

“Scanning
as printing’s
equal”

VRS Desktop Productivity

The quick, new way to easily
access your scanner

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KOFAX 

Scanning as a 12-step process

For many companies, document imaging technology offers the best – and perhaps final – hope of controlling the ever-rising tide of paper documents that threatens to engulf them. As a result scanners, a key component of any document imaging system, are appearing with greater frequency in today’s modern office. Often they are found sitting side-by-side with printers, a longstanding fixture in just about every office, modern or not.

But while they might share the same table, printers and scanners command far different levels of perceived utility. Printers are considered the bedrock on which an efficient office is built, as indispensable to work life as a desk or a phone. In contrast, scanners have yet to shed their status as new-kids-on-the-block, and typically are utilised by a smaller subset of workers accustomed to their rumoured temperamental nature.

This difference in perception can be traced to the ease with which workers can interact with each device. Anyone who needs a printout of their work while composing a letter, designing a presentation, building a spreadsheet or writing an email can simply click on the little printer icon atop their screen, or pick the print command from a dropdown menu. Seconds later, a nearby printer churns out the finished product. In most cases, it’s ready for immediate use, as a print preview function allows workers to adjust output quality before committing their work to the printed page.

But what if the same workers, in the midst of any of these tasks, need to scan a document? Try as they might, they won’t find a scanner icon atop their screen, or a scan function in any of the available dropdown menus. Instead, workers typically must:

- 1) Minimise the current application
- 2) Locate and launch a separate scanning application
- 3) Scan the document
- 4) Check the quality of the scanned image
- 5) Adjust the scanner settings and rescan repeatedly until acceptable image quality is achieved
- 6) Create a name for the image file
- 7) Save the image file
- 8) Switch back to the original application
- 9) Select the Import or Attach function
- 10) Navigate to where the scanned image was saved
- 11) Import or attach the file
- 12) Resume working in the original application

Imagine if workers had to follow the same 12-step sequence in order to print a document. A lot fewer documents would get printed, and millions of trees could breathe a sigh of relief. But workplace productivity would certainly decline, as what is now a one-click afterthought instead becomes a multi-step test of endurance. There’s no chance of returning to such primitive ways, however, thanks to the mature print technology that software developers have tightly integrated into countless programs, including those office workers use on a routine basis.

Now flip the equation, and imagine scanning no longer is a 12-step process, but as simple as printing is today, with the digital image of any paper document just a mouse click away. Suddenly, document imaging moves from the realm of specialists into the toolkit of all workers. They become as likely to eliminate a document – by scanning it, then discarding the original – as they are to create one through printing. The investment companies have made in scanners and document imaging software might finally be utilised fully. And millions of trees actually could breathe a sigh of relief, as the ideal of a paperless office comes one step closer to reality.

Sounds like a great idea. So why hasn't a scanner icon appeared atop the relatively limited universe of software applications most workers stare at on a daily basis?

Scanning as printing's equal

It's an old adage in technology that hardware arrives on the market far in advance of the software needed to operate it. Plenty of DVD and MP3 players, and more recently HDTVs, sat on store shelves while consumers awaited the arrival of a sufficient number of software options to justify a purchase. Once the number available reaches a critical mass, the results typically are explosive. Older methods (e.g., VCRs, CDs, analogue TVs) fall by the wayside, new hardware manufacturers enter the market, prices fall, the expanded number of hardware options entices software content developers to pump out more products, and the virtuous circle (at least for consumers) of more choices at lower prices accelerates.

While the market for high performance scanners is well past the starting line, it has yet to find the software catalyst that will launch its own virtuous circle. Still, the prospect for ubiquity the equal of printers is there. Just as a single printer for a large office today seems unthinkable, so too might come the day when the thought of a single scanner for an entire organisation seems equally ludicrous. Instead – just as with printers – each department, workgroup or worker that needs one would get one. The financial justification for widespread scanner usage is easy to calculate. Companies that have done the math find it is much more cost-effective to ship, store and manipulate the digital image of a document rather than the document itself.

