

A Forrester Consulting
Thought Leadership Paper
Commissioned By Adobe

August 2020

Digital Document Processes In 2020: A Spotlight On E-Signatures

E-Signature Results From The August 2020
Thought Leadership Paper “How Digital
Document Processes Are Shifting From Best
Practice To Business Necessity”



E-signatures are becoming a key tool in every organization's foundational digital toolkit.



60% of respondents said e-signatures are critical to support their organization's business resiliency.

Introduction

Even in a digital age, organizations remain reliant on manual paper processes to share trusted information or form legally binding agreements. As the shift to electronic processes continues, the use of e-signatures has become more prevalent. The pandemic, however, has increased the urgency of digitizing document processes to maintain business continuity, further accelerating the adoption of e-signatures across regions and industries. This new business necessity will last well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic as customers and employees expect more digital services.

In this environment, what value do e-signatures bring? Has this changed as a result of the pandemic?

Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to answer these questions by evaluating how digital document processes and e-signatures are supporting business resilience. Forrester conducted an online survey with 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Western Europe, and Asia Pacific with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization. We found that the pandemic has reemphasized the importance of e-signatures and accelerated their adoption. Shifting to a virtual working environment has highlighted the productivity and security benefits that digital document processes offer, dropping barriers to deployment. And while the pandemic is bringing its own new challenges, firms will continue to grow their e-signatures capabilities, shifting it from a best practice to a business necessity.

KEY FINDINGS

- › **Organizations are recognizing the importance of e-signatures and accelerating adoption.** As organizations acclimate to virtual work, the pandemic has emphasized the need for digital document processing tools including e-signatures, and respondents said adoption has accelerated across every industry, region, and company size. Sixty percent of surveyed business and technology leaders said that e-signatures are a critical requirement in supporting business continuity and agility. This rating increases to 77% in regions with higher digital document process maturity.
- › **Businesses are growing familiar with the regulations and compliance around e-signatures, unlocking new opportunities.** Only 13% of respondents report a lack of regulatory support as a challenge to their organization's e-signature deployment, down from 24% pre-pandemic. Even organizations with no or minimal digital document processes before the pandemic are now adopting these capabilities and familiarizing themselves with existing e-signature regulations.
- › **E-signatures will become standard practice as part of the new normal.** Organizations are recognizing how e-signatures support better customer and employee outcomes beyond simply replacing "wet" signatures. Being quick and cost-effective to implement, e-signatures also support integration with everyday productivity applications, helping organizations maximize and unlock more benefits from their modernization initiatives and earning a spot in every organization's foundational digital toolkit.

The Pandemic Has Accelerated The Adoption Of E-Signatures

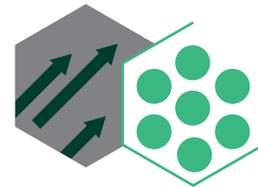
In the wake of the global pandemic, online interactions have soared, and in many instances, they have replaced in-person interactions entirely. Organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of digitizing document processes and adopting e-signatures for business resilience. According to respondents, adoption of these solutions has accelerated across every industry, region, and company size.

- › **Digital document signing and approval is key for business continuity during and post-pandemic.** Respondents anticipate that 39% of their organization’s workforce will continue to work remotely on a regular basis post-pandemic, up from 20% pre-pandemic. With remote work here to stay, digital solutions like e-signatures are key to keeping businesses moving. Sixty percent of respondents said it supports business resilience (up to 77% in higher education and 72% in financial services).
- › **E-signature adoption is accelerating and will continue to grow across regions and industries.** Seventy-four percent of respondents said their organization used e-signatures to some degree before the pandemic, particularly in document-heavy industries such as financial services, higher education, and government. However, 58% of respondents said the pandemic has accelerated user adoption of e-signatures at their organization (see Figure 1). That’s forcing organizations to reinforce their digital capabilities to serve broader client segments.
- › **North American organizations will continue to lead in the adoption of e-signatures.** Of the decision makers surveyed, 88% from North America said their firm was already using e-signatures as a best practice (26%) or standard protocol (62%) before the pandemic, the highest across all regions surveyed. These organizations are also expanding their use of e-signatures the fastest during the pandemic as 79% of respondents from North America reported an acceleration in user adoption at their organization. The pandemic has also accelerated adoption across industries that have traditionally seen lighter adoption of digital document processes. Fifty-four percent of life sciences respondents reported an acceleration in user adoption of e-signatures (see Figure 2).
- › **Large organizations will increasingly adopt e-signatures.** Accounting for larger volumes and more complex document processes, larger organizations have recognized the value of digital document processes including e-signatures. Indeed, 85% of respondents from large organizations said they were already using e-signatures prior to the pandemic to some degree. That’s 17% more than respondents from mid-sized companies (68%). The pandemic has accelerated adoption in large organizations, with 71% of respondents stating the importance of e-signature capabilities in operating day-to-day businesses (see Figure 2).



