Restore
Digital

The Complete Guide to Digital Mailroom

What is a digital mailroom?

**Do you remember the mail department in your organisation?
You would see them daily, walking around with a cart, delivering mail to the relevant department - but that was only part of their role.**

Earlier in the day, they would be in their office frantically sorting mail to ensure that you got the right post. This worked relatively well historically, and it still does in certain businesses. But it doesn't provide a solution to a growing number of modern business practices; working from home, navigating multiple business locations, the push to go paperless etc.

A digital mailroom provides a more adaptable solution, better suited for modern businesses.

A digital mailroom digitises all the inbound mail for your business before routing it to the correct department, team or individual. With digitised post, you're no longer limited to the office in order to receive vital documentation.
You also greatly reduce the chance of human error associated with physically routing documents and storing data in a singular, secure environment.
It's a scalable tool that enhances your business processes and helps you deliver a more refined customer experience.
Using AI and machine learning, a digital mailroom ensures that all documentation is categorised swiftly and accurately, allowing mail to be routed to the right people more effectively.

There are many composite parts which come together to create a digital mailroom, which if you'd like, you can go into more detail here.
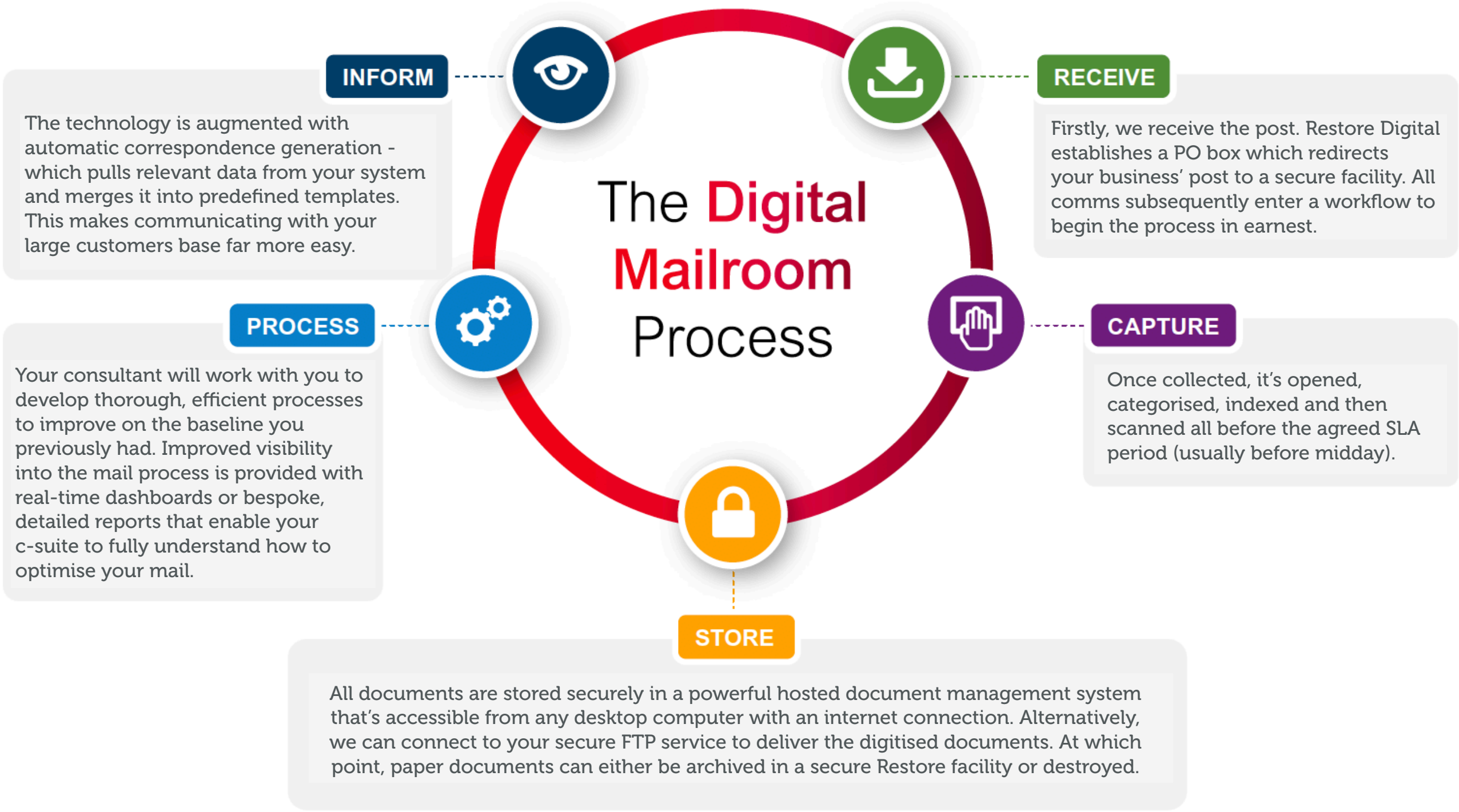
How does it work?

