



Managing What Matters: Smarter Strategies for Government Documents

Ensuring Efficiency, Accessibility, and Security
For Mission-Critical Documents in The Digital Age



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Document Modernisation as a Catalyst for Public Sector Transformation

Australian governments are undergoing a significant modernisation of how public services are designed, delivered, and accessed. For government leaders, this shift is not optional—it is foundational to delivering better outcomes. Central to this shift is the move towards more dynamic, accessible, and interactive digital experiences for employees and citizens alike.

Despite HTML-native formats emerging as the preferred policy standard—driven by their adaptability, mobile responsiveness, and alignment with accessibility requirements—Portable Document Format (PDF) files are still the second most widely used document format globally and a core mechanism of government processes.

While many routine forms and documents have been retired or converted to HTML, the PDFs that remain are among the most critical to government operations, internal and citizen-facing. Recent research indicates that although agencies are seeking to reduce the volume of PDFs in circulation, as many as 73% across ANZ governments still manage between 1 and 200 mission-critical PDF forms. These documents often support core regulatory, financial, or legal functions—areas where continuity, security, and compliance are paramount.

Approximately how many PDF forms (digital/print) does your agency...	%ANZ
More than 1,000 forms	8%
501 - 1,000 forms	7%
201 - 500 forms	11%
51 - 200 forms	36%
1 - 50 forms	37%

(Public Sector Network's Imperatives of Accessibility Done Well Survey, 2024, 97 Respondents)

In this context, government is under growing pressure to not only deliver accessible digital services, but to do so **more efficiently, with fewer resources**. Unfortunately, many of the tools historically used to manage PDFs are no longer fit for purpose. Legacy PDF software is often complex and inflexible, difficult to scale, and costly to maintain. It lacks the analytics, automation, and integration features now expected in a modern Information and Communications Technology (ICT) environment.

These limitations are not simply operational annoyances—they are **barriers to innovation**. These challenges increase operational costs, slow innovation, and degrade employee experience. As transformation accelerates across the public sector, legacy document solutions are becoming increasingly incompatible with whole-of-government goals for agility, accountability, and value for money.

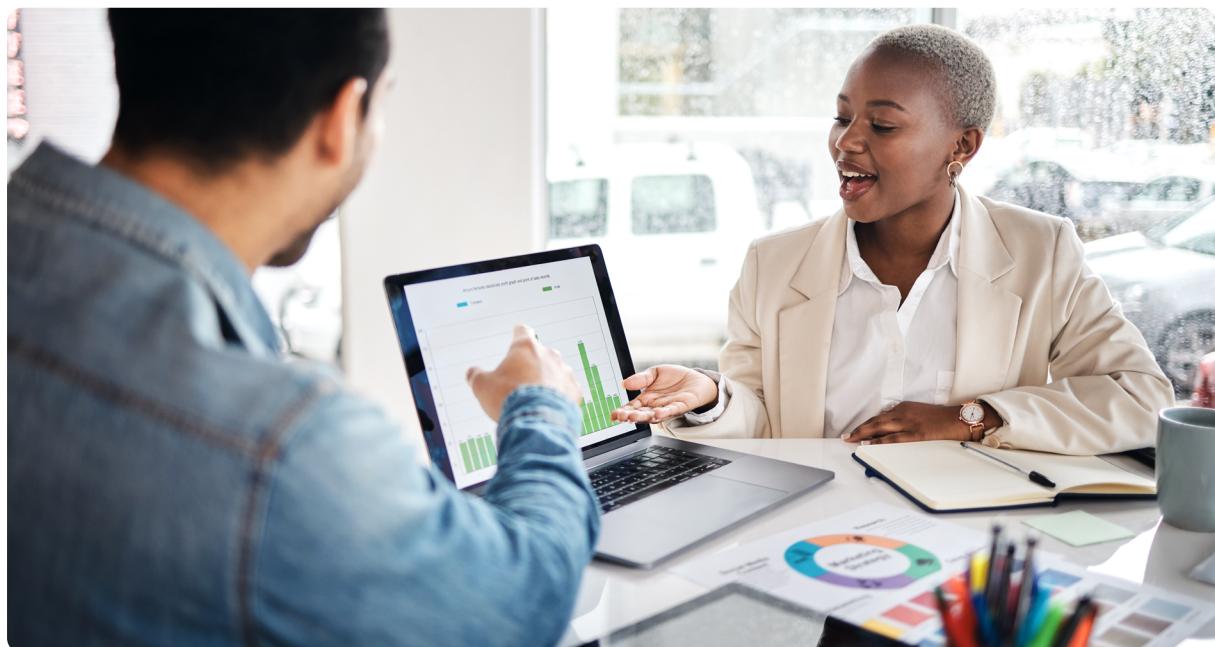
“Legacy solutions are really very costly. Only one in 10 employees might have access to PDF editing software.”

