

Research Note: Gaps in Existing E-Signature & Document Platforms and Proposed Solutions

Introduction

This research was conducted to understand the real limitations of existing e-signature and document management platforms (DocuSign, PandaDoc, Adobe Sign, Dropbox Sign, SignNow, Signeasy, and Jotform Sign).

The goal is not to criticize these companies, but to identify **structural weaknesses, pricing barriers, and missing capabilities** that affect individuals, small teams, SMBs, and growing sales organizations.

Based on this research, I intend to design and build **my own platform**, deliberately avoiding the recurring problems found across current market leaders.

Limited Document Editing Capabilities

Problem

Even after uploading documents, editing is minimal or impossible.

Users cannot easily replace pages, correct text, or adjust content without re-uploading files.

Intended Solution

Provide **full in-platform editing**, including:

- Page replacement and reordering
 - Inline text edits
 - Field repositioning after upload
- This reduces friction and prevents unnecessary rework.

Expensive and Fragmented Pricing Models

Problem

Essential features are locked behind expensive tiers or sold as add-ons:

- API access
 - Bulk sending
 - Advanced analytics
 - Templates
- Pricing is often unclear, unpredictable, and hostile to SMBs.

Intended Solution

Adopt **transparent, flat pricing**:

- One clear plan (or very few)
 - No hidden add-ons
 - All core features included
- This makes budgeting predictable and fair.

Template Restrictions

Problem

Most platforms strictly limit templates (often 5–15) unless users upgrade to high-cost plans.

This penalizes small teams that rely heavily on reusable documents.

Intended Solution

Offer **unlimited templates at all tiers**, allowing users to:

- Scale without artificial constraints
- Organize templates by teams, roles, or workflows

No Real-Time Collaboration During Drafting

Problem

Collaboration is weak or non-existent before signing.

Most platforms only support sequential review, not live collaboration.

Intended Solution

Implement **real-time collaboration**, similar to Google Docs:

- Multiple users editing simultaneously
 - Inline comments and suggestions
 - Role-based editing permissions
- This supports faster contract creation and internal alignment.

Weak or Restricted Bulk Sending

Problem

Bulk sending is often limited:

- Single signer only
- No multi-party workflows
- No attachments
- Locked behind expensive plans

Intended Solution

Enable **advanced bulk sending** as a standard feature:

- Multiple recipients per document
 - Custom signing order
 - Conditional roles
 - Attachments and dynamic fields
- This is especially important for sales and HR use cases.

Poor Email Deliverability

Problem

Users report documents landing in spam folders, especially on PandaDoc and SignNow. This directly impacts deal closure and trust.

Intended Solution

Improve email reliability by:

- Built-in domain verification
 - SPF, DKIM, and DMARC alignment
 - Smart retry and resend logic
 - Email reputation monitoring
- Email delivery will be treated as a **core system**, not just a notification feature.

Limited Analytics for Non-Enterprise Users

Problem

Detailed analytics are reserved for Enterprise plans:

- Time-to-sign
 - Drop-off points
 - Engagement metrics
- SMBs are left blind.

Intended Solution

Provide **advanced analytics for all users**, including:

- Signing timelines
 - Bottleneck detection
 - Document performance insights
- This empowers data-driven decisions regardless of company size.

No Conditional Logic or Dynamic Workflows

Problem

Most platforms lack conditional fields or branching logic, or charge heavily for it.

Intended Solution

Include **conditional logic as a standard feature**:

- Show/hide fields based on responses
 - Branch workflows dynamically
 - Adaptive signing experiences
- This supports complex real-world agreements without complexity.

Strict File Size, Page, and Signer Limits

Problem

Arbitrary limits exist:

- 25MB file caps
 - 500-page limits
 - 25 signers per transaction
- These restrictions break enterprise and legal use cases.

Intended Solution

Support **large files and high signer counts**:

- Optimized file handling
 - Chunked uploads
 - Scalable signing flows
- Limits will be technical, not artificial.

Missing Payment Collection and Contract Lifecycle Management

Problem

Most tools stop at signatures.

They do not handle payments, renewals, amendments, or lifecycle tracking.

Intended Solution

Build **end-to-end contract lifecycle management**, including:

- Payment collection
- Renewals and expiration tracking
- Amendments and reassignment
- Central contract repository

Weak Mobile Experience

Problem

Mobile apps are often limited, especially offline.