A digital mailroom operates to strict service level agreements (SLAs) which means post is available in electronic form to staff at the start of the working day. Often used by consumer facing organisations such as retail banks and insurance companies, digital mailrooms scan, code and route incoming mail and place it into work streams to be dealt with by relevant teams.

Digital mailrooms enable organisations to meet their own SLAs with customers and remain compliant with strict GDPR regulations. For example, a company may promise to respond to a customer complaint or a product/service application within a certain time period. Digital mailrooms make this happen.

An Restore Digital Mailroom operates with a simple methodology:

The Digital Mailroom Process

INFORM

The technology is augmented with automatic correspondence generation - which pulls relevant data from your system and merges it into predefined templates. This makes communicating with your large customers base far more easy.

RECEIVE

Firstly, we receive the post. Restore Digital establishes a PO box which redirects your business' post to a secure facility. All comms subsequently enter a workflow to begin the process in earnest.

PROCESS

Your consultant will work with you to develop thorough, efficient processes to improve on the baseline you previously had. Improved visibility into the mail process is provided with real-time dashboards or bespoke, detailed reports that enable your c-suite to fully understand how to optimise your mail.

CAPTURE

Once collected, it's opened, categorised, indexed and then scanned all before the agreed SLA period (usually before midday).

STORE

All documents are stored securely in a powerful hosted document management system that's accessible from any desktop computer with an internet connection. Alternatively, we can connect to your secure FTP service to deliver the digitised documents. At which point, paper documents can either be archived in a secure Restore facility or destroyed.

Who benefits from a digital mailroom?

A digital mailroom will benefit businesses (traditionally B2C) which receive substantial quantities of inbound correspondence - particularly organisations looking to work smarter. Think of a digital mailroom as providing you with opportunities to automate previously manual processes and, ultimately, the first step towards a full digital transformation.

At Restore Digital, we believe that a digital mailroom can support any business regardless of vertical. We specialise in supporting the heads of change, facilities, risk and transformation - enabling them to do their jobs more effectively. We have had major successes across public sector organisations, financial services and commercial real estate.

Your digital mailroom also benefits your customers, your employees and your bottom line. Before progressing with a project, you should…

Consider your digital mailroom goals:

Before embarking on any major digital transformation projects, it's worth truly understanding what your goals are.

A digital mailroom provides many benefits, but do they align with your business goals?

Improve efficiency

Implementing a digital mailroom can provide substantial efficiency gains across your business, particularly in relation to workflows and communication processes.

Digital mail can be incorporated into other internal processes in a way that physical documents never will. This is because they can be coded and have their data captured as they are scanned, triggering further processes such as sending an outbound reply letter.

Outsourced digital mailroom can be further extended into an organisation using application programming interfaces (APIs), so that digital documents can flow into relevant systems such as finance and HR.

Instead of incoming communications from partners, customers and suppliers arriving in one single 'bucket', it can be automatically streamed to the right team.

Another benefit is that incoming mail can be combined with other communication channels, such as email or phone calls to ensure everything is placed into the relevant workstream. This enables customer-facing teams to access all the relevant information they need to action processes or resolve queries.

Digital mailrooms can help improve productivity, customer service, regulatory compliance and operational resilience. And as the power of artificial intelligence and robotic process automation continues to grow, digital mailrooms will move far beyond being mere replacements for the physical post rooms of the past. Instead, they will act as the information hub of every organisation, speeding up and improving every process that relies on document sharing.

Work from Home/ Remote work

For several years now, the trend towards remote work and working from home has been growing. This has been exacerbated even more so by the events of 2020. This poses real problems for traditional mailroom services. In some organisations, you could argue that there's a one to one ratio of offices to employees. Clearly this is not feasible for your traditional infrastructure but equally, even with reductions in physical mail, post has a part to play in modern business.

An increasingly remote workforce is not a problem for a digital mailroom. With your mail digitised and hosted on a server, the only limiting factor now is accessing the internet with a mobile device.

