



How Should I Store My Images?

Storage and migration of scanned images.

First, some places you should *not* store your scanned images:

You should not store your images on jump drives (also called thumb drives).

Unless you have no other options, you should not store your scanned images on external, removable hard drives.

External drives and thumb drives can easily corrupt, especially if they are accessed less than monthly. In addition, they are easily stolen or misplaced.

Second, some place you *could* store your scanned images:

- **Storage devices connected to your main IT network**

Devices, such as Network Access Storage (NAS) devices, can be connected to your primary IT network and can be actively monitored (for both security and corruption) and backed up more easily than external devices.

- **File Shares**

If your scans are well organized and have a naming convention, keeping scans on a file share is a simple way to store images. File shares are part of your formal IT network and share the protections of that network. Complicated searching will not be possible unless you maintain an external index that leads you to a specific document title.

- **Document Management System (DMS)**

These systems provide an organized structure for the scanned images and the index to those scans. A good DMS provides access control (password protection) and version control. Images may reside within the document management system itself, or the system may point to the images stored outside the DMS. See the section on 'Migrating Scanned Images,' below for a caution about DMS systems.

- **Cloud storage**

Cloud storage vendors provide a place to store your images without adding servers and storage drives to your own IT network. Cloud storage comes with unique risks, though (you must ensure that you are not transferring ownership of your records, for example, and the physical location of the servers can increase or decrease risk), so never sign a contract with a cloud vendor until you have reviewed it with your attorney.



Migrating Scanned Images

Storing scanned images is just one important step toward preserving them for use. If the images have a long retention they will probably need to be migrated to a new system during their life or updated to a new version of the format in which they are stored. The time to plan for migration is at the beginning of the scanning project—many years before the migration becomes necessary. For this reason, you want to make sure that:

- **the scans are saved in a non-proprietary format.** Scans may not migrate if the format is unknown to the new software. Some proprietary formats are so widely used they pose little problem, but the longer the retention of the records, the more likely that their format will become obsolete at some point. As of 2020, the most widely used non-proprietary format is PDF/A, the archival version of PDF.
- **the scans can be moved from one system to another.** Some systems—especially Document Management Systems—“wrap” scans in a proprietary shell, making it difficult or impossible to move the images to a new system, even if the format is very stable. Many systems, for example, create TIFF images (a widely-used and very stable format) but wrap each image in a proprietary wrapper that makes it expensive or impossible to remove the wrapping and move the images to a different system.
- **you account for the risks of migration.** Migration always poses risks: scans could be corrupted or be lost during the process; links from the images to their indexes could be lost. If you are purchasing a DMS or storing your records in the cloud, make certain you have a well-understood, well-documented exit strategy that has been tested on a sample of records before committing all of your records to the system.