Users cannot fully manage documents from their phones.

Intended Solution

Develop **full-featured mobile apps**:

- Drafting, editing, signing
- Offline access
- Push notifications
- Secure biometric access

Hidden Per-Signature Charges

Problem

Some platforms introduce unexpected per-signature fees after a threshold, creating cost traps.

Intended Solution

Offer **true unlimited signatures** with no hidden switches or penalties.

Poor Document Version Control

Problem

Most platforms lack proper version history.

Users cannot easily track changes or revert safely.

Intended Solution

Implement **strong version control**, similar to Git:

- Full change history
 - Named versions
 - Easy rollback
- This ensures accountability and reduces risk.

Research Note (Part 2): Additional E-Signature Platforms — Limitations and Practical Lessons

Introduction

This second phase of research examines additional e-signature and document platforms that are often positioned as “simpler,” “cheaper,” or “more modern” alternatives.

The focus is on **what these tools still fail to do**, and what lessons can be extracted when deciding **what is realistic to implement** in my own platform — and what should intentionally be avoided.

This research reinforces a key insight:

Many platforms simplify by removing capability, not by improving design.

SignWell

Identified Problems

- Free plan is almost unusable (3 documents/month)
- No API access at all
- Limited branding and template customization
- Clunky field placement and alignment issues
- Per-sender pricing increases cost as teams grow
- No native mobile app
- Poor scalability for mid-size and large teams
- Cannot edit documents after sending
- Forced “Signed with SignWell” branding page

Practical Takeaway

SignWell optimizes for **low engineering complexity**, not user control.

Intended Direction

- Avoid **per-sender pricing traps**
- Allow **post-send corrections** (at least recipient email and metadata)
- Treat branding as a **user right**, not an upsell
- API access should be foundational, not optional

CocoSign

Identified Problems

- Missing advanced workflows and automation
- Very limited integration ecosystem
- Frequent technical bugs
- Weak customer support
- API exists but lacks depth
- Email branding locked behind business plan
- No real-time collaboration
- Analytics are shallow

Practical Takeaway

CocoSign shows that **having features on paper** is not enough — reliability and support matter.

Intended Direction

- Prioritize **stability over feature count**
- Build fewer integrations, but make them **reliable**
- Analytics should provide **decision value**, not vanity metrics

Lightico

Identified Problems

- Enterprise-only pricing
- Requires live phone call interaction

- Cannot be used asynchronously
- Niche use case (call centers, banking, insurance)
- No offline or self-service mode

Practical Takeaway

Lightico is a **workflow product**, not a general e-signature tool.

Intended Direction

- Do NOT build a call-dependent system
- Design for **asynchronous, self-service workflows**
- Avoid niche lock-in that limits platform flexibility

GetAccept

Identified Problems

- E-signature not available as standalone
- Entire sales platform required
- Expensive pricing
- Overly complex for simple needs
- Sales-only focus
- Dated interface
- Heavy dependency on “Deal Rooms”

Practical Takeaway

GetAccept bundles aggressively, but sacrifices **clarity and usability**.

Intended Direction

- Make e-signature **independently usable**
- Allow optional expansion (sales rooms, analytics, workflows)
- Avoid forcing users into a single workflow philosophy

Xodo Sign (Eversign)

Identified Problems

- Very limited free tier
- Template caps on all lower plans
- No real permission control in collaboration
- Risky for sensitive documents
- Weak identity verification
- No contract lifecycle management
- Poor mobile experience

Practical Takeaway

Collaboration without permissions is **dangerous**, not helpful.

Signaturely

Identified Problems

- Email-free signing has no tracking
- Weak template organization
- Limited bulk sending capabilities
- Shallow analytics
- No workflow automation

Practical Takeaway

Removing email should not remove **accountability**.

Intended Direction

- Tracking should exist **regardless of delivery method**
- Bulk sending must include analytics and control

Research Note (Part 3): Smaller, Regional, and PDF-Centric E-Signature Platforms — Limitations and Strategic Lessons

Introduction

This phase of research focuses on **smaller, regional, niche, or PDF-first e-signature tools**.

While these platforms are often affordable or simple, they reveal important patterns around **scalability, ecosystem dependence, and long-term viability**.

