

Document Communications Industry Trends: 2007 Survey Results

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I. Executive Summary

Survey Snapshot

EDSF asked members and/or clients from the following organizations to participate:

- The Electronic Document Systems Foundation (EDSF)
- Xplor International
- The Association of Image and Information Management (AIIM)
- OutputLinks
- Doculabs, Inc.

As part of EDSF's ongoing research to identify trends in the document communications industry, a team of consultants at Doculabs and faculty at the University of Illinois at Chicago conducted a survey that examined three main themes: changes in overall budgets for document communications, electronic document delivery, and the use of digital color. This year we also distinguished between types of data-driven document communications: those focused on transactional service fulfillment (such as statements, bills, and explanations of benefits) versus marketing communications (such as solicitations, promotional campaigns, and response marketing).

Among the main findings of the 2007 survey are the following:

- **Budgets for paper-based communications increased modestly**, with more than 43% of respondents indicating that they expect a slight increase (approximately 10%) in paper-based communications. This expected growth will be fueled primarily by overall business growth and marks a significant departure from our findings in 2005 and 2006, respectively, where only 33% and 32% of our respondents expected a slight increase.
- **Firms are stepping up their electronic document delivery efforts**, with more than 50% of the firms making more than half of their documents available over the Internet. However, only 8% of respondents deliver more than half of their documents *exclusively* electronically.
- **Firms have changed how they promote electronic document delivery, many of them now offering financial incentives to their customers.** Financial incentives have become the preferred mechanism for convincing customers to switch to electronic document delivery. This is a remarkable change from 2006, when companies were more passive about promoting their electronic efforts, relying primarily on advertising.
- **Companies continue to grapple with managing both print and electronic modes of document communications.** Print costs have remained largely flat even though firms are experiencing slight increases in electronic delivery. It is mainly legal and regulatory compliance requirements and security/privacy concerns that inhibit the move to exclusively electronic delivery.
- **The use of digital color is expected to grow for both marketing and transactional documents.** While the use of color in transactional documents lags behind marketing communications, this is likely to change in future years. **Expect a gradual shift to color in service-fulfillment documents**, as more than half of our respondents indicated plans to increase their use of digital color by 5% or more in the future. The reasons for this intended shift were the impact of color on customers and management's willingness to increase investment levels.

There is most likely a significant latency between when a firm offers electronic document delivery and users' acceptance of exclusive electronic delivery. Financial incentives now being offered may influence this dynamic.

Overall, the primary findings of this year's study are consistent with those of years past. Yet, looking closely at the data, we can discern some subtle implications for the future of the document communications industry:

- While budgets for document communications are flat or slightly increased, a growing number of firms expect their budgets for transactional documents to decline. This is perhaps a leading indicator that there is a latency period between the time users come to regard electronic documents as a complement to paper and the time that they accept electronic document delivery exclusively. Whether this latency period is 6 months or 36 months becomes a key metric for the industry to monitor.
- Offering financial incentives to encourage electronic document delivery and suppress print may result in a net positive economic impact for mailers. A one-time \$10 incentive is attractive, if it will convince customers to use electronic delivery exclusively – particularly when compared to the cost of many \$0.40 mailings spread over the life of the relationship with the customer.
- Still, we expect electronic delivery will have only a nominal impact for the next several years as firms address legal and compliance requirements and security/privacy issues. Electronic delivery is far from being the “silver bullet” for reducing document communications costs.
- Surprisingly, the use of digital color did not accelerate in the past year; rather, color volumes are increasing incrementally, slowly eroding black-and-white volumes. Consumer demand may speed this trend, however, as many customers use color print in their homes and in the office and will expect to see color in the transactional communications they receive.

The findings of this year's survey suggest that while the document communications industry is changing, the rate of change is slower than we anticipated. Looking ahead, we expect spending levels will continue to rise in the short term (1 to 3 years) as a result of increased use of color and limited electronic adoption. In the 3- to 5-year horizon, however, document communications budgets may begin to decline slowly as the cost of color drops considerably and the adoption of electronic delivery increases.

Dynamics are difficult to project beyond the 5-year horizon – although demographic preferences are likely to be the dominant factor. By 2012, the average 45 year-old wage earner will have graduated from college in 1989, eight years after the IBM PC was introduced and approximately seven years before Internet access became widely available. These consumers may well have no interest in paper-based communications – or, alternatively, they may be enamored with high-gloss, full-color, graphically-oriented documents and be completely overwhelmed with digital transmissions, with the result that print documents begin to have more impact. But between now and then, organizations will certainly need to find an appropriate balance in their use of low-cost black-and-white print, high-value color, and electronic delivery in order to maximize their communication effectiveness while also minimizing costs.

II. Objectives and Methodology

The response data used in this analysis does not include the responses of hardware, software, and print-for-pay providers, and thus represents the “buy side” of the industry.