Chris Ward

Enterprise Account Executive – APAC, Nitro

As a result, the focus of public sector leaders is shifting from format migration alone to **format optimisation**—ensuring that the most important documents are handled with maximum efficiency, security, and user experience. This includes adopting leaner, more strategic document solutions that are easier to use, cheaper to maintain, and better integrated with agency workflows. In an environment where most departments are being asked to do more with less, improving the **cost-to-value ratio** of PDF management has become a critical priority.

This whitepaper explores the changing role of PDFs in Australian government, the risks and costs of relying on outdated tools, and the imperative to adopt **smarter, more cost-effective approaches** to managing essential documents and forms. It outlines key trends, barriers, and opportunities facing agencies today—and provides practical guidance on how to deliver better outcomes without adding unnecessary complexity or expense.



A Digital Shift with Legacy Stakes

While Australian governments are progressing in their shift to digital-by-default service delivery, they continue to rely on PDFs for a range of mission-critical activities. Despite the perception of government coming under fire for frustrating citizens through clunky or inaccessible processes, the persistence of PDFs is not accidental—it reflects a targeted decision to retain a proven format where security, auditability, and archival stability are non-negotiable. These include legal transactions, regulatory compliance, secure communications, and long-term archiving.

However, the problem is not the format itself—it is how it is managed.

Legacy PDF tools, once considered standard, are now a barrier to efficiency, innovation, and cost control. These platforms are frequently overly complex for routine workflows, prohibitively expensive to scale, and cumbersome to deploy across diverse agency environments. Their complexity drives up IT support requirements, while restrictive licensing models mean only a fraction of staff—sometimes as few as one in ten—have access to core PDF capabilities. This results in poor formatting, avoidable bottlenecks, duplication of effort, and fragmented workflows.

“PDFs are a cornerstone of our document management—secure, viable, and still widely used.”

Chris Ward

Enterprise Account Executive
- APAC, Nitro

“It’s a cost-versus-capability scenario. Everyone uses PDFs, but only a small portion of staff have the tools to manage them.”

Chris Ward

Enterprise Account Executive – APAC, Nitro

For example, 58% of Australian government agencies still spend significant time manually managing PDFs, and 50% report that staff manually enter data from PDF forms—wasting time, increasing risk of error, and delaying outcomes.

This inefficiency extends beyond labour. Traditional PDF solutions often lack analytics or integration with workflow systems, making it difficult for agencies to measure usage, benchmark performance, or identify opportunities for improvement. Without visibility, leaders cannot make informed decisions on cost-effectiveness, capability gaps, or user demand. Moreover, these tools frequently fall short on modern accessibility and compliance standards (namely WCAG Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

Governments are now operating in an environment where:

- The number of PDFs has decreased, but the importance of those remaining has increased;
- The tools used to manage them are outdated, expensive, and poorly integrated;
- Manual handling is common, despite readily available automation options;
- Agencies are under increasing pressure to demonstrate ROI while delivering more with fewer resources.

The cost of inaction is mounting. Legacy PDF tools represent a growing opportunity cost in terms of both budget and productivity. They are not just outdated—they are increasingly incompatible with the strategic goals of digital transformation and public value delivery.

Agencies urgently need lean, accessible, analytics-enabled document management solutions that deliver measurable savings and operational benefits—without the burden of excessive licensing or complexity.

How much time do you or your team spend managing PDF forms each week?	%ANZ
More than 10 hours	5%
5 - 10 hours	21%
1 - 5 hours	32%
Less than 1 hour	41%

(Public Sector Network's Imperatives of Accessibility Done Well Survey, 2024, 94 Respondents)



Digital Maturity Model for Document Management

To manage mission-critical PDFs efficiently, government agencies must shift from simply maintaining legacy document workflows to adopting smarter, leaner systems. Document management should no longer be treated as a peripheral task—it is a strategic enabler of compliance, service delivery, and cost control. Clearer strategies are essential to align document practices with agency-wide transformation goals.

This section outlines 12 practical strategies across three themes to help agencies reduce inefficiencies, cut costs, and future-proof their document infrastructure.

Part 1: From bottlenecks to enablement: Empowering staff with equitable access to tools and workflows

1. Apply a risk- and value-based approach

Agencies must identify and focus on the PDFs that carry legal, regulatory, or archival weight. By auditing existing assets and classifying documents based on risk, usage, and compliance value, agencies can direct resources where they matter most—ensuring resources are allocated proportionately based on value and risk.