With seemingly so many factors aligning in its favour, what's preventing scanning from achieving critical mass? Some might argue the lack of a “killer app” is to blame, the one scanning software program so compelling that any company without it is destined to be left as road kill by its competitors. And who knows, perhaps one of a number of software giants, or a start-up in someone's garage, is at this moment dutifully coding its way to scanning immortality.

A vote for the known over the new

But it's entirely possible that companies pursuing scanning's killer app are taking the wrong approach. Conceptually the idea of an all-new, all-encompassing scan application is appealing, particularly among those who won't actually have to do the work. Among those who will, the appeal is decidedly lower. Learning the

intricacies of yet another software program is seldom a chore workers tackle enthusiastically, and having to switch back-and-forth to it throughout the workday means it fails the easy-as-printing test.

Far better, then, to examine the types of software workers already are comfortable using today, and extend scanning capabilities to them, than to force workers to use something entirely new. Look over the shoulder of the typical office worker and you're likely to find one of three applications in use: a word processor, spreadsheet or – seemingly the lifeblood of any organisation – email.

Over time, software coders may make note of the number of scanners entering the workplace, and build direct access to them into their word processing, spreadsheet or email programs. Then, just as printers and scanners often sit side-by-side in an office, so too might print and scan buttons sit side-by-side atop every worker's screen.

But don't hold your breath. Popular software applications are so big, so well entrenched, that change comes at a ponderous pace, if at all. The prospect of connecting to an entirely new class of hardware – scanners – is daunting, a job only for those with deep pockets and needed expertise. So while it sounds like a noble goal to provide rank-and-file workers with direct access to scanners through the software they already use on a daily basis, it's not one the software giants are likely to get around to any time soon.

Like so many technologies that came before, a scanner's mechanical capabilities appeared destined to remain far in advance of the software needed to access and drive them. While a limited number of workers with proper training might utilise scanners to their full potential, the critical mass of software needed to make them indispensable to all workers was nowhere in sight.

So that's why Kofax stepped in with a solution.

A collector's dream.....if you collect scanners.

If you visit Kofax's headquarters, it's easy to think you've stumbled into a scanner manufacturing plant – or possibly a scanner museum. That's because throughout the building, in storage rooms, labs, offices – even the gym – you'll find scanners. They range from hulking, refrigerator-sized monsters to models small enough to fit in a briefcase. This collection, encompassing virtually every business-class scanner produced over the past two decades, provides Kofax with an unrivaled understanding not only of how scanners work, but also how workers interact with them.

Manufacturers regularly submit their scanners for certification with VRS, Kofax's flagship document imaging enhancement software. Certification assures potential customers that the full power of VRS's image adjustment capabilities is available with their scanners. Many manufacturers consider VRS a must-have application to bundle with their scanners, even though VRS isn't actually an application at all. Instead, VRS functions essentially as an add-on to virtually any application with scanning capabilities. VRS is easily configured to run in the background, performing its correction and enhancement tasks entirely without user interaction.

Kofax's long association with scanner manufacturers and its experience in extending the capabilities of complementary software puts it in a unique position to help workers more easily interact with their scanners. Instead of building a new type of scanning application from the ground up, Kofax found it could provide workers with direct access to their scanners from the programs they already use on a daily basis.

Need to scan something? No need to drop what you're doing.

The first implementation of this approach, called Desktop Productivity, appears in VRS 4.2 Professional. With it, workers can scan documents from within popular email applications (Outlook 2007/2003/XP, or Lotus Notes 6.x) without having to launch a separate scanning application. Instead, workers simply select one of three options added to the toolbar and/or drop-down menu atop the screen: Scan with Preview, Fast Scan or Scan Using Profile.