The Doculabs/University of Illinois at Chicago research team launched an aggressive effort aimed at understanding the current trends and issues in the document communications industry, conducting an online survey in the first quarter of 2007. Members, customers, and/or subscribers of EDSF, Xplor International, AIIM, OutputLinks, and Doculabs were solicited via e-mail for participation in this study. The survey was administered online via Zoomerang, an online survey service provider. In appreciation of participants’ time, respondents were offered a copy of this report and a subscription to the *EDSF Report*, a bimonthly research newsletter. Respondents were given the option of identifying themselves or remaining anonymous.

We received 151 responses representing various industry segments, as indicated below (see Figure 1). The survey included responses only from firms using equipment and technology to delivery communications, not suppliers of either hardware or software. Thus, the survey results are indicative of trends in the “buy side” of the industry. A total of 57% of the respondents represented the financial services, banking, and insurance sectors. Approximately half the respondents were managers or supervisors overseeing the document communications function, and half were vice presidents and other functional executives who are knowledgeable about the document printing and mail functions in their companies.

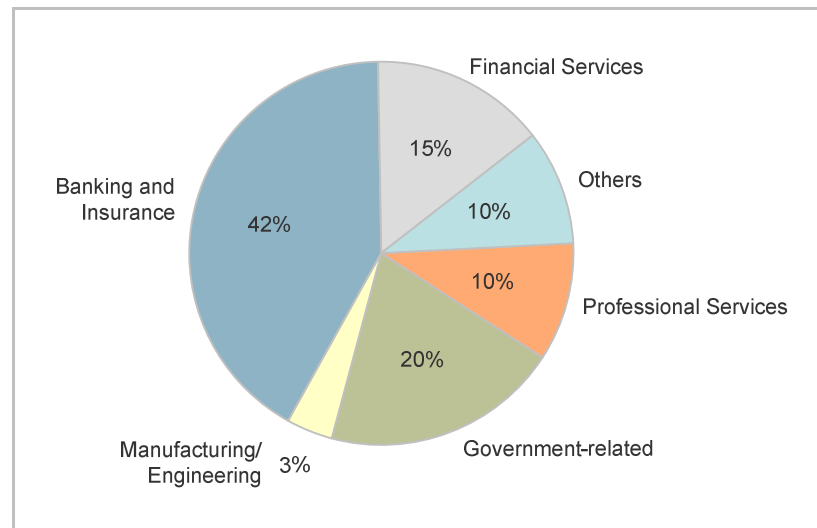


Figure 1. Demographics of Survey Sample by Industry

The respondents included in this survey tended to be large organizations with considerable print and mail expense. They reported that on average, approximately 80% of their volume is transactional documents, and 20% marketing-related documents.

More than 60% of the firms who responded have annual revenues in excess of \$1 billion. One-third of the firms employ more than 100 full-time employees for document print and mail operations, and another one-third have between 25 and 100 employees for document management.

In 2007, nearly 27 percent of our respondents expect to generate and mail more than 100 million pieces of document communications to their clients and customers. Approximately 17% of respondents estimate their print volumes to be 51 million to 100 million pieces, whereas another 25% expect to print more than 11 million to 50 million pieces (see Figure 2). These volumes include both transactional (service-fulfillment) documents and marketing materials that are sent to customers.

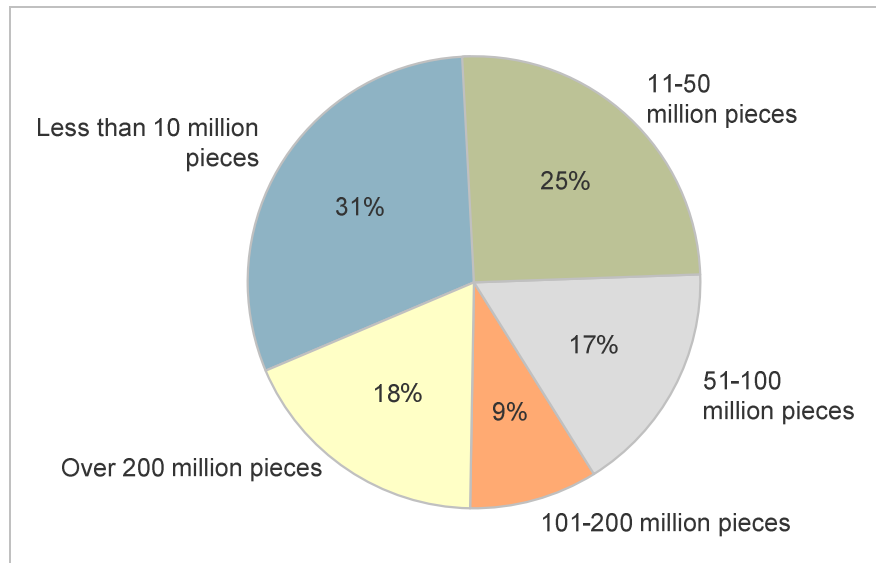


Figure 2. Annual Volumes of Mail Sent by Survey Respondent Firms

III. Findings and Analysis

This section summarizes the findings and analysis of the study. Our findings are presented in five subsections, representing our major conclusions from the study.

