

Don't Put It Off Any Longer: End Workplace Procrastination NOW with BPM.

By Laurel Sanders, Optical Image Technology



Why do something today when you can put it off until tomorrow?

The procrastination mindset is a serious obstacle to business success. It causes us to shirk work, miss deadlines, and treat customers inconsistently. Persistent procrastination turns short, routine tasks into long-lasting chores, holding up projects when other work follows the task at hand. Delayed work can have a negative impact on cash flow and profit margins. It also damages a potential differentiator when competition is tough: your company's reputation for service.

In Anthony Balderrama's June, 2009 article for Careerbuilder.com and CNN, "The 10 Worst Work Habits," procrastination is first in the list of ten common work-related problems. An enemy of progress for all types of people, it keeps employees and managers alike from meeting their potential.

Procrastination raises its head for many reasons. Some of the most common are:

- Disdain for boring work;
- Poor work habits;
- Fear of failure;
- Rebellion against expectations;
- Uncertainty how to proceed; and
- Lack of accountability

As a manager, your role is to empower employees to work to their fullest potential.

What if you could:

- Prioritize your employees' work for them?
- Make sure work is done in order, by the right person, and on time?
- Distribute work to employees appropriately, along with task lists and tips to help them succeed?

You've heard, seen, and even talked about them. Stop turning a blind eye to your company's weaknesses. Find out how implementing ECM now can help.

Cut the excuses:

I'll do it tomorrow. Someone else can handle this. It's not important. I don't want to think about this right now. If I ignore this, someone else will do it. I work better when I wait 'til the last minute. No one will notice if it's late. I'm not good at this. I don't know how to handle this. There are more important things to do. I'd rather do something else. I don't know how to do this. I don't know what to tackle first. This is boring. I don't feel like doing this today. There's no deadline, so I'll put it off 'til later.

- Ensure expectations are met and customers are treated consistently?
- Assess incoming work, approaching deadlines, and employee productivity easily?
- Assign and adjust assignments based on role, skill, work load, or absenteeism?

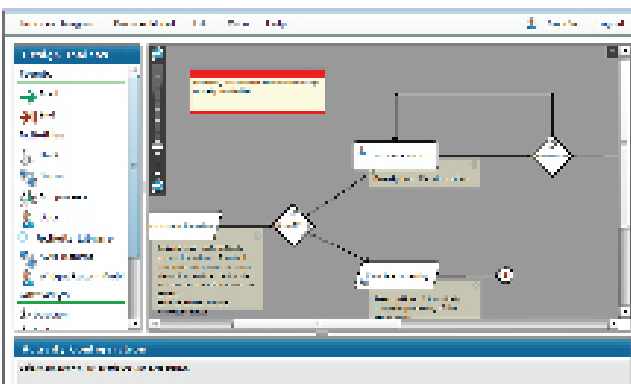
If you already have an electronic document management system that stores and gives you access to scanned papers, images, and electronically stored information, intelligent automation of your business processes can give you the control you need. The secret weapon? Electronic workflow.

How BPM and workflow work

Business process management (BPM) involves the automation of everyday, routine business procedures. Regardless of the line of work, rules govern what's done, how it's carried out, who does it, and when. Does everyone follow the rules? Probably not—but they would if it were made easy for them.

BPM lets you dictate the rules that govern your business—including who is authorized to interact with your files, render approvals, or sign documents—and ensures they are followed. Rather than breathing down employees' necks to make sure conventional practices are observed, the flow of work and directives for accomplishing it are delivered in the right order, at the right time.

When there are valid exceptions to the rules, it's no problem for BPM, which faithfully follows directives for handling exceptions. Furthermore, electronic workflow gives authorized workers real-time insight, informing them where each issue or process stands at any point in time. Digital trails document 'history in the making,' noting what happened, who did it, and when, simplifying managerial analysis and making it easier to show compliance.



Keeping the right projects on top

All employees struggle to juggle priorities sometimes, regardless of their roles. Evaluating and regularly reassessing deadlines, reviewing how long tasks have been demanding attention, and weighing their relative importance to other tasks consumes precious time every day. Even when we try our hardest to make smart decisions, human nature interferes; sometimes we decide against what makes the most sense, overlook something important, or miss a deadline because we waited too long to act.