“Even if the parties are geographically diverse, signatures are done electronically so there is no delay in updating and executing contracts.”

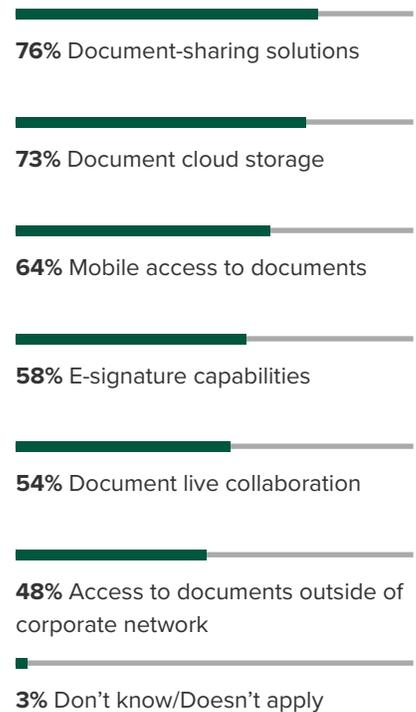
VP marketing, construction company, United Kingdom



58% of business leaders said that the pandemic has accelerated user adoption of e-signatures in their organizations.

Figure 1

“To the best of your knowledge, is the COVID-19 pandemic causing an acceleration in user adoption at your organization for any of the below technologies?”

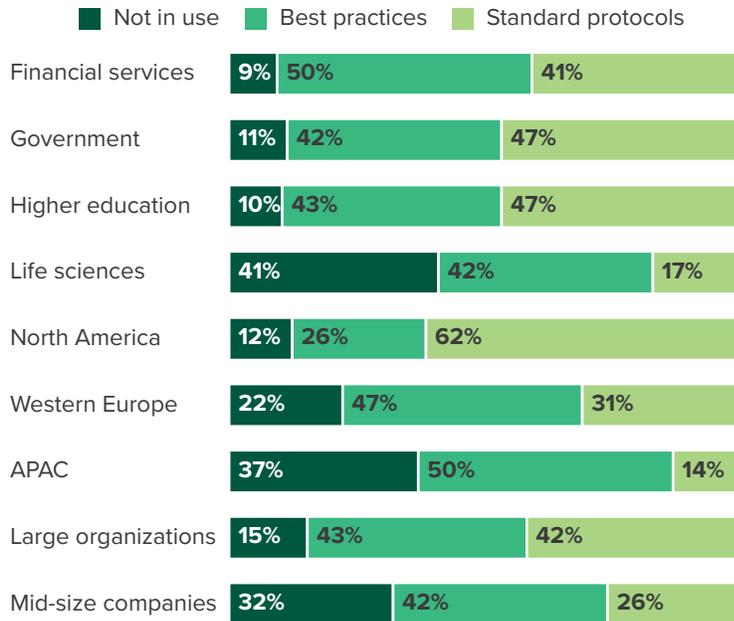


Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Figure 2

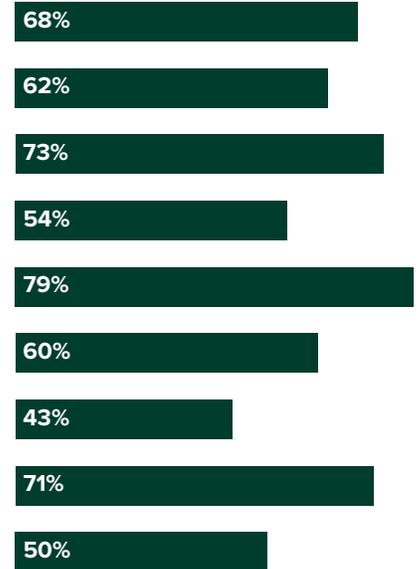
“Please indicate whether each of the below processes were considered best practices or standard protocols at your organization prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

(Displaying “e-signature” answers)



“To the best of your knowledge, is the COVID-19 pandemic causing an acceleration in user adoption at your organization for any of the below technologies?” (Displaying “e-signature capabilities” answers)