Each subsection includes relevant statistics from the survey, and, where appropriate, analysis that represent the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of EDSF or its sponsors.

Our analysis is presented in five subsections, highlighting key findings regarding the budgets for document communications, electronic document delivery, and the use of data-driven digital color.

1. Budgets are undergoing a marginal increase, primarily due to a healthy business climate and anticipated customer growth.

Compared to years past, organizations are increasing their outlays for document communications, albeit marginally. In 2007, nearly 43 percent of companies expect an incremental increase (by approximately 10%) in their document communication budgets, and another 33% expect to maintain their budgets at current levels (see Figure 3). The 10-point increase from 2005 and 2006 levels confirms the confidence and/or reliance that organizations have in paper-based communications.

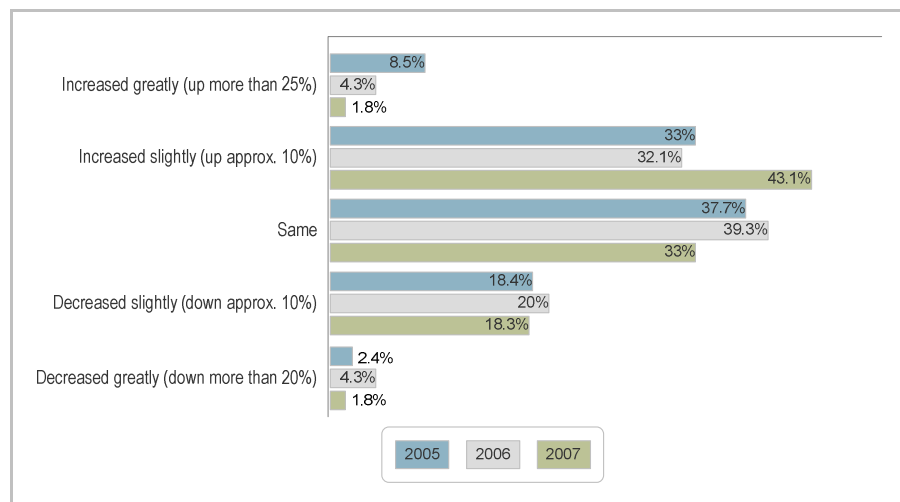


Figure 3. Projected Change in Document Communications Budget 2005-2007

While overall budgets for document communications are expected to remain the same or increase slightly, a growing number of firms expect a slight decline in their expenditure for transactional documents due to electronic delivery.

Our survey also asked about budgets for transactional as well as marketing-related document communications. While the overall trend in spending is up, approximately 22% of respondents report a marginal decrease in their budgets for transactional documents (see Figure 4).

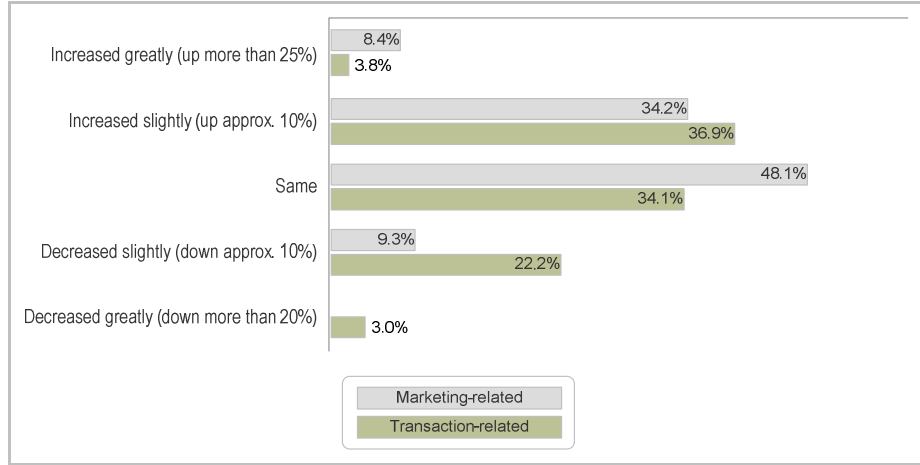


Figure 4. Projected Change in 2007 Budget for Document Communications

When we look at the reasons behind this trend, the reduced expenditures are due to the emphasis on electronic document delivery (see Figure 5).

