The paperless office

This month, Emirates airlines are introducing the world's first 'paperless plane'. What are other companies doing in order to reduce the amount of paper they use? Has any company managed to achieve a 'paperless office'?

1 When you get a work-related e-mail, do you print out and file a hard copy? Compare your answer with a partner.

a) always / usually ☐   **b) sometimes - it depends** ☐   **c) rarely / never** ☐

2 Read the paragraph headings (a-d). Skim the article and match each heading to the correct paragraph (1-4).

a) Research results   b) No more paper!   c) Lightening the load   d) Problems

[1] As the first Emirates Airbus takes to the skies this month, one thing will be missing: paper. The Gulf airline has decided to make its A380 superjumbo a paperless plane. No in-flight magazines; no heavy shopping catalogues or glossy entertainment guides. Instead, this information will be shown on the screens on the back of seats. The airline calculates it will save 2kg per seat. At 500 seats, that's a considerable saving in the total weight of the flight. Why has the airline decided to go paperless? Soaring fuel prices for one thing; and according to the management, because of concern for the environment.

[2] Whatever happened to the much-hyped concept of the 'paperless office'? With the advent of new technologies like e-mail and the possibilities of storing data on computers, the death of paper in the workplace was widely predicted. Convert all documents to a digital format, the idea went. Use a scanner instead of a photocopier. Generate faxes on the computer. Send all clients electronic bills. You can even use an electronic signature. So, no more dealing with scraps of paper; no more rows of A4 files of invoices; no more clutter! By cutting out paper, companies can save money and space, as well as reducing the impact on the environment.

[3] However, there are many obstacles facing those in pursuit of the 'paperless office.' Not everyone wants to be billed electronically. Can all your clients read the digital documents? Moreover, many businesses are slow to change procedures. And there's something comforting about that 'hard copy' – you know: "in case the system crashes".

[4] Still, times are changing. A recent survey of accountancy firms revealed that more than half (58%) are now storing most of their clients' files electronically. What is vitally important if a company wishes to change is whether there is a system to back up files. Nowadays, rather than moving to a 'paperless office' the goal seems to be a 'paper-less' office. Paper, it seems, will continue to play an important part in the office of the future.

3 Read the whole article. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a paperless office?

4 Identify one word in each line which does not form a collocation with the word at end.

4.1	(a) to convert	(b) to store	(c) to save	(d) to bill	(e) to back up	(f) to generate	a file
4.2	(a) to delete	(b) to lose	(c) to access	(d) to copy	(e) to account	(f) to send	
4.3	(to) file	(a) a fax	(b) an invoice	(c) a copy	(d) a document	(e) a bill	(f) a system
4.4	(a) digital	(b) master	(c) concept	(d) electronic	(e) original	(f) hard	copy

5 In small groups, discuss the questions and report back to the class.

(a) What have you /your company done in the area of moving towards the 'paperless office'?
(b) What more could you and / or your company do in this area?
(c) Do you think there will always be the need for paper?
(d) Describe the office of the future in your own words.

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