



## Document tracking and document control

There is little that is so exciting as the subject of document tracking. If you think it's about as interesting as watching paint dry, then you're wrong, and there it is.

Ever since the supermarkets discovered loyalty cards (pre-dates Google although they now do a splendid job tracking each and every web move that you make with them, and a rather large fortune selling that knowledge) knowing what users (aka consumers in some marketing thinking) are doing is valuable.

Just as a supermarket wants to know your buying habits and patterns so that they can punt to you things that you normally buy, they can also contrast your habits with similar people, see what else they bought, and see if it would appeal to you.

Now this can be good - you might like the other choices and it does save you the effort of thinking, or it can be bad if you blow this month's salary on crap it turns out you don't either need or want.

But that is one side of document tracking. If a seller knows how often his books are read (actually, opened, so it can be misleading, 'cos how often have I opened a recipe book and then ignored it?) then he 'knows' how to target the kinds of books you might be interested in.

(It crosses my mind that this document tracking stuff may not work quite so well when I am reading War and Peace [Tolstoy, not Dostoevsky damn it], which, even if you don't put it down, and you would have to be seriously strong if you didn't, it is not a 5 minute wonder, but a most of this month epic.)

But document tracking for commercial purposes, whilst it mimics the supermarket tracking and web analysis of the search engines, is probably at a lower level than the element of document control and document tracking that the corporate enterprise would find useful.

Now for the enterprise, document control is an essential. Far too many internal documents contain information that is subject to this or that regulatory control, or is a secret that you seriously do not wish to find on a download site (just look at the US government and the Wikileaks fiasco where huge numbers of supposedly confidential documents ended up on the Internet, to see exactly what I mean about failure to implement document tracking and document control in any useful way. Too little too late is their mantra.

For the corporate, document tracking - who exactly was authorized to see this, when (if ever) was it opened, can be amazingly useful information, especially once you understand that electronic evidence can be just as good as any other kind.

Imagine that, after some cock-up or other, someone is asked - did you see the instructions concerning the security of this document? Be very careful, because with document tracking they can show that the document was at least opened, so they are entitled to come to the conclusion that it must either have been read or consciously ignored. This already happens with email, so extending it is no big deal.



So document tracking is suddenly valuable. And knowing which location it was opened at can be kind of interesting as well. If top secret documents are getting opened from someone's home rather a lot, it might suggest that they take way too much work home and need some helpful counselling (if you know what I mean).

In the corporate world, document tracking is therefore seriously interesting from many perspectives. It complements document control. If you don't have document control, then you don't have anything at all.

In fact, establishing document control is just the beginning of wisdom. If you cannot achieve document integrity - that the document delivered must be the document sent in both form and format (this is a piece of legal speak, and if you don't understand immediately all the liability implications please feel free to talk to your own counsel because I do not offer legal advice) then you are building on sand, which, apparently the Bible indicates is not a good idea. (Just as well silicon is not just sand, I guess.)

What document tracking builds on top of document control is the ability to know when particular events (usually the opening of a document, but also the printing of a document) took place. What document tracking is not able to tell you is when someone stopped using a document. There are many reasons for this. On the Internet, if a computer dies on you (or just gets disconnected from the Internet) the protocol has no method of noticing. As a logging system (please do not try to say audit because almost no IT systems actually deliver audit, just logging) there are no messages that say, "I have recently died," or, "This application is no longer talking."

The for why is the horrifying amount of network traffic that would be generated if applications would create if they were continually confirming their existence - never mind the problems of managing it all.

It is correct to say that back in the punched card age (after all, computers are post steam age, are they not) there were protocols that detected if a terminal was connected to a mainframe or not. But they were abandoned when the Internet came along, for a free-wheeling approach where a 'session' stayed alive for a certain amount of time regardless of whether the connection was live or not. That was the price of resilience - not to get upset if the other half was not there for a while (!).

So as a result of history, document tracking can only tell you when events start, and not when they end. Can you imagine the amount of network traffic if document monitoring could tell you each page that had been read/viewed/passed over by a recipient? It is technically feasible, as are most things, but not technically wise or sound.

In conclusion to this little observation, document control is an absolute, a must. Without it, any document of any importance can be distributed anyhow, anywhere and anywhen. And regardless of what the music track fascists claim, that having access to something automatically grants you the authority to do anything you like, in the words of the song, "It ain't necessarily so." Following on from document control, document tracking can be and is a valuable tool in a wide number of circumstances. If you believe that it will deliver valuable marketing



information it may prove informative. If you need to be able to 'prove' that internal users actually received and at least opened (or did not open) documents then it is an invaluable tool in the administrative armoury.

## **About LockLizard**

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