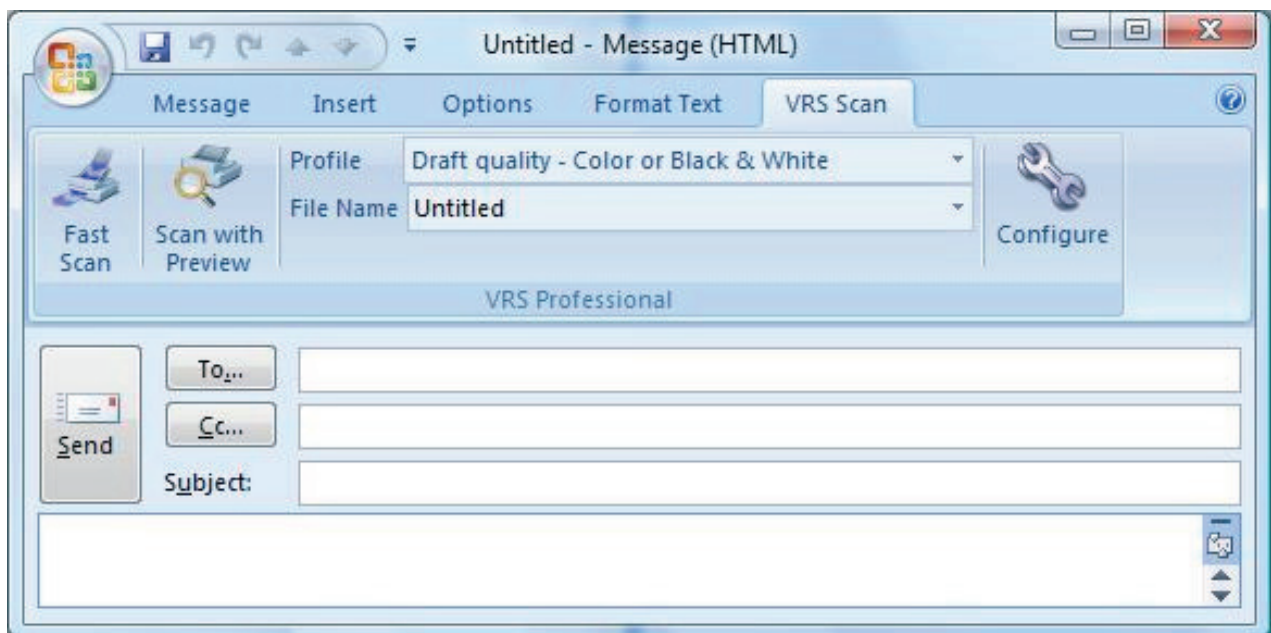


Fig 1 – VRS Scan Tab in Microsoft Outlook 2007

Scan with Preview displays scanned documents in a thumbnail viewer after correction and enhancement by VRS. These images can be attached to the email message immediately, or adjusted further before distribution. If a worker selects Fast Scan, VRS 4.2 Professional scans, corrects, names, saves and attaches the document image all in one step. Anyone who must repeatedly scan and distribute documents throughout the day will immediately recognise the productivity gains this feature can deliver.

Desktop Productivity comes pre-configured with six common profiles (draft, normal or high quality scan, in B&W or colour). Workers who choose Scan Using Profile can select one of these options, or choose another profile that they have created themselves. This provides workers with one-click access to the scanner settings that work best with their most common documents.

Utilising profiles eliminates the need for workers to return repeatedly to their scanners, adjusting settings while trying to create a legible document image. In fact, Desktop Productivity assumes most workers don't know very much about scanning. That's why, aside from loading documents into the paper tray, it does most of the work for them. After all, most workers couldn't explain how a printer operates; they just click on the printer icon and it prints. Why should they have to interact with their scanners any differently?