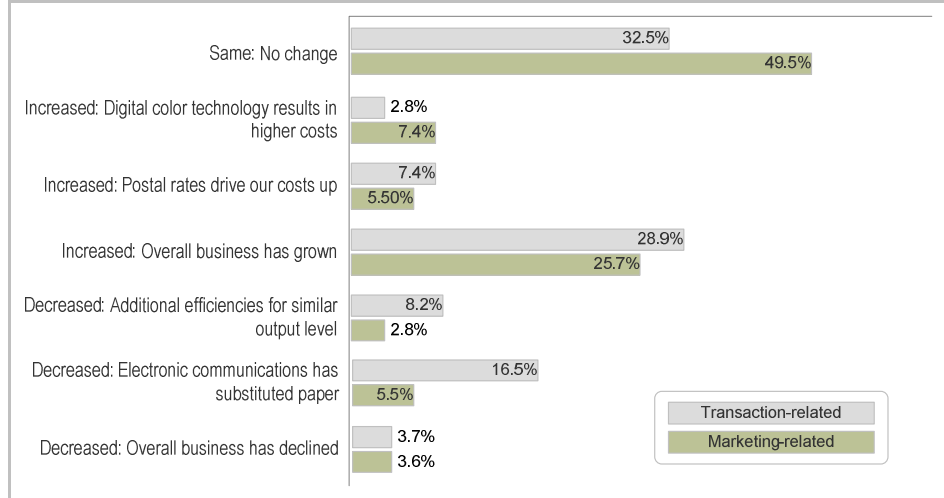


Figure 5. Reasons for Change in 2007 Budget for Document Communications

2. Firms are stepping up efforts in electronic delivery, with more than 50% of the firms making more than half of their documents available in electronic form.

In 2007, 33% of firms indicate that they expect to “substantially” or “moderately” improve their digital delivery efforts. About 50 percent of firms indicate a slight increase in electronic document delivery. Compared to 2006, more firms are seeking to expand their electronic delivery efforts, with an estimated 5 to 10% increase for electronic delivery (see Figure 6).

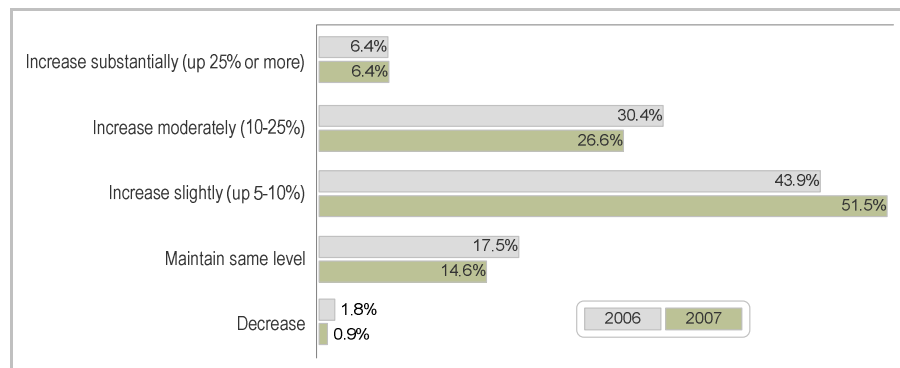


Figure 6. Growth in Electronic Document Delivery

We also assessed the extent to which companies intend to use both print and electronic modes of document delivery. A total of 50 percent of respondents expect to make more than half of their print documents available electronically as well (see Figure 7).

Only 2% of respondents indicated that none of their documents were available electronically.

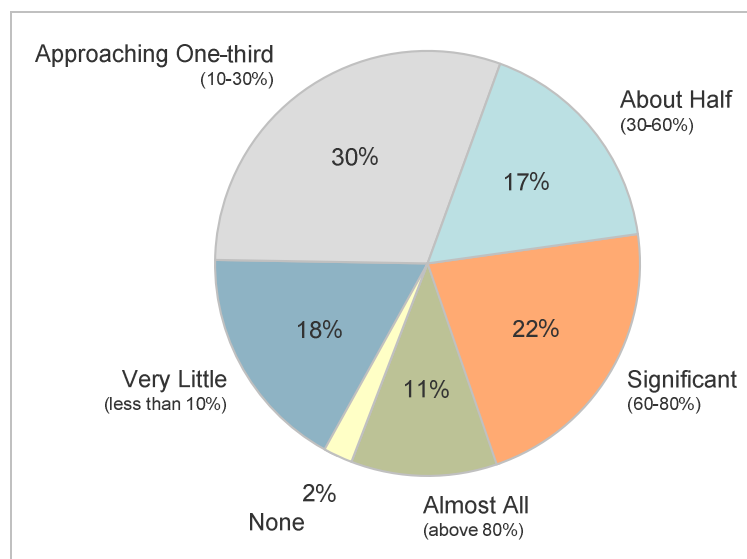


Figure 7. Proportion of Print Documents Available Electronically

Only 8% of firms deliver more than 50% of their document communications exclusively in electronic format, while 15% indicated that none of their document communications were delivered exclusively in electronic format.

But very few firms plan to have documents delivered *exclusively* in electronic mode – i.e. suppress print; no print copy (see Figure 8). Note that a total of 24% of respondents indicate they plan to deliver only 2 to 5% of their documents exclusively electronically, and only 8% of respondents expect to deliver more than 50% of their documents exclusively electronically.