BPM addresses each of these problems. Documents, and the processes they launch, are date/time stamped as each is initiated. Deadlines are indexed. Priority status can be assigned. Stored data about your documents and processes distributes work by whatever method you prefer:

- first in, first out;
- by deadlines;
- according to priority status;
- a combination of these, or
- by adhering to other rules you set in place.

Process automation means workers no longer have to think about what's next. Putting off tasks is no longer a choice. Work must be—and is—handled in the order you determine, 100% of the time. Employees are no longer subject to personal micro-managing that builds resentment. The system handles mundane decisions for them, letting them accomplish more work in less time, and freeing you to concentrate on the work that is most meaningful for your company.

Making sure nothing's left out

Since most processing involves multiple tasks, it's easy to get one or more steps out of sequence from time to time, or to miss a step completely. Organizational hierarchies; required reviews, approvals, and signatures; and quality control procedures are established for a reason, but it's easy for something to be missed. Let's face it: Some employees are better at noting and following details than others.

Workflow makes it possible for every worker to succeed, every time. Each job spells out tasks that must be followed. By using technology to make certain all tasks pertaining to a job are followed according to the rules and in the right order, quality control is ensured. If a

manager's approval is required when s/he is absent, employees no longer have to ponder what to do. BPM sticks to the rules, following your backup plans and reassignments, and making sure work keeps moving. Pre-empting a required step—or completely ignoring it—is no longer an option.

Enforcing consistency and fairness

Rules-based processing has another advantage: it's fair and impartial. Whether an employee tends to give preferential treatment to certain customers, chooses certain tasks over others, or simply isn't always consistent, BPM levels the playing field. Every job, task, customer, and member of staff is treated exactly the same way. Whatever rules you put in place are enforced. Whatever exceptions you allow are followed with the same consistency, every time.

Assessing productivity

Almost everyone wants to be a star performer, but few like being watched. Workflow reporting gives managers unobtrusive insight into work volumes, departmental productivity, the ability of staff and individuals to meet deadlines and keep up with projects, and more. Employees feel empowered as their productivity rises. The occasional non-performer can no longer hide by shuffling papers and shirking work. Management can make smarter decisions about work allocation, promotions, and changes in job roles based on individual strengths and weaknesses. The steady, unfettered flow of work puts an end to procrastinating.

Making changes on the fly

Let's face it: occasionally there's a mismatch between employees and their jobs. Sometimes it's a result of a poor hire. Other times, employees who could be star performers simply aren't playing to their strengths.

Process automation gives you insight into where individual employees are their strongest and where they are weak. Perhaps an employee works at lightning speed to process applications, but is extremely slow whenever he has to compose texts during the workflow process. Maybe another worker causes constant bottlenecks in

processing because of an inability to keep up with the others, yet that person has other talents that aren't being used.

BPM and workflow reporting give you the extra set of eyes you always wished you had, letting you move work and employees into streams of activity that suit them best. As productivity rises and each new venture is met with success, morale improves, raising a team's collective performance....all with simple behind-the-scenes adjustments.

Rules-driven processing helps your workers be productive each and every day, eliminating the monotonous task of deciding what's next.

Seeing the results

The trick to overcoming procrastination in the long term is to do the things we want to avoid. The only cure is to eliminate the beast. That's exactly what workflow does, at least in the workplace: it takes away a fundamental human weakness by eliminating the opportunity for avoidance.

Summary

Procrastination doesn't have to be a hindrance to staff productivity and service. By using technology to drive work forward in the most logical way, employees are able to focus on the work that lies before them rather than staring hopelessly at all of the balls in the air. Rules-driven processing helps your workers be productive each and every day, eliminating the monotonous task of deciding what's next.

Although procrastination is a human trait that technology alone can't solve, procrastination and uncertainty of what to do next don't have to drop the curtain on your corporate performance any longer. With a strong solution and a solid plan, you'll be able to give a first-class show, again and again.

Optical Image Technology offers an integrated suite of imaging, document management, and workflow software, including document archiving, lifecycle management, electronic forms, and email management products. To learn more about our products and services, visit our website at www.docfinity.com, email info@docfinity.com, or call us at 800-678-3241.