E-signature speeds document processes and delivers savings

Document workflows have long been plagued by time-consuming bottlenecks. Adobe’s advanced e-signature solution offers a smarter remedy.

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Paper-based administrative processes that require approvals and signatures can be long and frustrating, especially those contracts or documents that require input and sign-off from multiple parties. But advances in e-signature processing are helping public sector and higher-education organizations streamline one of the primary bottlenecks contributing to paperwork delays.

The states of Utah and Hawaii, for instance, are among the latest examples of public sector organizations that have standardized advanced e-signature platforms to deliver constituent services faster and reduce document processing costs and delays.

The State of Utah adopted Adobe Sign to reinforce its telework initiative for employees across the state. The tool allows people to sign documents from any device with a browser — laptop, tablet or mobile phone. No special app is needed, nor does the signer need to be logged in to a state machine.

Schools like San Diego State University are also realizing large time savings by getting multiple parties to sign a document within a day, rather than over weeks.

“The advent of mobile-friendly, cloud-based software services, like Adobe’s e-signature platform Adobe Sign provides a secure solution that’s helping both public sector and higher-education organizations more easily send documents out for signature, in addition to tracking, managing and reporting on document approval processes,” says Ben Vanderberg, technical product manager for Adobe.

The processes that require paper documents to circulate can be error prone, which is why leaders are moving to a modern, digital solution.

“The goal of Adobe Sign is to empower everyone to be able to work and transact 100 percent digitally. Going fully paperless really helps modernize the way people interact with government,” explains Vanderberg.

Signatures create bottlenecks

Even though public sector and higher education organizations have been working hard to eliminate archaic, paper-based processes — both internally or externally — organizations still encounter costly bottlenecks in their workflows when a user needs to print, sign, scan and email paperwork.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdown amplified paper dependencies and the bottlenecks they create. It also demonstrated the importance of completely digitizing documentation to deliver services quickly, efficiently and securely.

Federal policy changes are pushing public sector organizations to move beyond some of these constraints. Both the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (2018) and the E-Sign Act (2000) were written to accelerate the adoption of e-signatures among government agencies and make e-signatures legally
compliant. But there are still a variety of other challenges to overcome.

“There is a significant amount of work to receive emails and carry over key information into another system of record,” says Vanderberg. “All of those tasks are inherent with manual processes that current automation technology can help solve.”

Additionally, the way people work today on mobile devices — amplified by current remote work requirements — requires a new kind of solution, he explains.

**How e-sign adoption is helping**

Technology is critical if organizations want to improve how documents are processed, especially when stakeholders are geographically dispersed. That’s why states like Hawaii and Utah have pushed for an e-signature tool.

With over 1.4 million citizens spread across Hawaii’s eight major islands, adopting digital processes helps government agencies communicate more effectively and deliver citizen services as efficiently as possible. As with most agencies, Adobe Acrobat Pro DC is already a staple in Hawaii’s toolkit. From both a system integration and a user adoption standpoint, implementing Adobe Sign made the most sense.

"Electronic signatures are key to driving new innovation in the State of Hawaii, as it’s the linchpin that allows us to push many workflows digital," said Todd Nacapuy, former chief information officer for the state. The test case for Adobe Sign started with agencies and departments across Hawaii to process certain administrative documents, before expanding the tool for other use cases.

For example, it can take two to three days to circulate and approve an emergency procurement plan. Using Adobe Sign, the state can now deliver the same result in minutes because the tool makes it easier to pass documents between departments like finance, operations, logistics and planning, while managing the workflow through the final sign-off of each plan.

Generally speaking, human resource departments tend to be a major beneficiary of digital workflows. At San Diego State University (SDSU), HR generates about 30% of the campus’s total Adobe Sign transactions — mostly documents to onboard new staff — which amounts to roughly 12,000 transactions every year.

"In the past, we had new hires come to the office to fill out paper forms, which took 30 minutes," says Rachel Stalmann, human resources technician at SDSU. With Adobe Sign, they were able to reduce that time significantly to 10 minutes.

Beyond the manual processes of signing a document, keeping track of where
documents are can often lead to black holes in processes and delay approvals. Any organization that requires multi-department signatures and authorizations can realize the benefits of e-signatures.

SDSU expanded the use of Adobe Sign to travel authorizations and donor forms as well. Ed Legaspi, IT consultant for the university, said that now a donation agreement can be signed within a day by the university’s CFO, vice presidents and donors, who all electronically sign from wherever they are.

**A modern and secure e-signature platform**

There are several benefits to cloud-based technology today. Organizations can scale to meet surges in demand, in addition to improving how teams collaborate across departments.

“Adobe Sign’s reporting dashboards give real-time information on where different documents are in the process. This helps teams to identify bottlenecks,” shares Vanderberg. “You can tell when a document was sent, viewed, signed, and if an email was bounced — all these types of information are tracked in an audit report from the beginning to the end of the e-sign process.”

With integrated API’s, Adobe Sign also facilitates auto-routing to send documents to the next person to sign off. A department can send reminders and see reports on which documents are still waiting for signatures and which are complete. APIs can extract information from your form and place it into another system of record or database.

That’s helped both public sector and education organizations to dramatically reduce the labor involved in paperwork and follow-up. Employees and non-employees can fill out and sign forms in one simple digital workflow. Adobe Sign sends automatic notifications when a document is submitted, resulting in much faster processing times, according to Vanderberg.

“One of the biggest advantages of Adobe Sign is that we can obtain a signature in an efficient, secure manner while maintaining a proper workflow,” says Melissa Dominguez, lead, specialized software and systems at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). “Adobe Sign maintains an audit trail that reassures departments of the quality and accuracy of the signature.”

CSUF administration departments process more than 370 documents a month on average, but numbers can increase to five times as much during the beginning of a semester. According to a recent article, CSUF uses Adobe Sign for documents such as new hire or emergency hire packets. Staff send an email directly to the signer who can then view the documents from any internet browser and sign them with just a few clicks.

This platform gives CSUF’s staff greater visibility of the process so documents don’t get lost in an inbox or fall through the cracks among departments — saving them time and money.

Adobe Sign brings additional advantages to government and education users — beyond being readily accessible to and from Adobe documents familiar to most agency employees.

Built with security top-of-mind, Adobe keeps its cloud-based infrastructure compliant with federal security requirements for data at rest and in transit — with certifications such as ISO 27001, SOC 2 Type 2, PCI DSS and FedRAMP Tailored compliance.

**Getting started with an electronic signature tool**

“The technology for a modern, secure e-signature process is here, but the greatest challenge to getting started comes from the culture within government,” Vanderberg says.

“There has been a decentralization of a lot of procurement within government, so deploying a tool across every department and institution is difficult to organize,” he explains.

The strongest recommendation is that agency leadership come together with an enterprise-wide strategy to migrate to digital-based processes, in accordance with federal mandates. Doing so will provide agencies more flexibility in how they work and deliver services to citizens faster.

Learn more about delivering stronger ROI across critical lines of business with e-signature tools.

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