The Secret Life of the fax - Healthcare Services Industry

The chances are that today you are working in a hospital with people who have no idea what a fax machine is or why faxing was for so long the most efficient and effective way to communicate.

It will come as a surprise to many therefore that the fax is still very much with us, just not how you would imagine. Its secret life continues to underpin many of the day-to-day needs of organisations and patients alike.

While many organisations are ditching old-fashioned fax machines, faxing itself remains as it underpins a huge number of vital processes we all rely on, and that includes the transmission of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) which includes medical records, X-Ray's, scans and other vital documentation.

Email may dominate today but it is fundamentally flawed in the eyes of the law. It is vulnerable to:

- Fraud
- Interception
- Manipulation
- Hacking

Today email remains pervasive, powering many of the things we all rely on for a host of processes. And while the machines may have gone, online cloud-faxing enables organisations to continue to send Electronic Health Records safely and securely.

In this Report we look into the trends we are seeing in the healthcare sector, detailing who and how fax is being used today. If you think fax is long gone, think again.

The fax is dead, long live the fax.

Faxes and healthcare sector

Over the years, innovations in the healthcare sector have influenced patient care and enhancements in health information technology have improved patient safety and reduced medical errors. Researchers around the world are prioritising the studies to improve safety and reduce errors. Electronic Health Records (EHRs) can achieve this by improving the efficiency and quality of healthcare and by streamlining healthcare processes.

As more patient information is becoming digital and a large number of consumers are expressing the desire to have mobile access to their health records, the role of EHR is becoming significantly influential in healthcare. Critically the question has become how to communicate these records through the primary and secondary healthcare systems in a safe and secure way. The answer is by fax and this has been driven by a number of important factors.

Security

Concerns about data security are a huge issue within the healthcare sector. It is believed that many medical organisations are now top targets for cyber criminals. As a result, healthcare organisations need to identify and actively use communications systems that are secure, free from hi-jacking, and not open to

ransomware threats.

Privacy

While the fear of cyber-attacks is a clear and present danger, patients are also concerned that EHR providers will misuse their medical data. Fax – with its inherent security – means that when a record is sent, it is done so safely, date and time stamped and therefore auditable.

Regulation

In the US there is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) which provides clear guidelines to ensure compliance related to the security and management of confidential information. Professionals in the healthcare sector must be compliant and ensure that they do not compromise patient information.

In the EU, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is one of the most comprehensive sets of regulations. Some of the processes that fall under the GDPR include the creation and destruction of patient information. For the sake of clarity this means any communications system must be compliant and must ensure that information is protected from a legal perspective.

Exchange

The European Commission has also adopted an exchange format for EHRs that will allow patients to access and exchange their medical records from within any country that is part of the EU. This means once again fax comes to the fore as a safe, secure, and compliant communications format not just from one hospital to another, but even one country to another.

The secret life of the fax

- Just over a third of us send and receive secure documents every day, a further 34% do so 3 or 4 times a week
- When asked our sample base 22% stated they send and receive secure documents at least weekly
- The number of fax users in organisations is also far higher than you could ever imagine. Over half of our total sample – 54% - had between 6 to 50 users; A full fifth claimed that there were 51 or more users in their organisation.
- Fax usage is also expected to increase in over 37% of our sample, with 28% stating there would be no change, while only 35% felt they might see a decrease
- Over the past year, an amazing 64% of our sample stated that the number of secure documents received had seen no change or had in fact increased.

How do healthcare providers send and receive secure documents today?

- 42% of our sample send and receive confidential documents via password protected emails, and 25% said they use email encrypted software

- When it comes to fax, 37% use cloud-based fax systems, while 21% use a mix of cloud and traditional faxing, while 17% of our sample remained wedded to their traditional fax machine.
- 25% of our healthcare sample stated that cloud-based fax systems were extremely secure and that 41% of the total sample felt security was critical to their thinking when it comes to migration to cloud-based fax systems

Fax versus email

One of the main problems with email is its increasing vulnerability to interception, hacking and fraud. It is surprisingly easy for unauthorised personnel to gain access to an email account.

With sophisticated software, criminals can hack into an email account by accessing login details and passwords.

Fax was and remains one of the most protected methods of communication available to an organisation. The superior level of security associated with fax is why it is the preferred medium for healthcare professionals in particular where communications tools have to be 100% secure.

What is cloud faxing?

Cloud faxing enables your business to enjoy the reliability and security of fax, with the convenience of email.

Online cloud faxing completely replaces the need for a physical fax machine. All documents and files are sent and received digitally, rather than over analogue lines. Carry on sending fax to physical fax machines without having to own a fax machine yourself.

The benefits include:

- Fax document security is increased through high-level encryption and access controls
- There is no need for resource expenditure on toner, ink and maintenance
- The process of sending and receiving fax is much quicker and more efficient
- Fax documents can be sent while working remotely
- You can maintain important functionality associated with fax transmission, such as legal document sharing and instant submission/reception of visual files
- Fax can be saved and easily accessed through online document management systems
- Multiple fax numbers can be assigned to a single account, simplifying transmission.

Switching to eFax services is simple. eFax solutions can quickly and easily be integrated into your current work environment.

Why are organisations migrating to cloud-based faxing?