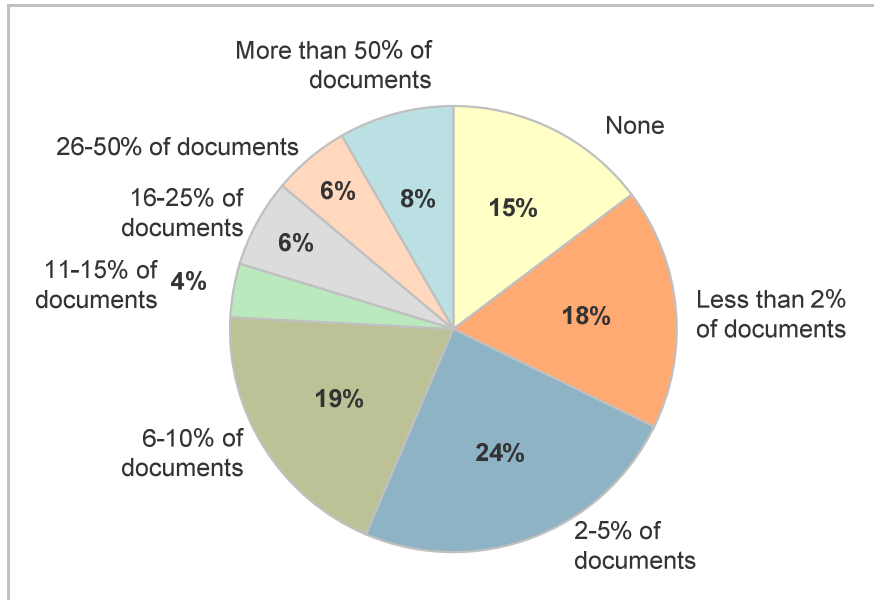


Figure 8. Proportion of Documents Delivered Exclusively in Electronic Format

3. Firms have changed how they promote electronic document delivery, offering financial incentives, among other tactics.

We witnessed a complete reversal in terms of the most frequently used techniques to incent electronic adoption – from a primary focus on ad campaigns in the past, to the use of financial incentives today.

In contrast to the last two years, offering explicit financial incentives for customers to switch to electronic delivery has become the preferred mechanism for promoting electronic document delivery, followed by providing additional products and services, then by providing additional features that attract more customers online (see Figure 9). Below, the average of all responses is compared for 2006 and 2007, using a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 indicates no usage and 5 indicates aggressive usage.

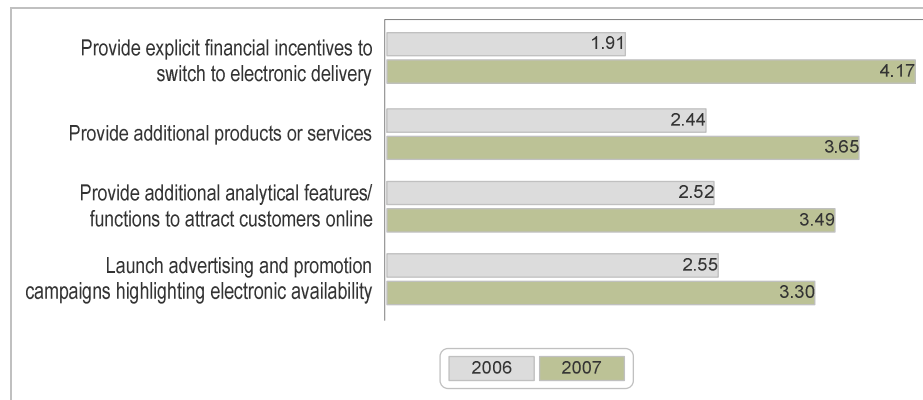


Figure 9. Mechanisms for Promoting Electronic Document Communications

The survey also explored the key inhibitors for electronic document communications (see Table 1). As in 2006 and 2005, regulatory compliance, security, and privacy remain the top challenges – although regulatory compliance, previously number 2, now tops the list. Note that customer acceptance, at the top of the list in 2005, slipped to number 3 last year and remains in that position in 2007.

Key Inhibitors	2007	2006	2005
Legal compliance and regulatory requirements	1	2	2
Security and privacy issues	2	1	3
Customers not prepared to accept electronic documents	3	3	1
Inadequate technology infrastructure	4	4	5
Costs in relation to benefits	5	5	4

Table 1. Key Inhibitors for Electronic Document Communications

Suppressing print and the reduction of associated costs is difficult to achieve. Expect only minimal impacts when initializing electronic delivery.