Just like in every other business, 2020 was a learning experience for everyone here at Restore Digital. Knowing that we were well-suited to support many of the issues raised by the year, we went to work collating the lessons we've learnt about supporting remote workers here.

Improve customer satisfaction

An often overlooked benefit of fixing your workflows and streamlining your mail, is the rapid improvement of your response times.

Customer satisfaction is intrinsically linked to better communication, to faster response times, to implementing a digital mailroom.

Take the specific example of claims management in the insurance sector. Digitised documents are indexed and categorised with AI and machine learning, meaning that you can search for documents with ease by whatever classifications you decide. Coupled with advanced, automated workflows implemented into your physical comms, you can greatly improve the speed with which you retrieve claims and get answers back to claimants.

Any mail entering the system will trigger work allocation automation, distributing data based on suitability, availability and cost - ensuring that your employees can work to their full potential.

Compliance

There's a worry when outsourcing operations. Maintaining compliance to certain regulations (notably GDPR) is seen as more difficult, in part because you no longer have total control over the process.

Compliance shouldn't be a concern when embarking on a digital transformation project - it's a positive. Your digital mailroom vendor lives and breathes the industry and its nuances, they're best placed to help you deal with it.

With expert consultants available throughout the process, a digital mailroom can ensure you adhere to your GDPR policy. If you want to amend or refine it, experts can support you here.

An effective digital mailroom is designed with risk-mitigation as its core tenet.

Cost savings/ cost effectiveness

One of the biggest drivers for outsourcing a mailroom function is to reduce costs. Actual cost savings vary by implementation, but as a general rule of thumb organisations can save between 20% and 30% of their investment in a physical post room by outsourcing their mailroom to a third party operator.

But operational cost savings are just the start In our experience, organisations can also improve the productivity and efficiency of relevant processes by as much as 60% by outsourcing their digital mailrooms.

In turn, this helps to improve access to information that was previously hidden away in filing cabinets and desks. Documents can be accessed and shared, worked on collaboratively and made available even when buildings are closed down to employees.

Improving security

We don't particularly like to hear it but human error is the main cause of errors and lapses in security. Misplacing physical files and losing track of them are the main reasons for security breaches in document management.

Moving to a digital infrastructure greatly reduces risk by simply removing human hands from many of the processes.

Digital mailrooms should be **ISO27001 accredited**, employ highly vetted sites and be in secure locations with advanced fire & theft prevention technologies. They have security built into their DNA because the stakes are so high and the clientele often highly risk averse. Once again, it comes down to experience, digital mailroom vendors have prioritise security.

Reduce paper

The benefits of digitising documents and communications are now well-understood: speed, accuracy and better productivity can all be achieved by reducing the amount of physical paper changing hands in organisations.

It may be that an organisation's decision to reduce paper is triggered by a specific event, such as an office move or refurbishment, a merger or acquisition, a change in legislation or an external event such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

But before simply ditching your filing cabinets and emptying out your staff's desk drawers, it pays to think about what paper-based processes the organisation still has, why it has them and which teams make use of them.

Does the paper create an action that is linked to it, and can that be replaced with a digital process that is more efficient? By carrying out a detailed audit, organisations can work exactly which paper documents they can get rid of, where it's safe to digitise and how much space they can reclaim.

Your audit will undoubtedly show that one of the best ways to reduce paper is to eliminate it at source, when it enters your organisation in the mailroom. Digitising paper on entry to an organisation means staff do not have to handle incoming paperwork at all.

A digital document can be coded and searched automatically, accessed by authorised members of the team, easily shared with customers and partners, or routed and processed using automation techniques.

By contrast a paper document needs to be taken out of a folder, physically read by a human and manually taken on to the next stage of a process. When information needs to be re-entered into a system errors can creep in, destroying the concept of having one golden version of the truth.

Once it is digitised, it can be used as a single source of data, no matter who is accessing it and for what purpose. Digital documents are also more conducive to collaborative working than paper, especially when people are working remotely or in different locations to other team members.

How quickly do you need to go live?

Emergency mailroom vs digital mailroom

To cope with the overwhelming change in working arrangements in 2020, Restore Digital developed a straight-out-of-the-box digital mailroom solution: The Emergency Mailroom

An emergency mailroom is designed to come online in a rapid timeframe and with minimal disruption to the business.

An emergency mailroom is a standardised offering - developed from years of experience of running some of the largest digital mailrooms in the country to help businesses handle the unforeseen. We know what works and what doesn't. We've templated a solution which we can guarantee to get live within 7 days.