As we have seen, fax remains central to many organisations and their operations. Its secret life underpins many organisations, powering the effective communication of secure and legally binding documentation today and for years to come.

But what are the key drivers our survey highlighted that are underpinning the move to cloud-based faxing from traditional fax?

First and foremost, it is about security. Fax is more secure than email in many way - not least because fax has limited exposure to the internet and internet connected devices. Fax machines communicate through phone lines, which are harder to access than public internet connections. And let's be honest, if a cybercriminal does breach a fax it does not give them that much leverage, unless a device is connected to an immediate network and even then that will be limited.

It is therefore no surprise that the biggest driver for the ongoing use of fax is security at 41%. But this is rapidly followed by cost efficiency at 36%, compliance to GDPR at 34% and the increasing importance of cloud storage at 23%.

Fax Facts

What documents do users assume are suitable for faxing?

Contracts	56%
Tenancy agreements	44%
Company accounts	31%

Commercially sensitive docs	28%
Documents containing bank details	26%
Patient records	24%
Documents containing PII	19%

Reasons to use a faxing service

We asked our sample of users why they use a faxing service today and the findings highlight a number of vital business and operational processes. These include:

- If suppliers/customer expect it   34%
- To send sensitive documents   28%
- Professional expectations   21%
- Enable new working patterns   20%
- To get receipt of delivery   20%
- Cost reduction   20%
- If decision taken at HQ   14%
- For the cloud storage   13%

The secret life of the fax

How online cloud-faxing keeps transmission legal, safe and secure

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How online cloud-faxing keeps transmission legal, safe and secure

When it comes to communicating EHR, faxing is still the preferred communication tool.

Despite being perceived as an outdated medium; fax has stood the test of time and many industries continue to use it as their primary means of data transfer . The reason for this is because of fax's undeniable, tried-and-tested security and reliability, as well as its elevated status as one of the most legally binding communication tools available today.

In many different industries, but particularly in the healthcare sector, fax is the most-used medium of communication. Many documents need to be sent in a safe and secure environment, and one that complies with regulations such as HIPPA or GDPR.

These types of documents often contain sensitive and confidential information, so a completely secure communication method is needed, one which can conveniently send important information quickly and securely.

eFax online cloud-faxing services enable organisations to continue sending legally binding documentation, even over a digital platform. But how can online faxing do this when email cannot? eFax services enable transmission of legal files thanks to:

- Verified high-grade encryption
- All fax documents are time-stamped and dated with absolute accuracy
- Its ability to send original files that feature legally binding e-signatures signed through touchscreen technology
- The software's functionality, which allows physical, already-signed documents to be captured using cameras and transmitted through secure online channels.

Conclusion

Cloud faxing enables your organisation to enjoy the reliability and security of fax with the convenience of email. And when you sign up to a service provider, like eFax, your company can instantly enjoy an encrypted and speedy service.

With eFax, you'll never have to use your legacy machine again. Instead, send all of your fax messages securely via email. Watch as your productivity increases, while your bottom-line costs decrease.

Wave goodbye to paper jams and signal delays. Instead, watch as faxes are sent instantly from the desktop all the while benefiting from the same level of security that we associate with traditional faxing.

Digital cloud fax technology is decades ahead of email in terms of secure data transmission for a very logical reason. While email messages run the gamut from exchanging confidential data to asking co-workers where to go for lunch, most businesses use fax only to share important—and often highly sensitive—documents. Nobody faxes a colleague about where to go for lunch.

As a result, cloud fax providers have had to develop an infrastructure that guarantees business users the most secure, private, and legally compliant way to transmit their confidential data to clients, vendors, partners, and other third parties.

At the same time, email encryption programmes are constantly playing catchup with the ever-evolving techniques and resources available to cybercriminals.

If you're interested in learning how internet faxing can help your business, why not call or email us today to learn about eFax's competitively priced plans?

Methodology

In late 2021, eFax conducted a major research project to gain greater understanding of the cloud-based electronic faxing market and its dynamics. It aimed to determine the volume of faxing by different types of organisational size and vertical market.

The survey polled 1001 senior IT and business decision-makers in large enterprises, small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and public sector organisations. All of those represented have UK or European operations.

Market Overview

Who did we talk to?

eFax interviewed over 1000 people in a wide range of roles within a broad number of companies and vertical markets.

These included:

29%	IT managers
19%	IT directors
16%	Office manager
12%	Business owner

The size of the companies:

31%	250 employees
25%	100-249 employees
17%	50-99 employees
20%	10-49 employees
7%	5-9 employees

Vertical markets included

Tech, media and telco	25%
Financial services	11%
Legal and professional services	10%
Public sector	10%
Manufacturing	9%
Healthcare	8%
Retail and distribution	8%

About eFax

eFax is the leading HITRUST CSF® certified digital cloud-faxing solution, trusted by five of the top 10 global enterprises and four of the top 10 Fortune 500 healthcare companies. The eFax Corporate product transmits billions of documents annually and is widely used in the USA, Canada, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Its 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. As a core product of Consensus Cloud Solutions' leading interoperability suite, it creates operational efficiencies and enhances communications for paper-reliant industries such as healthcare, legal, manufacturing, finance and real-estate.

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