2. Address accessibility and compliance gaps proactively

While accessibility remains essential, inefficient remediation can increase workload and risk. Agencies should standardise accessible templates, embed WCAG 2.1 compliance in PDF creation workflows, and consider shared services for accessibility support. Fixing accessibility issues at the source reduces downstream compliance costs and administrative burden and promotes long-term sustainability in accessibility practices.

3. Empower staff through broad access and usability

The high cost of traditional PDF software often limits access to a small user base. This creates workflow delays and unnecessary task handoffs. A rightsized licensing approach—coupled with lightweight, intuitive editing tools—enables more staff to handle core tasks directly. Broader access translates to faster processing, reduced workflow friction and lower reliance on centralised teams.

Looking to extend secure PDF editing to your whole workforce—without blowing the budget?
See how Nitro PDF Pro simplifies deployment 

4. Streamline workflows through integration and interoperability

Disconnected systems introduce hidden costs. Agencies should prioritise document solutions that integrate with existing platforms—such as records management, case management, and CRM systems. Open APIs and metadata standards help avoid vendor lock-in and future-proof operations.

Integrated workflows cut manual data entry, reduce error rates, and speed up service delivery. Want to eliminate disconnected workflows and reduce rework? [Discover PDF integrations with SharePoint, OneDrive and more](#) 

Part 2: Automation: Reducing friction and error through smarter processes, E-Signatures, and Analytics

5. Introduce automation to reduce administrative overhead

Manual processing remains widespread, despite the availability of proven automation tools. Agencies can streamline operations by automating document assembly, data extraction, routing, and validation. This reduces handling time and human error in compliance-sensitive workflows while freeing up staff for more strategic work.

6. Expand eSignature adoption for secure, end-to-end digital workflows

Evidence suggests as little as 15% of government employees use e-signatures—despite their ability to eliminate physical handling, accelerate approvals, and ensure compliance. Scaling secure e-signature use across the organisation simplifies workflows and improves audit trails, reducing turnaround time and eliminating print-scan-sign loops.

Need to digitise approvals without compromising security or compliance? [Learn how Nitro Sign supports whole-of-government e-signatures](#) 

7. Use analytics to drive continuous improvement

Legacy platforms typically offer no visibility into how documents are used. Agencies need tools that provide usage analytics, accessibility metrics, and cost-saving indicators like print reduction. Data supports smarter investment decisions and enables teams to monitor adoption, track ROI, and identify where efficiencies can be scaled.

8. Establish clear governance over document lifecycle management

Without structured oversight, document handling becomes reactive and inconsistent. Agencies should formalise policies for document ownership, versioning, retention, accessibility, and deprecation. A defined governance framework reduces duplication, ensures accountability, and lowers compliance risk.

Part 3: Integration & Governance: Aligning document lifecycle management with whole-of-government ICT, records, and accessibility mandates

9. Optimise cost-to-value through rightsized licensing and lean infrastructure

Licensing costs often consume a disproportionate share of document budgets. Agencies should evaluate usage data, identify underutilised tools, and consolidate where appropriate. Transitioning to more agile, scalable models has helped some agencies reduce costs by up to 50%.

Traditional enterprise licensing models often result in underused licenses. Nitro's flexible licensing supports broad access without overspend.

Ready to cut your PDF costs by up to 50%? ↗

10. Enable equitable access to document capabilities across the workforce

Enabling broader access to basic PDF editing and signing capabilities reduces bottlenecks and improves employee experience. Staff should be able to complete routine document actions without relying on a small number of licensed users.

11. Leverage shared services and collaborative models

Smaller or resource-constrained agencies can benefit from shared hubs or frameworks for document accessibility, automation, and procurement. Collaboration across jurisdictions supports consistency, improves capability, and reduces implementation effort.

12. Embed PDF management within broader digital and records strategies

PDF management should align with broader ICT governance, digital strategy, and records management plans. This ensures consistency in metadata, retention rules, and accessibility—and avoids building a parallel, unsynchronised workflow system.

By applying these 12 strategies, agencies can reduce complexity, improve cost-efficiency, and ensure the remaining PDFs—those that truly matter—are managed with purpose, security, and speed.



Real-World Results: Smarter PDF Management in Action

Australian government agencies achieving more with less

Across the public sector, forward-thinking agencies are already modernising their approach to PDF management—achieving measurable results in cost savings, staff productivity, and service agility. These results reflect the growing emphasis on leaner document solutions that enhance efficiency without increasing administrative burden. The following examples illustrate how replacing legacy solutions with leaner, more scalable alternatives can deliver real-world impact.