Restore Digital can rapidly:

- Establish a PO Box for your business where your inbound mail will be redirected to our established facility.
- Collect your mail, scan it and index it into a format you want
- Upload your newly digitised documents to EDMonline™

With Restore Digital's Emergency Mailroom your documents will be securely and digitally available to view immediately

from our hosted document management platform EDMonline™, the same day your post is received. We understand that every organisation has its nuances which is why the emergency mailroom is only a short-term fix. Behind the scenes, our consultants work to develop a digital mailroom better suited to your long-term needs.

Inhouse or Outsourced Digital Mailroom?

When you begin your research around digital mailroom, beginning to understand all the moving parts, you'll find yourself asking **"can this be done in-house?"**

Naturally, it seems tempting. You have a mailroom already, what would it really take to convert to a digital one? There are benefits to doing it yourself, but many hurdles.

The factors that are relevant when deciding to convert to a digital mailroom relate mainly to volume and complexity. Set-up costs, whether for an inhouse or outsourced service, are prohibitive for organisations with mail items in the low hundreds per week. The organisations that benefit the most are those handling thousands of items every day.

Organisations also tend not to have the expertise needed to run digital mailrooms in-house, in contrast to third parties that constantly invest in skills and technology to stay ahead of the game.

The reasons for outsourcing digital mailrooms are many and varied. Some companies with expensive city offices may not want to use them for a physical or digital post room, for example, or want to reduce the number of mail rooms they operate down to a single hub. Others have a culture of keeping all systems in-house rather than outsourcing to third parties.

The main factors when deciding to outsource are cost and added value. Even the most basic outsourced digital service will cost less than maintaining a physical mailroom over time, but the fact that it delivers resilience for the future and potential for additional services offered by specialists in the sector makes outsourcing the smartest choice.

Everything you should ask your digital mailroom vendor

Before speaking to a vendor about implementing a digital mailroom, it's worth fully evaluating your needs and position. Your vendor will have some available to support you, but it's good to consider the following:

What volume of post (daily/weekly/monthly) does your business receive?

This will help your vendor scope out a more tailored project and, in turn, provide a more accurate quote.

How many different formats of post do you regularly receive?

You don't control everything that is sent to you, but if you're in, say, the healthcare sector, you might regularly receive medical/patient records. Understanding what regular post you're likely to receive will help develop more accurate processes for your business more quickly.

How would you like to receive your digitised correspondence?

Do you have your own secure FTP system you want the vendor to integrate with? Do you have your own secure servers? Would you like to use a platform tailored for this, such as EDMonline™?

Is the vendor BS10008 accredited/compliant?

This relates to the legal admissibility of scanned documents in court. Something no one really wants to think about until it's too late. Find out whether your digitised documents can support you should the worst happen.

What happens to exceptions/sentimental/payments?

At Restore Digital, we call these 'cherished items'. We know that not everything you receive through the post can be digitised, so you need to have a system in place to make sure nothing slips through. It's vital that your vendor considers this so that you don't lose out on sentimental or valuable items.

'Cherished items' come in multiple forms. They can include passports and birth certificates that are posted to the company to verify ID and for anti-money laundering (AML) purposes. These are semi-regular forms of communications in certain industries and workflows have to be able to cope with them and safely return the contents to the relevant sender.

Do you regularly receive payments via postal cheques?

Can your vendor help you deal with them or even bank them for you? Restore Digital handles the regular banking of cheques for several clients.

About

Restore Digital is a leading independent provider of document scanning, content input, capture, and business process automation solutions. We're an innovative, digitally orientated division of Restore plc, and our reach is rapidly expanding.

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Our mission is to equip our customers with compliant document management solutions and contribute to a world shaped by digital transformation. Founded in 2000, our consultancy led approach to the implementation and delivery of integrated digital solutions has enabled thousands of customers to accelerate business processes, reduce costs and improve operational efficiencies.

Here at Restore Digital, we're passionate about what we do, and we take tremendous pride in striving to provide the best possible outcome for our customers. Visit our website at www.restore.co.uk/digital for more information about us, the services that we provide, and how we may be able to kickstart our digital transformation.

About the author

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Tim's expertise lies in devising the perfect blend of consultancy, technology and outsourcing that delivers the best value for his customers.

As well as founding and managing his own business, Tim's extensive industry experience, spanning a 15+ year period, includes working with some of the country's most high profile organisations and taking them on a journey of digital transformation with a major focus on de-risking, enhancing compliance and improving performance.