

# Is the TDOC in?

Contractors are leaving themselves liable to expensive and ultimately futile litigation if they don't understand the principals of document management - says David Chadwick

**Y**ou know, document management appears on the surface to be a somewhat mundane task, and you have to work hard to dig out what separates one particular piece of software from the common herd. Not so with TDOC, which we last looked at a number of years ago.

TDOC manifests itself on the screen as a clear and concise process with none of the bells, whistles and razzmatazz you would get from some grander packages. Yet it delivers everything it needs to in order to handle the normal to and fro of drawings and documents. But there's more - the company is often called in to rescue large companies who suddenly find that they are failing to deliver the goods - in both senses of the phrase.

Actually, it all boils down to some basic glaring omissions. One of these is so fundamental that I was quite taken aback when Richard Townsend-Rose, the originator of TDOC, told me about it - the fact that portal based systems, the basis of most document management systems, don't send any form of receipt of transmittal. They will record the fact that the document has been downloaded - and that is all! It may only have been attempted, it doesn't record whether it was saved locally, or whether the document downloaded was corrupt, or not.

Is this important? You bet it is! The document that a sub-contractor is hoping to receive is a work instruction - whether it is a drawing, spreadsheet, or any other type of document. If the work is not carried out to the contractor's satisfaction, or if the sub-contractor has grounds for complaint, the only way that the sub-contractor can pursue his interests in court is if he is able to provide proof of his compliance with his part of the contract. If the contractor says that the sub-contractor received the document, and there is no evidence to

contradict him, then the sub-contractor is stuffed!

As Richard so eloquently put it - "When you go to court, the bloke with the best records wins!" The only secure way to transmit documents is to do so formally - under contract. More sage words; "If it is not under the contract when it gets to you, stick it in the bin!"

TDOC documents are formally transmitted, and have to be formally responded to. Of course, you can receive the documents and totally ignore the receipt of transmittal form, but in doing so, you are throwing away some of your own company's arguments if the project should come to blows. Your response records the fact that you have received, and reviewed, the document at a given point in time. And of course it all happens over the web. The sub-contractor can make his acknowledgement electronically as well - with a copy to himself. Better, of course, if he has TDOC as well.

Need further proof? Ask any solicitor who has to sort out contract litigation and they will tell you that Portals are 'money for old rope'. The number of claims is increasing. Financial directors don't understand the implication of portals and contracts and think they know best, and smaller companies under the Design and Build contracting system are getting screwed left, right and centre.

## DON'T TRUST REVISION LEVELS

Creating records isn't difficult. Keeping an up-to-date record of them requires a bit more than a hit or miss approach though. TDOC has ensured that the correct revision level of a document is always available. That is the claim of every document management company - so what does TDOC do differently?

Some companies store all documents centrally, irrespective of revision levels. The

danger here is that someone in a hurry could misread the precise classification of a drawing and import an earlier version - with disastrous results. TDOC ensures that only the current level is available, and that earlier versions are archived. It quarantines the most recent annotated revision until it has been approved.

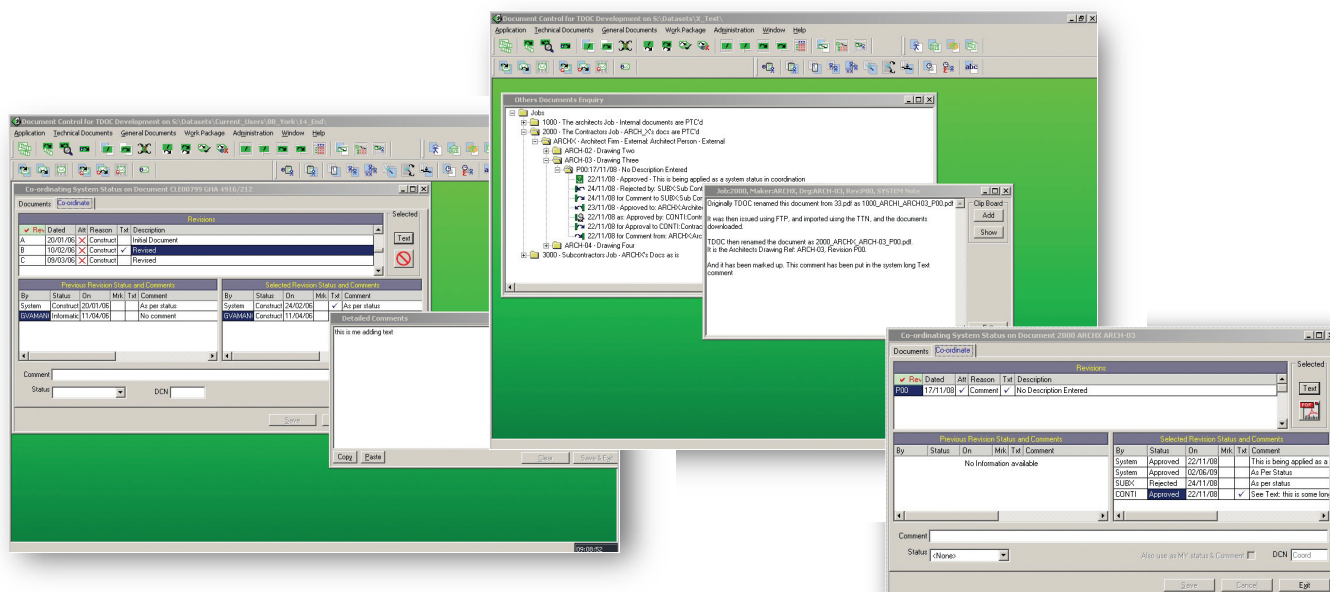
It may even save space on your desktop. Richard told me that he came across one company with close to 10,000 drawings saved on their system - many of them duplicates - due to slack management. Documents managed by TDOC are immediately available locally - but never on the desktop.

