sound investments that address both immediate and long-term needs. Given current uncertainties, technology leaders must be cognizant of their company's situation, revenue outlook, and resources as they adjust budgets during the pandemic. They must look to prioritize projects, processes, and technologies that focus on business resilience or new ways of working. Digital document processing solutions address both these elements, which makes continued investment in these capabilities a sound choice during these challenging times.

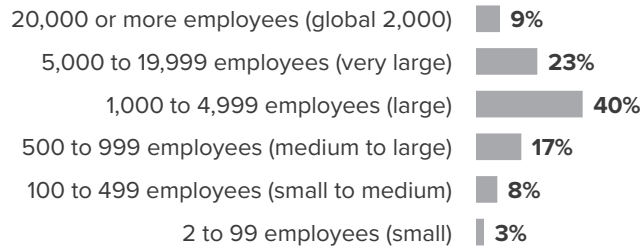**Ramp up digital workplace skills.** Business and technology leaders must take a human-centric approach when digitizing document processes. They should support change management with innovative rollout and training programs adapted to remote working in order to assist their workforce and their customers and to become more fluent with sharing documents, using e-signatures, and working in collaborative environments.

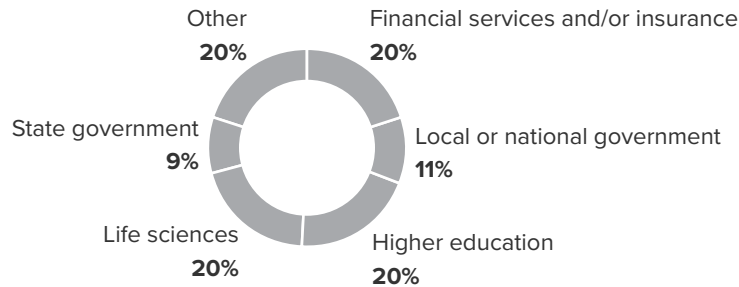FORRESTER®

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization to explore how digital document processes are supporting business continuity. The study began in May 2020 and was completed in June 2020.
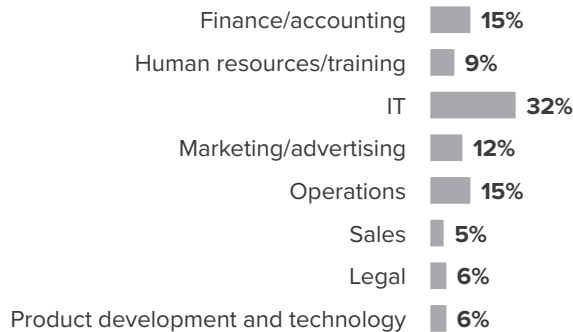
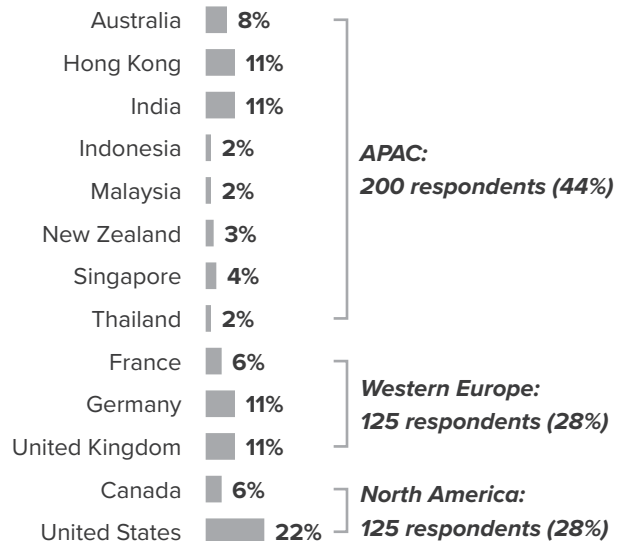# Appendix B: Demographics

COMPANY SIZE

20,000 or more employees (global 2,000)	9%
5,000 to 19,999 employees (very large)	23%
1,000 to 4,999 employees (large)	40%
500 to 999 employees (medium to large)	17%
100 to 499 employees (small to medium)	8%
2 to 99 employees (small)	3%

INDUSTRIES

- Other 20%
- Financial services and/or insurance 20%
- State government 9%
- Local or national government 11%
- Life sciences 20%
- Higher education 20%

RESPONDENT DEPARTMENT

Finance/accounting	15%
Human resources/training	9%
IT	32%
Marketing/advertising	12%
Operations	15%
Sales	5%
Legal	6%
Product development and technology	6%

GEOGRAPHIES

Australia	8%	
Hong Kong	11%	
India	11%	
Indonesia	2%	**APAC:**
Malaysia	2%	**200 respondents (44%)**
New Zealand	3%	
Singapore	4%	
Thailand	2%	
France	6%	
Germany	11%	**Western Europe:**
United Kingdom	11%	**125 respondents (28%)**
Canada	6%	**North America:**
United States	22%	**125 respondents (28%)**

Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

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Appendix C: Supplemental Material

RELATED COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

"Digital Document Processes In 2020: A Spotlight On APAC," a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

"Digital Document Processes In 2020: A Spotlight On Western Europe," a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

"Digital Document Processes In 2020: A Spotlight On Financial Services," a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

"Digital Document Processes In 2020: A Spotlight On E-Signatures," a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

"Center Your COVID-19 Recovery Planning Around Employee Understanding," Forrester Research, Inc., June 17, 2020.

"The Pandemic Recession Demands A Digital Response," Forrester Research, Inc., June 25, 2020.

"Your Automation Psychology And Roadmap Just Shifted Gears," Forrester Research, Inc., May 29, 2020.

Appendix D: Endnotes

[1] Digital document solutions include any processes, workflows, or platforms to manage the creation, collaboration, distribution, and storage of digital documents and records within the guardrails of corporate policies. This includes solutions that allow for reading, editing, signing, and sharing of PDFs and other documents.

[2] Working remotely: Workforce (e.g., home worker, teams split geographically, etc.) working remotely on a regular basis (e.g., at least once a week).

[3] For instance, 20% of life sciences clinical trial enrolment processes, 19% of higher education enrolment and admissions forms, and 18% of higher education faculty and staff contracts are fully paper-based.

[4] Source: "Introducing Forrester's Employee Experience Index," Forrester Research, Inc., February 14, 2019.

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