(Displaying “e-signature capabilities” answers)



Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Organizations Are Changing How They Perceive And Deploy E-Signatures

As adoption grows, more organizations are recognizing e-signatures as a foundational business capability. Perceptions around deployment also continue to evolve as:

- › **E-signatures are moving from operational tools to a strategic practice for good customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX).** Forty percent of respondents now link increased customer satisfaction and increased employee productivity with digital document processes, up from 28% pre-pandemic. E-signatures are a key part of this. They digitize and accelerate typically error-prone and lengthy steps of the document process, improving CX, EX, and outcomes.
- › **Organizations with minimal digital capabilities are growing familiar with e-signature regulations.** Organizations that are less familiar with e-signatures are likely to be more concerned with the regulation and compliance surrounding its deployment. Thirty percent of respondents from these organizations said they perceive regulatory risk as a challenge to e-signature deployment. That's 25% higher than respondents from organizations that exclusively used digital document processes (5%). However, the pandemic is also increasing awareness about regulations dropping barriers to adoption across all regions and industries. Only 13% of respondents reported a lack of regulatory support as a challenge to e-signatures deployment. That's down from 24% before the pandemic (see Figure 3).
- › **E-signatures are implemented as part of a suite of digital document solutions.** Reacting to the pandemic, organizations are looking to rapidly digitize across a range of capabilities to ensure business continuity and resilience. They are seriously considering e-signatures amongst other digital document capabilities, from basic features (e.g., document sharing) to more advanced ones (e.g., data analytics and insights). Higher education institutions in particular are using e-signatures as a driver to digitize document processes. Seventy-seven percent of higher education respondents said they consider the feature important, deeming it the most important digital document capability in the field.
- › **Organizations must overcome new challenges to e-signature deployment brought by the pandemic.** Respondents see the pandemic as adding an extra layer of complexity in deploying technology solutions such as e-signatures, with greater challenges around conducting training and change management in a remote work environment. The pandemic has also brought significant budget restrictions, forcing decision makers to carefully choose how they are going to direct spend (see Figure 3). Organizations must work closely with their employees to overcome these challenges early for what will be important practices to ensuring business resilience in the new normal.



"It enables us to collect approvals and signatures from multiple parties in whatever order we choose, increasing collaboration and keeping operations running."

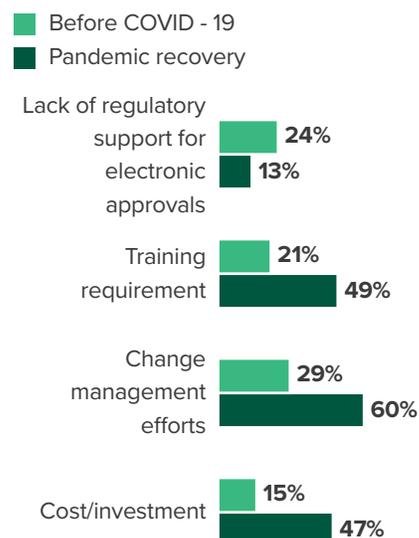
Human resources director, advertising and marketing company, Germany



Organizations face new deployment challenges in response to the growth in remote work.

Figure 3

"To the best of your knowledge, what are the main barriers to deploying digital document process solutions in your organization?"

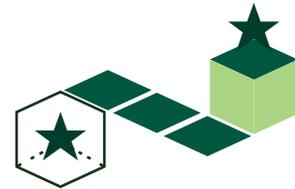


Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Unlock Opportunities With E-Signatures To Thrive In The New Normal

Shelter in place orders, social distancing, and travel restrictions have reemphasized the need for strong digital practices for both customers and employees. Our research indicates that this will extend post-pandemic with companies looking for more agile and flexible ways to service their customers and empower their workforce. While digitizing document processes was once considered a best practice, it is now becoming a business necessity, making e-signatures a table-stake feature.

