Flexibility and Scalability with
eFax Connector 2.0 for SAP

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Helping SAP Managers Find the Best Cloud-Based Fax Provider

Managers of SAP environments are poised to take advantage of the migration to the cloud for fax communications. The emergence of proven, stable, and affordable cloud-based fax services now enables IT managers to replace their ageing server hardware infrastructure and software license and maintenance investments with a service that integrates fax directly into their SAP email platform. This paper will explore the advantages of moving legacy SAP fax processes into the cloud, and offer guidance on finding the ideal cloud-based fax provider.

Hardware-Based Fax Solutions Bring Cost and Complexity

According to a recent Gartner report, the need for speed, agility, and cost-effective IT solutions is being hindered by hardware-based server applications, including fax servers. This trend is especially true for business processes that are repeatable, such as digital cloud faxing, where companies might generate thousands of SAP forms daily, including invoices, purchases orders, statements, etc. and fax them from a common source.

Hardware-based fax solutions pose unique challenges for IT managers, ranging from high upfront hardware and software licensing costs and the recurring cost of telecommunications, to the bureaucratic headaches that devolve from software upgrade and trouble-shooting requirements. Sizing the fax server infrastructure to avoid bottlenecks at times of peak usage means that at other times this system may sit virtually idle, and components that aren't actively working are, of course, wasting money.

In addition to the investment cost is the cost of maintaining the traditional fax server system. **Figure A** illustrates the many components that lay between this instance of SAP and the telephone network (PSTN), including the fax server and its component cards, the dedicated analogue or digital telecommunication lines, and the customised software between SAP and the application server. Each of these components must be purchased, implemented, maintained, and supported by dedicated in-house resources. Then, if a fax card should subsequently fail, IT must endure yet another headache and unplanned expense to replace it. The truth is, no one in IT wants to be responsible for managing the 'last-generation' fax server infrastructure!
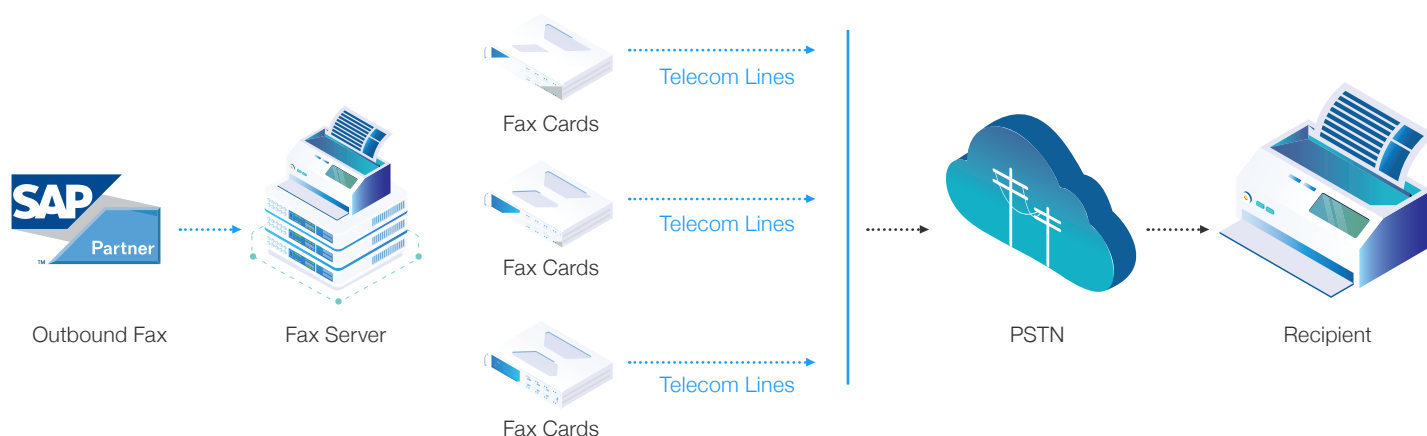
Telecom Lines

