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NEWSWORTHY

Manual processes still dominate parcel landscape, study finds

Survey of 820 shippers shows only 8% have a fully automated data entry process.

By **Mark B. Solomon**

Despite the proliferation of automated tools to facilitate the flow of parcel shipping information, many shippers continue to use costly manual processes to accomplish basic tasks, according to [an annual survey](#) from international trade IT provider Kewill plc.

The survey of 820 respondents across a wide range of industries found that 70 percent of shippers are still using some form of manual data entry to complete transactions. About 21 percent still use a fully manual process for that task, while only 8 percent said they rely on a totally hands-free operation.

Of those who still enter data manually, 44 percent said they were forced to because the needed information resides in an automated system that is not accessible to the company's shipping department.

Kewill said the 2011 survey results, which were compiled in mid to late July, are similar to the 2010 findings. What's different about 2011, according to Kewill, is an improved economic environment that has led more companies to look at increasing headcount in their operations. About 31 percent of respondents are holding staff levels steady, while 29 percent are adding staff, the survey found. In 2010, nearly half of respondents were cutting staff levels, the report said.

As transactions and employee staffs increase, businesses will find their labor costs rising even though solutions are available to complete tasks such as data entry in an automated fashion, Kewill said.

"For all companies, simply increasing headcount may only serve to reinforce a manual method of doing business that is not optimized for efficiency, cost containment, or accuracy and quality," the company said. Citing survey data showing that nearly 40 percent of respondents spend one minute or more entering shipment data, Kewill said a company shipping 500 parcels per day would need to hire a full-time employee just to handle that daily task.

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Kewill urged those companies whose shipping departments don't have access to automated data to invest in tools that enable such access. "Comparing the cost of improved automation to the labor costs currently being incurred for data entry would indicate a quick [less than six month] return on investment, in pure cash terms," Kewill said.

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