Slack management? That brings up another problem. With TDOC you can't self-instruct - i.e. sub-contractors deciding what drawings they are going to work on, irrespective of their instructions. With a choice of which drawings to download, they tend to make their own mind up if they think that they have been given duff information, leading to the same scenario as above. Whoops!

## TDOC COMPONENTS

TDOC has three main components. The System Utilities are used for both installing and configuring the system as well as for routine database maintenance. Configuration includes how the inbuilt EDM functionality operates. This automates many of the problems of receiving documents with an unstructured naming convention - why should other people do this when you can get TDOC to do it for you? Additionally a Document Utilities [or "fixit"] module allows "unusual" changes to be made to the database.

The second and main component is the Clerical Registration module, designed for use by Document Controllers, recording everything you need to know about documents and the people entitled to send or receive them. It comprises editable sub-groups - names, jobs, subjects and groups - so that documents received and transmitted can be allocated to proper persons, projects, activities and so on. The third part is the User Actions Reports and Enquiries, which allows project management and engineering team members to initiate and respond to actions.



Users can configure their own TDOC - the screen colour can be set to a team's colours, and warning and advisory colours set up. There are four toolbars - one for administrative items and one each for technical documents, general documents, and other stuff, allowing access direct to editing, enquiry, and reporting functions.

There is also an optional dashboard providing an onscreen window with instant access to undealt with traffic, and, for new users, a Quick Start function showing document system functions, and the interactions between each of the tools.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

It's an automated manual system, which means that wherever and whenever possible things are automated and validated. For example emails are received in the normal manner, and saved in a previously set "download" path. As explained above, the accompanying [electronic] "receipt of transmittal" form is sent back as proof that the recipient has received, opened and saved the document.

Entering TDOC Clerical Registration, the Dashboard indicates files that have been received, and that are awaiting formal import into the system. Clicking on each brings up supplementary screens that allow the document to be matched to the correct sender, recipient, job number, subject and group, along with other document information. The Dashboard allows instant access to record receipts and transmissions of both technical and general documents - all of which are open to

detailed inspection.

Besides providing a system for transmitting your own documents using the same full accountability, there is a section that deals with expediting both documents that you have issued and required to be returned but are still outstanding and, finally, a list of documents that other people are expecting back from you.

The same goes for correspondence, RFI's or technical queries, and even telephone calls. There is a different dashboard for members of the team using the User Actions module, showing a list of technical documents awaiting coordination (and if you don't know what that is don't ask: it's the making of the corporate decision on acceptability of a revision). It can get quite complex - and often a large screen is required to read the text.

## CONCLUSION

You can't get away from manual intervention. Not only does TDOC force you to look at and understand incoming documents before you can deal with them, it formalises the document receipt and transmittal system. It takes a little bit of time [and some managerial thought] to set up but once you have it up and running, with projects and jobs assigned properly, the process of allocation is quick and easy, as it forces you to obey the basics of iso9001.

When the job goes belly up - which, after all, is what you are really concerned about - you have all the information you need at the tips of your fingers to support your case. Cynical? Moi?

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