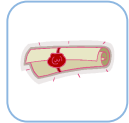


# How to Choose a Digital Signature Solution

There are 10 simple points to consider when choosing a Digital Signature solution for your organization. While not all are obvious, they are critical make-or-break factors for the smooth implementation, management and use of such a system, impacting on every aspect of your business processes. To ensure a low TCO and a speedy ROI from your Digital Signature solution, read on.



**Seal documents** - This is the basic building block of a true Digital Signature solution. It guarantees the document is sealed from changes, be they incidental or even the result of a late night hacking of your network.

**Tip:** Make sure the solution is based on standard digital signature technology (PKI – Public Key Infrastructure) and that the digital certificates are not self-signed certificates which create a highly potential repudiation problem.



**Multiple Application support** - Many applications (e.g. Excel) provide only minimal support for digital signatures, so you'll need to make sure the application support meets your actual requirements. For example, in Excel you would need to ask if the Digital Signature solution you are evaluating signs a single sheet, a range of cells or only the entire document. If it's two out of three, you need to keep on looking.

**Tip:** Make sure the applications and file types you intend to sign in your organization are supported by the solution.



**Graphical Signatures** - Of the standard applications that have Digital Signature support, almost all lack Graphical Signature support. This is a major shortcoming. Graphical Signatures, while obviously ensuring the signature is visually noticeable, also have a psychological impact: the signer is reassured they have actually signed the document and that it is now legally compliant.

**Tip:** Check to see if your industry regulator requires graphical signatures to be appended to signed electronic documents.



**Multiple Signatures** - You now know your applications support Digital Signatures and you can sign documents, but how many people can actually sign the same document? Unless your solution has support for multiple signatures you can forget about your CEO signing your leave form. Electronically, that is.

**Tip:** A true Digital Signature solution allows for multiple signings on the same document be it Word or even Excel, where different users may be asked to sign different cells within the same spreadsheet.



**Zero IT Management** - Be aware the time to deploy a system is typically lengthy and resource-intensive. IT staff can find themselves spending weeks every year just managing the selected Digital Signature solution. Then again, the company may opt to employ an additional staff member to manage the task, or implement a help-desk just to ensure users can digitally sign their documents. Costs can skyrocket.

**Tip:** If you want to avoid this kind of scenario you need to ensure your solution is operational the moment it is hooked up to your network and that the "Zero-Management" requirement on your checklist is met.



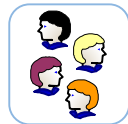
**Compliance** - Each regulation has its own specific requirements pertaining to electronic documents. For example, the FDA 21 CFR Part 11 regulation for the Pharmaceutical market has numerous requirements that are not met by most digital signature solutions.

**Tip:** Review the regulations for your industry and make sure the solution covers all those requirements.



**Transportability (Worldwide verifiable)** - Do you want your customers or partners to be able to validate files you've signed electronically? This seemingly trivial task is not so trivial after all. The truth is not every digital signature may be transportable outside of your organization. In fact they are not always embedded in your document.

**Tip:** You need to know if your documents may be validated by an outside user without them having to install a third party application.



**Seamless User Registration** - The implementation of your Digital Signature solution must be as transparent as possible. You want to make sure that the moment the solution has been deployed, staff at your organization can start signing straight away without having to start a "wizard" to enroll or call on the IT department for this matter.

**Tip:** If your CFO gets married and changes her surname make sure your solution is capable of updating her user profile seamlessly in the background.



**Simple-to-use** - Be sure to choose a system that is easy to use. You don't want staff to run a Wizard application when they A) load the signature application onto their PC and then B) every other time they want to sign a document. IT staff involvement should also be cut to a minimum, only stepping in when user information needs to be backed up.

**Tip:** It should take a single click to ensure your document is sealed and legally compliant.



**Total Cost of Ownership** - Not everyone considers TCO when purchasing a digital signature solution. But to ensure you don't get caught out in the long run you need to take the following into account: initial cost, deployment, help desk, digital certificates (which may be a recurring annual cost) and development of support for the application you're going to sign with.

**Tip:** Project your TCO three years into the future to reveal any hidden costs, such as renewal of annual certificates.

Digital Signatures Made Simple