The goal here is not to compete with every tool listed, but to understand **why many of them remain small**, and what architectural or strategic decisions prevent them from growing into full platforms.

Scrive

Identified Problems

- Strongly European/Nordic-focused
- Limited support and market presence outside Europe
- Smaller global brand recognition
- Fewer third-party integrations compared to major platforms

Practical Takeaway

Regional strength does not automatically translate to global scalability.

Intended Direction

- Design infrastructure and integrations for **global use from day one**
- Avoid region-locked assumptions
- Build flexible compliance layers rather than region-hardcoded logic

Under.io

Identified Problems

- Very limited public information
- Small or unclear user base
- Lack of transparency around features and roadmap
- Uncertain long-term viability

Practical Takeaway

Lack of clarity kills trust, even if the product works.

Intended Direction

- Be explicit about features, limitations, and roadmap
- Treat transparency as a **core trust signal**
- Avoid building “mystery features” without documentation

3. DigiSigner

Identified Problems

- Extremely basic feature set
- Designed mainly for freelancers
- No team collaboration
- No CRM or business integrations
- No analytics or workflow tracking

Practical Takeaway

Tools designed for individuals struggle to scale into team platforms.

Intended Direction

- Design for **teams first**, even at small scale
- Collaboration and visibility are non-negotiable for business use
- Avoid locking the product into a single-user mindset

4. eSignatures.io

Identified Problems

- Pay-per-use pricing creates unpredictability
- Less established brand
- Limited enterprise-grade features
- Better suited for occasional signing, not ongoing workflows

Practical Takeaway

Usage-based pricing sounds flexible but creates anxiety for growing teams.

Intended Direction

- Prefer **predictable subscription pricing**
- Allow optional usage-based add-ons without making them mandatory
- Ensure users can forecast costs confidently

5. Nitro Sign

Identified Problems

- E-signature is secondary to PDF editing
- Not competitive as a standalone e-signature platform
- Strong dependency on Nitro PDF ecosystem

Practical Takeaway

When e-signature is an add-on, it rarely receives full attention.

Intended Direction

- Make e-signature a **first-class product**
- Ensure document editing supports signing, not the other way around
- Avoid treating signatures as a checkbox feature

6. DocHub

Identified Problems

- PDF editor first, e-signature second
- Limited automation and workflows
- No advanced analytics
- Not designed for contract-heavy teams

Practical Takeaway

PDF editing tools cannot easily evolve into contract platforms.

Intended Direction

- Build around **contracts and workflows**, not PDFs
- Use PDFs primarily as an export or compatibility layer

7. KeepSolid Sign

Identified Problems

- Small market presence
- Limited integration ecosystem

- Basic feature set
- Missing advanced capabilities expected by teams

Practical Takeaway

Feature completeness matters more than low price.

Intended Direction

- Focus on **depth over breadth**
- Ship fewer features, but make them production-grade

8. RightSignature (Citrix)

Identified Problems

- Strong dependency on Citrix ecosystem
- Limited innovation in recent years
- Older architecture
- Lags behind modern UX and workflow expectations

Practical Takeaway

Ecosystem lock-in often slows innovation.

Intended Direction

- Build platform-agnostic integrations
- Avoid tying core value to a single ecosystem
- Keep architecture modern and adaptable

Certinal

Identified Problems

- Strong focus on Indian market

- Limited global adoption
- Regional compliance advantages do not scale globally
- Smaller international footprint

Practical Takeaway

Regional compliance strength must be balanced with global usability.

Intended Direction

- Support regional compliance through **modular compliance layers**
- Maintain a consistent global core platform
- Avoid region-exclusive design assumptions

Cross-Platform Patterns Identified

Across these smaller and regional platforms, several themes repeat:

- Products remain small due to **narrow scope**
- PDF-first tools struggle to evolve into workflow platforms
- Ecosystem dependency limits innovation
- Lack of transparency reduces adoption
- Individual-focused tools cannot scale to teams

Final Conclusion (Across All Research Phases)

This research confirms a consistent reality:

Most e-signature platforms are not limited by technology —
they are limited by **business decisions, pricing tactics, and architectural shortcuts**.

Advanced Analytics & Bottleneck Tracking , Conditional Logic + Dynamic Workflows