4. Companies continue to grapple with the need to manage both print and electronic modes of document communications.

Despite their efforts to improve electronic delivery, companies have not realized significant cost reductions through print suppression. More than 41% of respondents indicate that they expect reductions in their print costs to be “very little” (less than 10%), with another 36% of respondents indicating that their print costs have remained flat (see Figure 10). This situation is very similar to 2006, where respondents reported little or insignificant reduction in print costs as a result of electronic document delivery.

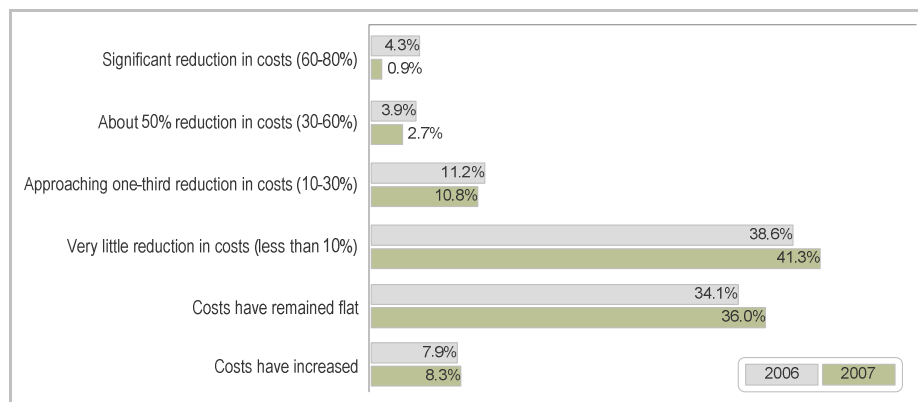


Figure 10. Impact of Electronic Delivery on Print Costs

5. The use of digital color is expected to grow for both marketing-related and transactional documents.

The results clearly indicate that firms understand the positive impact of color on customer perceptions in both marketing and transactional documents.

In 2007, 20% percent of the respondent companies will utilize data-driven digital color (highlight or full) in more than 10% of their documents (see Figure 11). When asked about the justification for the use of color, the majority cited the potential impact of color on customer perceptions.

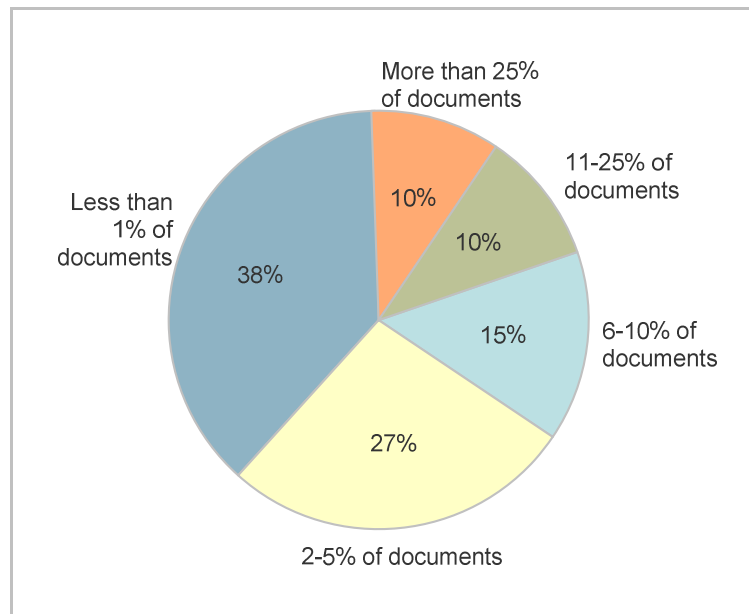


Figure 11. Usage of Data-driven Color in 2007

When comparing the 2007 survey results for use of digital color to those of prior years, however, the results are mixed (see Table 2). For example, among firms that use color in 2 to 5% of their documents, the use of color is expected to increase in 2007. In firms that had used color in larger percentages of their documents (11 – 25% and 25% and above), the survey results indicated a decline in the usage of color in data-driven documents.

Percent of Color in Documents	Percent of Respondents		
	2007	2006	2005
Less than 1%	37.61	31.07	47.83
2-5%	26.61	23.93	18.21
6-10%	14.68	13.57	14.95
11-25%	10.09	14.64	8.15
More than 25%	10.09	16.80	10.87

Table 2. Percentage of Documents Leveraging Data-driven Color

Some form of color usage – full or highlight – now makes up 21% of transactional print volume.

In this year's survey, we asked specifically about the use of digital color in marketing and transactional documents. In 2007, 79% of firms indicate that their transactional documents will utilize black and white, with 10% of firms using highlight color and a surprising 11% opting for full color (see Figure 12).