Fax Cards

Telecom Lines

Fax Cards

SAP Partner

Telecom Lines

Fax Cards

Outbound Fax   Fax Server   PSTN   Recipient

Figure A: Typical hardware-based fax solution built for high-volume traffic

Then comes licensing and upgrades. Here is a common scenario: You've paid for the server hardware and absorbed the cost of the fax software, but it's been a few years and now your system needs maintenance, yet the solution vendor won't support you unless you renew your license and upgrade to the latest version. Or perhaps you've planned to upgrade your servers to a current OS but discover that your old fax server won't support anything newer than 'X' Server 2003. Needless to say, keeping pace with these limitations and requirements is enough to make any IT manager dizzy.

Furthermore, in the newer releases of NetWeaver, RFC is no longer a supported protocol for connecting to fax servers (SAP Note 1236270). SAP has ceased renewing certification of these connectors in favour of using BC-SMTP for all email, SMS, and fax messaging. So if you've recently upgraded your SAP implementation, or are just trying to maintain certifications on all of your applications, you're in for a surprise; at the very least this change is going to require development time to prevent the loss of fax functionality.

What becomes clear, regardless of the source of the inefficiency, is that servicing increasingly outmoded IT infrastructures generates negative economic returns. Naturally, SAP managers seek surer economic footing. We see them turn increasingly to outsourced alternatives for required office functions such as fax, convinced that the combination of cost savings and simplified IT demands are simply not possible without the advantage of hosted applications.

Should You Move SAP Third-Party Applications to the Cloud?

Cost is always important, but as every IT manager knows, cheaper is not necessarily better. Before retiring your fax server infrastructure and moving to an outsourced solution, due diligence is required. Below are critical factors to consider when evaluating a cloud-based solution for transmitting SAP documents:

- Does it provide direct Outbound faxing from multiple SAP modules, including ECC 6.0, Business Suite, Sales and Distribution, CRM, and Materials Management (MM)?

- Does it support multiple document types, including PDF, Smart Forms, TIFF, TXT, HTML, RTF, Word and Excel?

- Does it provide an updated and extensive user interface for all fax administration tasks?

- Does it employ a connector that supports the required SAP BC-SMTP spec for fax transmission?

- Does it permit the return of Delivery Status Notification (DSN) through SAPconnect, permitting sending SAP module to maintain up-to-date fax logs?

- Can it issue timely and detailed usage and tracking reports?

- Does it offer a secure and direct communication bridge between SAP and the public Internet, such that your SAP network is always compliant with standards mandated by organisations such as HSCIC?

- Does it complement your organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives?

A hosted service might save IT dollars in the form of lower hardware and software costs. But any serious third-party solution must also meet the above-listed criteria, while demonstrably improving customer service. The right solution will combine all of these factors to yield benefits for years to come.

The Benefits of Hosted Faxing

Cloud-based fax services offer compelling advantages over a traditional server-based solution, particularly for companies looking to build a strong, obsolescence-free framework to conduct, manage, and control SAP document delivery. As we've seen, cloud-based solutions eliminate both the upfront capital costs associated with deploying, maintaining and upgrading premise-based fax servers, as well as the recurring costs of connecting them to traditional telecommunications services. In their place is a predictable, efficient and scalable cost-model that frees capital for deployment elsewhere in the IT organisation.

Select benefits of digital cloud faxing include:

- Eliminating up-front capital investment costs

- Eliminating monthly recurring costs of expensive analogue and/or digital telecommunication lines

- Reducing document-distribution costs by up to 50% (including reductions in monthly recurring costs for telecoms, data storage, and energy consumption)

- Usage-based pricing for a technology that might see declining use over the next five years

- Reducing costs of internal IT resources required to maintain, monitor and troubleshoot fax servers

- Reallocate IT resources to core competencies

- Reducing delivery times for invoices and other accounts-receivable documents from SAP for improved revenue collection and cash flow

- Improved fax security through transmission encryption

- Near-real-time fax processing and scalability eliminates need for queuing faxes until off-hours

- Giving your company a higher level of redundancy as insurance against data loss

In short, hosted faxing can be a highly sensible solution for the long-term, enabling your company to realise enormous cost-of-ownership savings, which include making your company greener, more efficient, transparent, and its systems more reliable.

