British Library 2.0

Fujitsu scanners help The British Library digitise its Document Supply Service.

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom and is one of the world's greatest research libraries. It is a large reservoir of knowledge as well as housing some of the most important literary works ever conceived. Everything from Shakespeare's Folio to Da Vinci's notebooks, and a collection of printed books and manuscripts dating back as far as 300 BC, are kept at this institution.

The main purpose of the British Library is to retain the nation's knowledge and memory and as such, every item that is deposited in the British Library is accessible for readers on site. Currently, it holds over 150 million items in different formats including books, magazines, newspapers, maps, patents, stamp collections and recordings.

This institution is obliged by law to provide free onsite access to printed articles deposited in it and another of its key roles is to provide a Document Supply Service. This is a commercial service that provides access to users all over the world. With such a wealth of information housed within its walls and a worldwide customer base, the Library gets request for copies of documents, images, sound recordings and permission rights. The Library provides these items for account holders or customers who want to purchase a one-off item for research and consultation.

Moving away from traditional methods

The British Library receives over one and a half million requests a year from customers all over the world for access to research articles and over 80% of those requests are for a surrogate copy of an item in the Library. In the past, the librarians would photocopy the required item and mail it out to the customer. As such, the whole Document Supply Service was based on paper delivery. This posed two major problems; the time and cost incurred in shipping the copies to customers (often overseas) and the environmental problem of continual paper use.

Martyn Lunn, Business Development Manager at the British Library, who is the spine that holds the Document Supply Service together believes; "Although this was our traditional method of document delivery, it was clear that it was not exactly cost or time effective. It was also having a negative environmental impact on our green credentials. Although we have a collection including items that date back to biblical times, we needed to step into the 21st century with a digital document system."

DSS moves to scanning – Library to cut paper?

In 2004, The British Library replaced all of their photocopying units with 110 Fujitsu fi-4640S image scanners. These scanners allowed for image capture on a much broader scale and their image processing function allows for automatic adoption of the quality of the original document. The British Library has greatly benefited from adopting a scanning policy as it has allowed them to digitise every copy of an original item and send it electronically to the customer. 70% of all output from the Library is now digital, thereby significantly reducing paper consumption.

Lunn notes; "It became clear that the problem of producing so much paper could easily be solved if we switched to digital imaging. Fujitsu scanners have helped us move away from the more time and cost consuming process of photocopying and sending physical documents, to sending digital

renditions. Aside from the obvious environmental benefit, we have been able to shift from what was largely a paper based delivery system to a digital based system."

The scanners were further modified to flatbed scanners by Relais International, a third party software provider, while maintaining the integrity of the scanners. This was additionally beneficial to the British Library as it allowed the librarians to scan books and other documents that cannot be scanned via automatic document feeder. Lunn adds; "This was a key part of the development process as it has allowed us to enjoy the full productivity that we can get from the Fujitsu scanners."

Additional benefits – Digital library

Besides being a national institution, the British Library also has a commercial aspect and as such has service level agreements. Using the Fujitsu scanners to digitise requested items, the Library has a more instant delivery system. The standard turnaround time for providing paper items to customers is five days but due to the new system facilitated by Fujitsu scanners, a quicker time of 24 hours has been enabled.

Another benefit is that the Library is now able to reach a much larger range of customers. The Library caters to all kinds of institutions and is able to boast over 10,000 international corporate organisations as part of its customer base for the commercial document delivery service because of its quick turnaround.

In addition to its everyday services, the Library is becoming more and more involved in digitisation services directly for publishers and researchers. Lunn comments; "A lot of content is now online and publishers are starting to see the value of getting their content online so we provide them with this service. Thanks to Fujitsu scanners, we are now able to provide digitised theses and back issues of magazines for publishers."

The future is in scanning

The British Library is so impressed with Fujitsu scanners that in 2007, they installed additional eight Fujitsu fi-6770 colour scanners and has ordered 40 additional fi-6750S scanners to enable colour scanning as an option for the future. Andy Appleyard, Head of Document Delivery & Customer Services at the British Library says; "The Fujitsu scanners have a great output rate. The fact that they work in the way that we need them to work is absolutely critical. We don't know of any other machine that can produce the same output. The scanners are also very reliable – we initially had a maintenance contract with Fujitsu but we eventually cancelled it and only called them out on an ad hoc basis because the machines were never faulty and simply did not break."

Andrew Cowling, Senior Marketing Services Executive at Fujitsu Europe notes; "I am incredibly pleased that Fujitsu scanners are helping a national institution such as the British Library be more productive and increase efficiency in their critical business processes. We hope that as the world becomes increasing digital, more and more precious information will be preserved and their availability will be ensured to everyone for future generations."