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Local company AmberSoft has developed software that allows businesses to manage document storage and retrieval safely, speedily and at lower costs. Managing documents is a costly and messy affair for any business. Besides that, documents in physical form are susceptible to damage. What if they were burnt in a fire, damaged by floodwater or eaten by termites?

Thanks to technology, all this can be a thing of the past. Companies now have an alternative method of storing documents in digital form. First, the documents are scanned, then they are stored in digital format. This allows easy retrieval using computers, eliminates rental costs and frees up physical space. Although digitising documents is nothing new in developed countries, the solution has yet to catch on in this part of the world. Local software company AmberSoft Sdn Bhd sees this as an opportunity. It has developed a software called Fingertips to enable companies to manage documents at an affordable cost.



Ambersoft director Harvinder Singh says Fingertips, developed fully by Malaysians, is perhaps the only one of its kind in the region. He says most companies in the world sell their solutions 'in a box' and do not provide implementation expertise. 'The beauty of Fingertips is that it can be developed to suit the client's requirements. So far, we have not found any competitor to our product,' says Harvinder.

Balvinder Singh, who is the business development manager of AmberSoft as well as one of its founders, says prior to developing Fingertips, the company had been distributing document management software that was developed in the United States. The software was reliable but had its downside. 'When we encountered a problem, it could not be settled quickly because we had to call the people in the US and wait for about a week for them to reply,' says Balvinder,

Balvinder:

One of his challenges is to change the mindset of Malaysians towards locally developed software.

He says with Fingertips, the company provides solutions for businesses swiftly and at lower costs. One client of AmberSoft that has recently taken a revolutionary step in document management is Koperasi Angkatan Tentera Malaysia Bhd (Koperasi Tentera). The cooperative was established in 1960 as a thrift and loan society for members of the Malaysian Armed Forces. In 1975, it became a multi-purpose cooperative with the aim of improving the socio-economic status of the members. It also provides savings account facilities for them.

The IT department manager of the cooperative, Shamshudin Khalid, says Koperasi Tentera had faced unnecessary costs in its effort to manage its documents. The problem was the result of its practice of keeping its documents pertaining to loan applications for up to seven years, mainly for legal purposes.

We need to refer to the documents if the loans are defaulted or there is a need for account adjustment, and in cases of forgery,' he says. Lending to members has been the core business and main activity of Koperasi Tentera since its inception. Loans contribute to 65% of its total income.

With an average of six to ten loan applications that consist of at least in pages each received each day, Koperasi Tentera decided to invest RM100,000 in digitising the documents rather than storing them in paper form. The decision was considered a radical one for the cooperative.

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'As far as we know, no other financial institution has done this,' says Shamshudin, who has been with Koperasi Tentera since 1989. Previously, everything was done manually, with the documents stored in boxes that were stacked high up until they reached the ceiling. Retrieving them took about a week and the staff had to work extra hours to locate and process the documents.

The digitisation process is ongoing. Shamshudin says pending its full completion, Koperasi Tentera needs to spend about RM2,000 a month on space rental. All loan applications from its eight branches are processed and stored at the cooperative's headquarters at Jalan Pahang in Kuala Lumpur, as well as in rented premises. The cooperative now has some 100,000 members.



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'We chose AmberSoft's document management solutions over those of two other companies because they are relatively cheap and are user-friendly,' says Shamshudin. 'They were able to customise the software to our need because they developed it. If we had chosen software developed elsewhere, it might have been difficult for us to implement and use it.'

He says the digitisation has started to show results, enabling the staff to access the documents independently and speedily. More importantly, the digitised documents qualify as evidence in court under the Evidence Act 1950.

But the process is still being fine-tuned. Each loan application consists of about 10 documents of various sizes. Shamshudin says their sizes would be standardised for easy and fast scanning. 'We keep two digitised copies of each document in CD form and store them separately in case of a disaster,' says Shamshudin. As with the paper documents, the CDs would be destroyed after seven years.

Balvinder says one of the challenges facing AmberSoft is in convincing Malaysian companies of the quality of locally developed software. He started the company in the early 1990s with two friends, Sukhdev Singh and Balbir Singh. All of them are software engineers trained in Britain and with wide experience in developing software for multinational companies. They started with an initial investment of RM200,000.

Another challenge, Balvinder says, is the typical Malaysian businessman's aversion to change. 'Their mentality is, "Why spend money on a new system when the one you have is still good?," he says.

But he expresses confidence that such negative attitudes would change over time with education. As it is, more local companies and state government bodies are already adopting AmberSoft's document management solutions to increase efficiency and productivity.

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