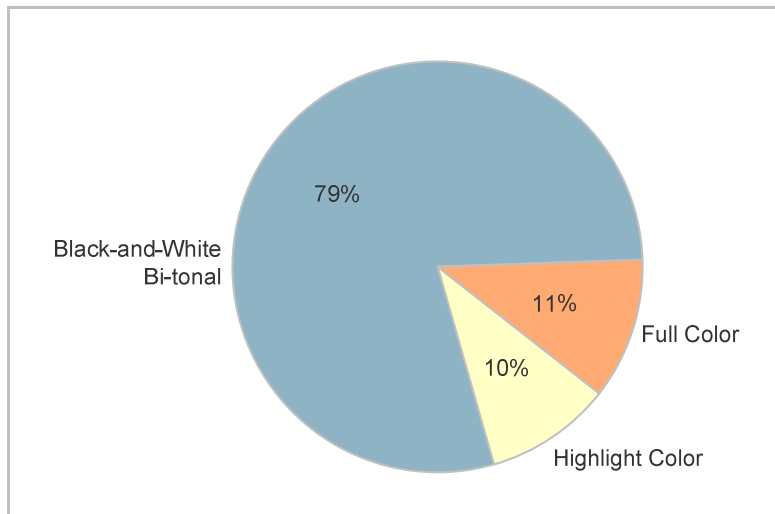


Figure 12. Use of Color in Transaction-related Documents

In their marketing documents, however, respondents indicated that 59% will use full color, 15% highlight color, and 26% black and white (see Figure 13). Keep in mind that while full color is a significant percent of the marketing output, marketing documents overall represent only a fraction of the respondents' total output (the large majority is transactional).

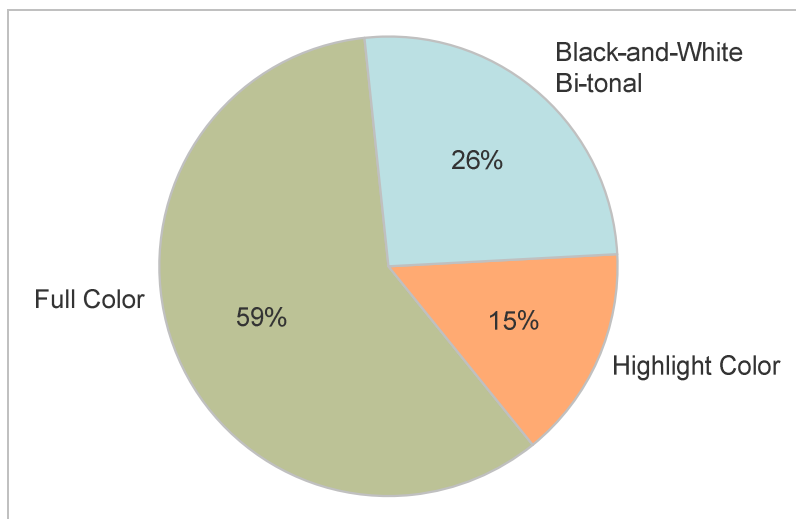


Figure 13. Use of Color in Marketing-related Documents

We expect to see the use of digital color increase more dramatically in transactional documents over the next several years.

Respondents indicate a definite interest in more use of color in future years (see Figure 14). The reason most often cited was the recognized impact of color on customers and management's willingness to increase investment levels. More firms that have traditionally been using bi-tonal, black-and-white print are likely to switch to highlight and full color, particularly in their transactional documents.

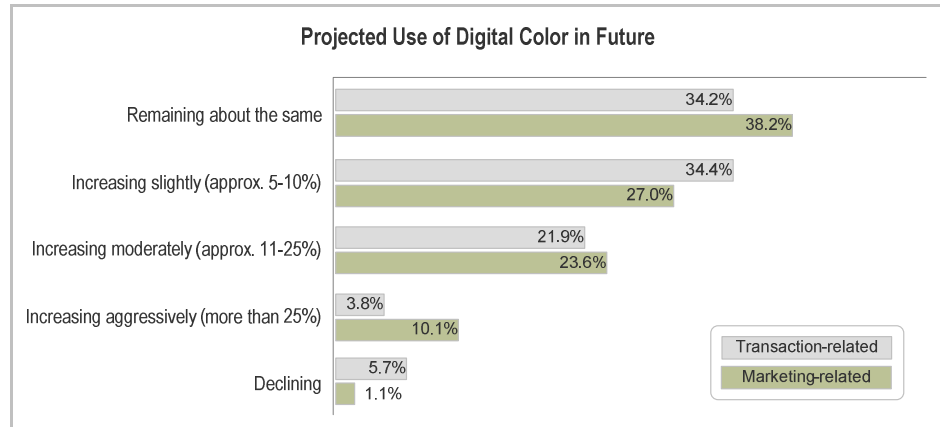


Figure 14. Projected Future Use of Digital Color in Document Communications

IV. Implications: Document Communications Outlook

This study's 2007 results mirror those of previous years, but the overall implication is that the industry's transition may be slower than expected.