Finding a Hosted Provider: Five Essential Questions

When seeking the best fax integration provider for your SAP platform, be sure to ask the following five questions of any candidate seeking your business. The answers will help lead to your ideal hosted provider.

1. **What is the company's history?**
   In the short history of the Internet, online entrepreneurs have come and gone. Be sure your hosting company is financially stable, offers global service and customer support, and has plenty of strong customer referrals.

2. **Is the company a certified SAP partner?**
   Faxing your business-critical SAP documents requires an SAP-certified fax connector that features the latest BC-SMTP (not RFC) interface. Remember, ensuring the integrity of your data also means protecting your professional reputation.

3. **Does the company offer ironclad security?**
   Client confidentiality is imperative and can't be left to chance. Be sure your provider's solution ensures compliance with relevant privacy regulations.

4. **Is the company able to scale its services to your needs?**
   You'll want the ability to easily add or delete users as necessary. Look for the ability to scale on demand with the click of a mouse.

5. **Does the company demonstrate a commitment to world-class, enterprise-level businesses?**
   Enterprise faxing is part of the communications lifeblood of any business. Your provider should be an expert at delivering a fax solution that supports the success of both your company and the customers you serve.

eFax® Connector 2.0: Provides Flexibility, Scalability

eFax enables SAP-based organisations to extend fax capabilities to their line-of-business applications (ERP, CRM, legacy systems, etc.) over an IP network, without the need for separate fax servers, fax software, fax machines, or phone lines.

eFax Connector 2.0 for SAP (shown in **Figure B**) is a true cloud-based solution that provides fax-to-email services directly in NetWeaver via a simple configuration change according to the BC-SMTP specifications. There is no software to install on the company's network or IT systems — faxes are simply sent, as SMTP email attachments, directly from the application or system in which they were created.

In this scenario, SMTP message attachments from SAP travel across the public Internet directly to eFax for conversion and processing. Encryption is provided via the Transport Layer Security (TLS) protocol, so faxes remain secure from their point of origin to final destination. Delivery Status Notification (DSN) emails are sent from eFax back to the originating instance of SAP, where they are routed to the proper module and the user logs updated accordingly.

As an optional feature, eFax Developer offers barcode capabilities so you can use the captured data for routing purposes or relational data tracking. Barcodes on Inbound faxes can be scanned and their value provided to you as part of the "wrapper" information. This valuable, low-cost feature is ideal for enterprises and other high-volume environments needing an automated way to efficiently gather accurate information about important documents.
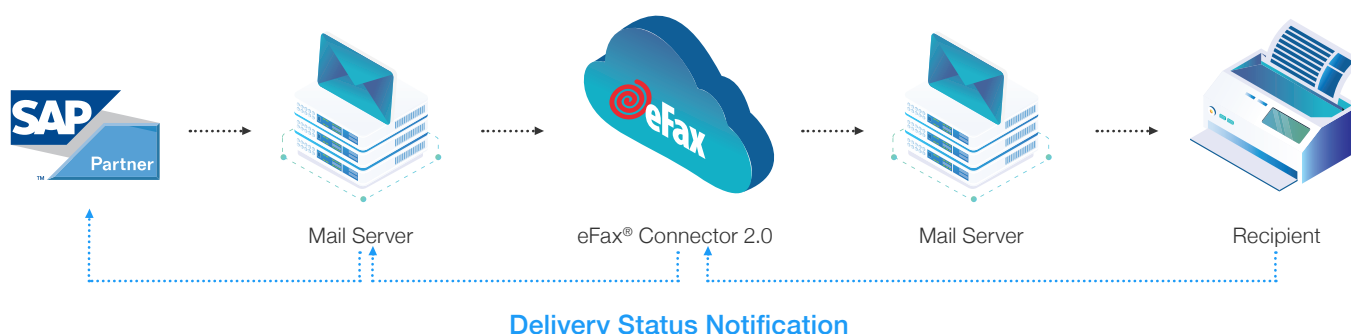
Lower the Cost of SAP Ownership

Cloud-based faxing with eFax lowers SAP operational costs, frees you to dedicate resources to mission-critical areas, and accelerates the distribution of critical information while improving tracking and notifications. Implementation is a simple configuration change and scalability is a snap, with virtually unlimited fax capacity, constrained only by your Internet access bandwidth.