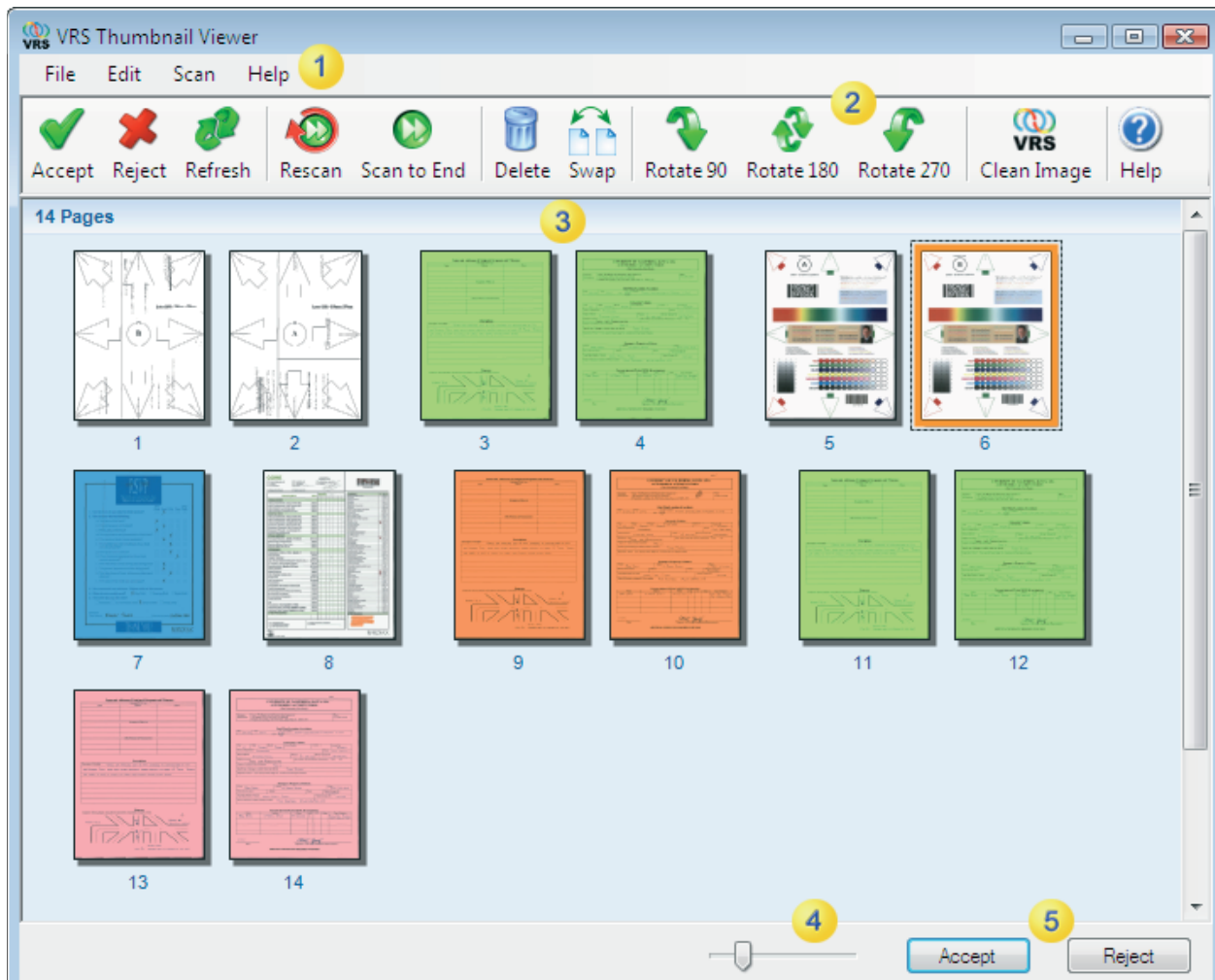


Fig 2 – VRS Desktop Productivity – Scan & Preview Interface

VRS 4.2 Professional's Desktop Productivity feature also provides direct scanner access from two other locations where workers can spend much of their day: Windows Explorer and Windows Desktop. They can deliver a document image to any folder or their desktop simply by right-clicking on it, then selecting Fast Scan, Scan with Preview or Scan Using Profile.

The democratisation of scanning

VRS Desktop Productivity finally allows workers to access scanners with the same click-and-forget ease they've long had with printers. What had been a 12-step test of endurance instead becomes a one-click gateway to the many benefit document imaging can deliver. VRS Desktop Productivity makes it easy to put these benefits at the

disposal of every worker who needs them. And just as virtually every worker who today sits before a computer screen needs access to a printer, so too will come the day that scanner access is equally essential.

That's because document imaging is in the midst of a remarkable transformation, from a strictly back-end, scan-and-store process to one in which a scanned document is used to trigger a workflow. For example, a customer could complete a credit application in a store, have a worker scan it and automatically transmit the data it contains to headquarters, and receive the result by the time the customer is ready to check out.

With document imaging innovations like these becoming more commonplace, more and more workers will have to make scanning an integral part of their daily routine. Thanks to VRS 4.2 Professional's Desktop Productivity feature, for them the future of document imaging now is just a single mouse click away.

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