As we consider the results of this year's study compared to those of the past several years, the implications are very similar:

- Overall budgets are flat or slightly increased. Given that the large majority of document communications continue to be in paper form, the use of traditional print is likely to continue for many years to come.
- Organizations that attempt to use electronic delivery exclusively as a substitute for paper should be extremely conservative in their estimates, particularly as a means for cost reduction.
- While the trend toward the use of digital color continues, it is not accelerating; rather, it is capturing market share incrementally.

These findings suggest that while the industry is changing, a radical shift is unlikely, as the rate of change is slower than expected.

After conducting this survey for a number of years, in 2006 we proposed a model to extrapolate how the industry might change over the next several years as a result of identified trends. Last year we developed the table below to illustrate the potential shift in communications taking place in the industry.

2006 Industry Transition Estimates (percentage of documents)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
B/W Bi-tonal Print	98	95	89	82	75	65	55
Digital Color	2	5	10	15	20	25	30
Total Paper-based Communication	100	100	99	97	95	90	85
Electronic-based Communication	5	10	15	20	25	30	35
Print Suppressed/Electronic Delivery Only	0	0	1	3	5	10	15
Total Document-based Communication	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3. 2006 Industry Transition Estimates

In support of this 2006 forecast, we put forward four predictions concerning market dynamics that are worth revisiting to see whether this year's findings confirm predicted directional changes.

The following table compares the past year's forecast and the 2007 findings. As this comparison shows, the industry's directional changes continue as anticipated, but the subtle dynamics influencing the speed of change remain difficult to predict.

2006 Forecast	2007 Study Findings	Future Implications
Black-and-white (bi-tonal) print volumes will erode at a rate proportionate to the growth in color print and the ability of organizations to suppress print.	Black-and-white print volumes have not materially changed, perhaps due to the overall growth in business. The ability to suppress print is complex, and few firms are realizing any financial benefit.	We expect color volumes to increase incrementally, slowly eroding black-and-white volumes. Electronic delivery will have only nominal impact for the next several years.
The growth of color print will accelerate, as a result of price reductions and competitive pressures to improve the customer experience.	The use of digital color is increasing, but not accelerating. A majority of respondents cited the impact of color documents upon customer perceptions as the justification for increased usage.	The combination of reduced costs and dominant use of color print in consumer markets (and thus consumer expectations) is likely to cause moderate acceleration in the growth of color print.
Electronic delivery of documents will begin to grow quickly, as the latency between firms initializing the service and user acceptance are no longer inhibiting factors.	While the availability of electronic documents is growing quickly, there is clearly a latency period in user acceptance of documents delivered exclusively in electronic format.	The widespread introduction of financial incentives to induce electronic delivery exclusively could change the outlook, but most likely adoption will continue a slow but steady climb.
Print suppression continues to remain nominal in the short term until organizations begin to understand how to effectively influence user preferences, but will eventually begin to grow at a constant rate.	Print suppression has been nominal to date, but organizations appear to believe that financial incentives will change user behavior.	Print suppression metrics are likely to remain in the low single digits for a number of years.

Table 4. Future Implications

Comparing the forecast with the 2007 results, there are a number of implications.

The key factors to watch over the next year are the impact financial incentives may have on documents that are delivered exclusively electronically, and consumer responses to digital color.

- First, it is doubtful that digital color represents 10% of the current data-driven document communications print volume. Most certainly, the use of digital color is greater if static documents are considered, and it may represent 10% or more of new equipment placements with the capability to produce data-driven applications. But, most likely, idle capacity exists currently in anticipation of increased usage in years to come.
- Second, our “guesstimate” that 15% of documents would be delivered electronically in 2007 was probably overly aggressive, but not too far off. However, the most important element of the forecast is the specific ratio of those documents delivered electronically and those no longer being printed. This ratio remains very difficult to project. One finding from this year that may prove to be a driving factor is the trend to providing financial incentives to users who agree to accept electronic delivery exclusively.

The table below shows a revision of our estimates of future industry transitions in document communications. As stated previously, the estimated rate of change has been revised downward.

2007 Industry Transition Estimates (percentage of documents)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
B/W Bi-tonal Print	98	95	93	90	88	85	81
Digital Color	2	5	7	8	9	10	12
Total Paper-based Communication	100	100	99	98	97	95	93
Electronic-based Communication	5	10	15	18	22	25	30
Print Suppressed / Electronic Delivery Only	0	0	1	2	3	5	7
Total Document-based Communication	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5. 2007 Industry Transition Estimates

Going forward, organizations will certainly need to find an appropriate balance in their use of low-cost black-and-white print, high-value color, and electronic delivery to maximize the effectiveness of their document communications while also minimizing costs.

About the Electronic Document Systems Foundation (EDSF)

In conducting this study, faculty at the University of Illinois Chicago (specifically the Center for Research on Information Management) received a grant for its assistance with data analysis. Doculabs did not receive any compensation for its efforts in conducting the study and providing analysis of the findings.

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- Roberta McKee-Jackson, EDP, RSM Consulting
- Linda Andrews and Amanda Maglish, Doculabs

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