Other advantages include 24/7 system support, a multi-redundant network for enhanced security and reliability, and continual technology upgrades.

Enterprise Fax Solutions for the Long Term

By leveraging IT systems already in place, and reducing or eliminating the costs of your pre-existing fax system(s), eFax solutions provide an almost immediate return on your investment.

Standard integration scenarios enable SAP enterprises to fax high-volume purchase orders, rate sheets, delivery confirmations, invoices, contracts, and other critical documents with ease, directly from a SAP application or SAPconnect. These solutions are ideal for companies in a variety of industries — including finance, insurance, healthcare, manufacturing, shipping, government, retail, travel, legal and more— and they help comply with government privacy regulations such as HSCIC.

SAP Partner → Mail Server → eFax® Connector 2.0 → Mail Server → Recipient

Delivery Status Notification

- Replace Fax Servers
- Secure Delivery of SAP® Documents
- BC-SMTP Specs Compatible
- Document Trails and DATA Tracking

Figure B: eFax® Connector 2.0 for SAP

SAP Certified

First introduced in 2010 and updated in 2013, eFax Connector 2.0 is SAP certified to be compatible with the latest BC-SMTP specifications.

eFax Connector provides:

- Easier installation and administration compared with the previous RFC interface

- The use of eFax through a standard SMTP interface

- Direct faxing from SAPconnect

- Better data tracking

- Compatibility with IETF standars

Account administration is through an eFax Account portal. Using this powerful, hierarchical administrative tool, SAP administrators have the ability to set up sub-administrators for regional or branch offices, or retain centralised control as needed. User faxing privileges can easily be added or removed through this portal on an as-needed basis.

Authorised users can view, track, and analyse current and past fax transmissions in real-time, 24/7. Data reports are provided in summary form or as graphs and charts and can be downloaded for importing into other systems.

Conclusion

Achieving true fax integration with your SAP applications requires a solution that combines the virtues of speed and agility with long-term cost control and stability.

SAP managers and CIOs have begun to recognise the power of outsourcing to meet these objectives, and cloud technology has introduced confidence and surer economic footing throughout the SAP universe. However, cost is not the only factor when migrating to a cloud-based fax solution; special care must also be taken to ensure that your provider has the requisite experience, expertise, scale, and dedication to serving customers as passionately as you would serve them yourself.

The unique solution discussed in this paper —the cloud-based eFax Connector 2.0 for SAP — supports all of the processes and modules within SAP. eFax cloud-based solutions require no extra infrastructure to maintain and deploy, which increases your overall ROI by reducing the cost and management overhead of faxing across your SAP enterprise.

Maximise Efficiency, Streamline Processes With eFax Connector 2.0 for SAP:

Process Support:

- ECC 6.0
- SAPconnect
- SAP Business Suite
- NetWeaver
- Sales and distribution
- CRM
- Materials Management
- Other Modules

Integration Support:

- Orders
- Delivery Confirmations
- Invoices
- Purchase Orders
- Rate Sheets
- Bills of Lading
- Forms Support
- Requests for Proposal (RFPs)
- Other Document Types

About eFax

eFax launched its digital cloud fax service with the goal of using the convenience of email and the speed of the internet to make it easier for people to send and receive faxes. eFax lets users and our 11 million customers receive, review, edit, sign, send and store faxes by email or through a web interface. Our appeal and success are built around three key features: the widest selection of phone numbers; an easy way to send and receive faxes and voicemail by email; and a fast, reliable and secure communications network.

To learn more about outsourcing to a digital cloud fax model with eFax, visit us at: efax.co.uk/corporate

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