- › **Providing customers with e-signatures protects organizations' revenue and opens opportunities.** The demand for digital services is intensifying, and organizations must be able to respond. For example, in Australia during the pandemic, businesses lobbied to make permanent emergency changes that enabled mortgages and other documents to be executed and signed completely digitally. By failing to meet this need, organizations put customers and revenue at risk, but they also forego business opportunities in the long run. Our study found that 21% of customers are at risk due to a lack of digital alternatives to service them during the pandemic, and an alarming 35% of revenue is at risk. However, for organizations exclusively using digital document processes, our research found that 47% of respondents reported that these solutions enable their organization to pursue opportunities and gain new customers in light of the pandemic versus only 9% from organizations with minimal digital documents capabilities.
- › **E-signatures accelerate document workflows and enable employees to get important work done.** “One in two businesses (56%) struggle with slow document workflows, up from 40% pre-pandemic. Implementing e-signatures streamlines document processes, accelerates document workflows, and improves employees engagement. And decision makers are recognizing this, with 45% of them looking to improve employee productivity, and 54% looking to improve employee collaboration with digital document processes (including e-signatures).
- › **E-signatures implemented today will endure to become part of CX and EX post-disruption.** Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents said that their organization's customers want improved digital alternatives and interactions, and a similar number also recognize that their organization's employees want more digital alternatives to perform their day-to-day work. Companies leveraging digital document processes and e-signatures show that they listen to the needs of their customers and employees.
- › **Connecting e-signatures to other digital initiatives maximize their benefits.** Replacing “wet” signatures in any business process and integrating with existing technology landscapes, e-signatures support the integration of document workflows with everyday productivity applications. That's a very important/critical requirement for 65% of the respondents. By digitizing document workflows holistically with end-users in mind, organizations are reaping more benefits from their modernization initiatives, opening new doorways to data analytics and data-based decision making to improve both CX and EX.



Respondents from organizations with no digital document processes reported **10x more at-risk customers** and **2x more at-risk revenue** than those from other companies.

“E-signatures save customers' time and make the overall signing process much more convenient for them.”

Chief marketing officer, legal services company, Germany



Key Recommendations

The global pandemic has reemphasized the importance of e-signatures. Forrester's in-depth survey of 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC about digital document processing yielded several important recommendations:



Recognize the importance of e-signatures for protecting business and better serving customers. Decision makers must recognize the value e-signatures provide in underpinning their organization's business resilience efforts and understand their contribution to full digital maturity. In this respect e-signatures are foundational tools that are cost-effective and quick to implement where more complex digitization initiatives take some time to provide benefits.



Remember that e-signatures are as valuable in the front office as they are in back office. Failing to digitize both front and back office departments and processes will erode the benefits of these solutions. Organizations should seize the opportunity now and identify key use cases in every department that slow or delay business due to manual or paper-based steps. Applying e-signing across the enterprise can bring substantial and immediate benefits.



E-signatures are a sound investment addressing both immediate and long-term needs. Given current uncertainties, technology leaders must be cognizant of their company's situation, revenue outlook, and resources as they adjust budgets during the pandemic. They must look to prioritize projects, processes, and technologies that focus on business resilience or new ways of working. E-signatures as part of a digital document workflow address both these elements and make continued investment in these capabilities a sound choice during these challenging times.