Shoalhaven City Council

364% Productivity Increase and Seamless Scaling

Facing a need to extend productivity tools to more than 1,300 employees, Shoalhaven City Council sought to move beyond the administrative complexity and high licensing costs of its previous vendor. By switching to Nitro PDF, the Council increased digital equity—empowering more staff to participate in digital processes such as editing, conversion, and signing—without increasing management overhead.

“Before switching to Nitro, we were struggling to maintain and manage licenses for all our staff. Now, we don’t have to worry about allocating licenses at all.”

Dan Jones

IT Infrastructure and Delivery Manager, Shoalhaven City Council

Key Results



364% increase in licensed users enabled organisation-wide access to critical productivity tools



100% license utilisation achieved in the first quarter



Reduced IT overhead - simplified admin, faster onboarding, and less shadow IT



Measurable public value - savings reinvested into service delivery and sustainability

City of Vincent

500% Expansion in User Access and 100% Adoption

The City of Vincent previously provided PDF editing capabilities to only 10-20% of its workforce due to high costs and licensing limitations. With Nitro's flexible model and streamlined implementation support, the Council rapidly transitioned to a platform that now serves the entire workforce.

"I was blown away by the acceptance we got from staff. I would have expected some pushback but there was none that I can recall."

Peter Ferguson

Executive Manager ICT, City of Vincent

Key Results



500% increase in PDF tool access, expanding usage across all council functions



100% license adoption, including planning, records, HR, finance, and IT



10,000+ sheets of paper saved through electronic signing and digitised workflows



Delivered with tailored change management support and minimal disruption

These case studies demonstrate the measurable outcomes that can be achieved when agencies replace overengineered legacy platforms with strategic, user-friendly solutions.

From Cost Burden to Strategic Asset: Redefining PDF Management in Government

Australian governments are making meaningful progress in modernising public service delivery. Many agencies have transitioned non-essential content to accessible, HTML-native formats. Yet despite this digital momentum, a substantial number of mission-critical PDFs remain in active use—supporting compliance, legal, financial, and archival functions across all levels of government. These documents continue to play a foundational role in workflows that require security, auditability, and longevity.

Modernised document infrastructure is no longer a ‘nice-to-have’—it is foundational to every agency’s mission to deliver efficient, equitable, and secure public services in a digital age.

Outdated PDF solutions—often burdened by rigid licensing, limited access, and poor integration—hinder operational performance. Their rigidity introduces bottlenecks, fragments digital workflows, and inflates the cost of service delivery—at a time when agencies are under pressure to deliver more with less.

This whitepaper has outlined 12 actionable strategies for agencies to improve how they manage what matters most. From automation and analytics to equitable licensing models and lifecycle governance, these strategies reflect a shift in mindset: from managing documents reactively, to leveraging them as strategic assets.

The case for change is clear:



Unlock cost savings of up to 50% by replacing outdated, overengineered software



Reduce manual processing and eliminate inefficiencies with automation and e-signatures



Empower staff with the tools they need—without overspending on unused capacity



Align document management with broader ICT, records, and digital transformation strategies

When agencies rethink their approach to managing high-value documents, they can simplify workflows, reduce risk, and create measurable return on investment. More importantly, they can future-proof their information environment in support of better service delivery and stronger public value.

Digital document strategy is no longer about marginal gains—it’s about building resilience, transparency, and performance into government operations. The goal isn’t just to manage documents more cheaply—it’s to manage them more intelligently, sustainably, and strategically.

Start Managing What Matters—Smarter, Simpler, and at Scale

The path to better PDF management doesn't require more complexity—it requires a smarter, cost-effective approach designed for the real challenges of government.

Whether you're ready to reduce licensing costs, eliminate manual inefficiencies, or empower more of your workforce, we invite you to explore how Nitro can support your transformation goals.

Ready to see measurable impact? **Schedule a live demo**  to discover how smart PDF tools can streamline workflows and cut costs at scale.





About Nitro

At Nitro, we're revolutionising digital productivity for individuals and organisations worldwide. Our PDF editing and eSign solutions streamline and secure document workflows, enabling seamless collaboration from anywhere, across devices.

With high-trust eSigning, we help businesses achieve efficient, fully digital operations that enhance outcomes. Our customers are empowered with secure sharing, optimised workflows, and insightful analytics, all backed by a dedicated customer success team.

Our focus on innovation makes digital transformation accessible for organisations of all sizes. And our commitment to nurturing our people, customers, and partners is key to driving meaningful change in our communities.

Learn more at [Gonitro.com](https://www.gonitro.com)

Contact us at www.gonitro.com/contact-sales



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