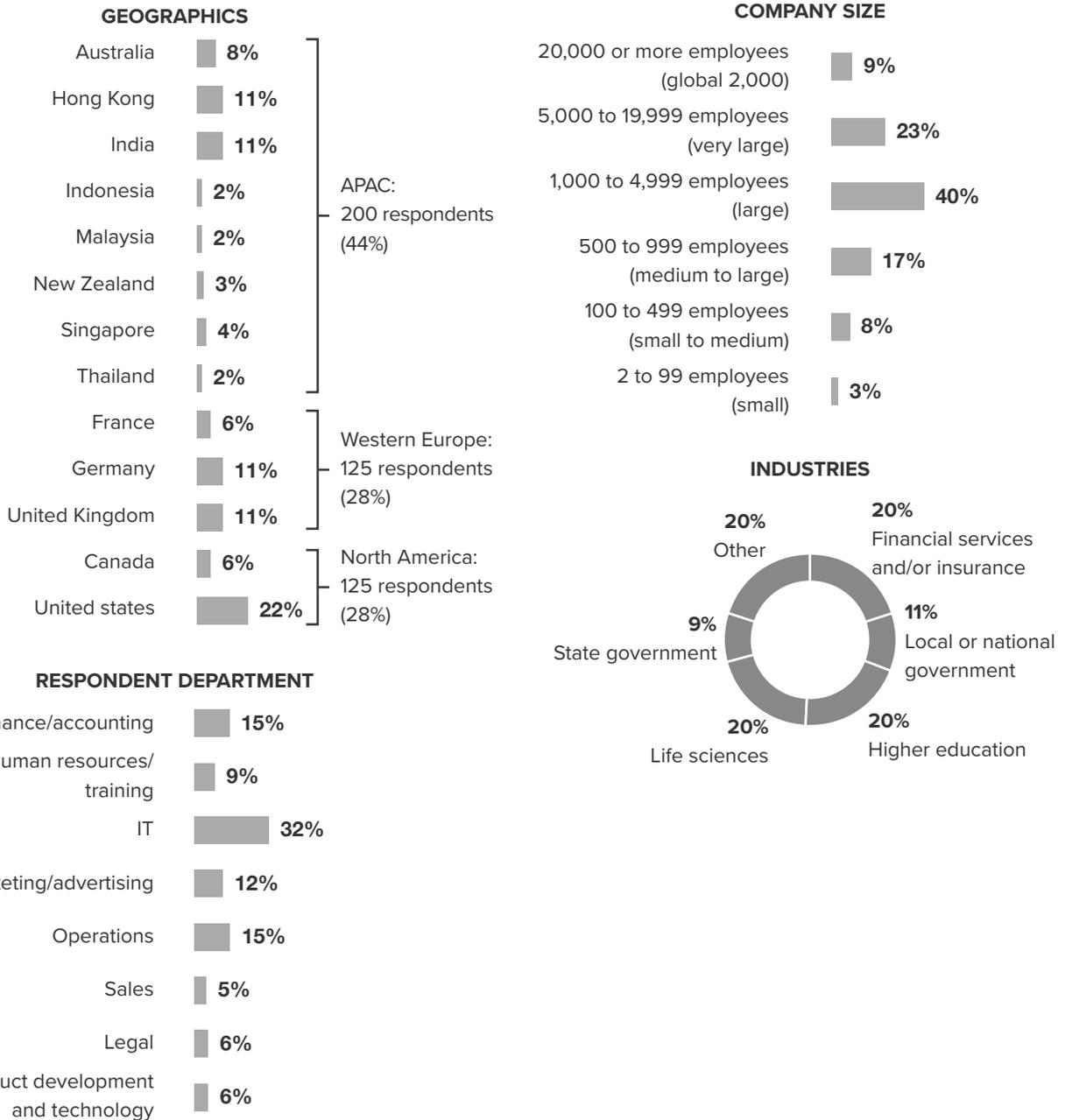


Ramp up digital workplace skills. Business and technology leaders must take a human-centric approach when using e-signatures and digitizing document processes. They should support change management with innovative rollout and training programs adapted to remote working to assist their workforce and customers in becoming more fluent with sharing documents, using e-signatures, and working in collaborative environments.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe, and APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization to explore how digital document processes are supporting business continuity. The study began in May 2020 and was completed in June 2020.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data



Base: 450 senior IT and business decision makers based in North America, Europe or APAC with responsibilities for digital document processing at their organization

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, June 2020

Appendix C: Supplemental Material

RELATED FORRESTER RESEARCH

“Center Your COVID-19 Recovery Planning Around Employee Understanding,” Forrester Research, Inc., June 7, 2020.

“The Pandemic Recession Demands A Digital Response”, Forrester Research, Inc., June 25, 2020.

“Your Automation Psychology And Roadmap Just Shifted Gears”, Forrester Research, Inc., May 29, 2020.

Appendix D: Endnotes

¹ Digital document processes include any processes, workflows, or platforms to manage the creation, collaboration, distribution, and storage of digital documents and records within the guardrails of corporate policies. This includes solutions that allow for reading, editing, signing, and sharing of PDFs and other documents.

² Working remotely: Workforce (e.g., home worker, teams split geographically, etc.) working remotely on a regular basis (e.g., at least once a week).

³ Larger organizations: Organizations with more than \$1 billion in revenue or annual funding/budget.

⁴ Mid-sized companies: Organizations with between \$100 million and \$1 billion in revenue or annual funding/budget.

⁵ Source: James Eyers, “Banks, businesses call for document digitization,” Financial Review, June 18, 2020 (afr.com/companies/financial-services/banks-business-call-for-document-digitisation-20200618-p553wq).

⁶ Source: “How Digital Document Processes Are Shifting From Best Practices To Business Necessity,” a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

⁷ Source: “How Digital Document Processes Are Shifting From Best Practices To Business Necessity,” a commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, August 2020.

To read the full results of this study, please refer to the Thought Leadership Paper commissioned by Adobe titled [“How Digital Document Processes Are Shifting From Best Practice To Business Necessity.”](#)

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