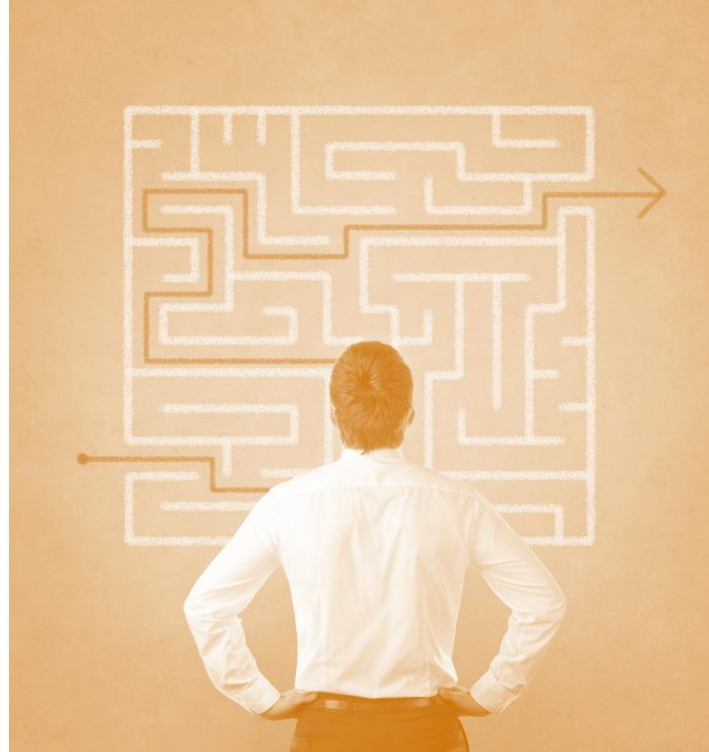


# Outcome-Focused Information Architecture™

Going beyond theory  
to predictable,  
measurable benefits

A WHITE PAPER BY

**EARLEY &  
ASSOCIATES™**



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**Control over and access to unified, meaningful, and timely views of content and data** are critical

to recognizing and seizing opportunity, controlling risk, and ensuring compliance. Access to the right information at the right time is a powerful strategic lever to get to the next levels of productivity, customer loyalty, revenue, brand value and profitability. Awash in a sea of customer touchpoints, data signals, channel fragmentation and point solutions, however, most organizations spend more time, money and intellect on manual reconciliation than they do on insight.

This E&A whitepaper introduces information officers, enterprise architects and the business leaders they support to a new and more productive way of solving information leverage challenges through **Outcome-Focused Information Architecture**.

**External / Marketing Challenges**

Within eCommerce and marketing alone, hundreds of point solutions dot the landscape, promising information nirvana. The truth is that many do provide unique benefits for communicating with, understanding and converting your audience. More critical is how companies select from, incorporate and adapt this information architecture landscape to achieve those benefits, without adding undue costs or crippling operational complexity.



Given the proliferation of channels, touchpoints and point solutions available, how do aspiring market leaders effectively compete, provide superior experiences, optimize loyalty, maximize market basket and cross-sell?

Which solutions do we use? How do we interact? Integrate? Leverage? Replace our legacy systems? Do you stand on the sidelines waiting for consolidation?

No savvy business person believes that standing on the sidelines is a realistic option. Technical professionals also understand the trade-offs between best of breed and all in one product suites – consolidation rarely meets expectations.

**Internal / Team Challenges**

Internal enterprise collaboration is no different. SharePoint continues to grow in adoption and capabilities, but most corporate users find themselves with “accidental architectures.” Team sites have sprouted across the organization, but findability across projects is no closer than before... or worse, many ad hoc taxonomies have evolved, further hampering search, sharing and findability. In short, we’ve accidentally automated the mess.

Regardless of function, the information mess represents a significant cost to the organization:

- 50% of all intranet searches are abandoned.
- According to IDC, knowledge workers spend between 15% and 35% of their time searching for information, and 40% of corporate users report they cannot find the information they need to do their job.
- 90% of the time that knowledge workers spend in creating new reports is in re-creating information that already exists!

Given those kinds of statistics, what are the loss of efficiency and time to market implications? How can research and development avoid prior pitfalls or re-inventing the wheel? As data and content proliferate throughout the organization, how can we ensure compliance or mitigate eDiscovery risk?

**Roots of the Challenge: Lack of Context**

Regardless of the set of tools you’re using to leverage information, you need consistent vocabulary and context. Information Architecture provides this context. Through a more systematic understanding of sources and uses of information, the right Information Architecture optimizes content-centric processes. It describes the content and provides structure and vocabularies that connect these processes. The result is your information (data, content, digital assets, expertise, etc.) is more findable, usable and valuable.

Context is the key to making information useful and relevant to a user’s process and objectives.

- Gartner Group projects that Context Aware Technologies will play a key role in over \$96B worth of consumer purchases by 2015.

<http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/1827614>.

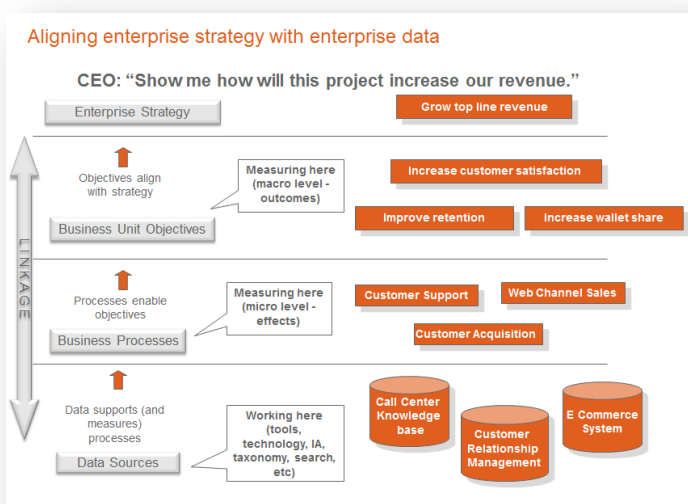
- A recent Forbes article cited context as the next generation of web content management application. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ciocentral/2011/08/30/context-will-drive-the-future-of-web-content-management/>.

Clearly, context is becoming critical to all that we do. Information Architecture provides that context.

### **Barriers: Under-Investment in the Context**

Far too often, executives balk at starting an Information Architecture project because the return on investment is not clearly stated in measures that matter to bottom line financial results or key enterprise objectives. Benefits like “getting everyone on the same page,” or “improving collaboration” are not enough to unlock budgeting momentum.

If we’re going to unlock funding and achieve the significant value available through well-defined Information Architecture, we must find another way. We must rise to the challenge of optimizing business results through Information Architecture. Short term projects require payoffs, but must also be aligned with a longer term vision of enterprise maturity.



### **Unifying People, Process, Content & Technology with Information Architecture**

In the real world, we rarely if ever get a “green field” approach to building the perfect blend of systems, content and process from scratch – we are always striving to get more out of our existing infrastructure, staging multi-year plans for gradual improvement. Initiatives like Master Data Management (MDM), which aim to consolidate all data and content into a set of “authoritative” information company-wide, are appealing for a variety of theoretical and common sense reasons.

MDM principles are well thought out, but implementing them in practice can take too long for serious impact in today’s competitive business climate. And MDM does not address the flexibility, agility and curated experience elements required of data and content for both internal and external audiences. For that, you must look at how you organize, model, contextualize and present content with consistency across applications and channels, but with flexibility and context for audience and task. In short, you need *Information Architecture*.

Whether for R&D, eCommerce, service, maintenance, support or internal collaboration, the benefits of connecting and modeling disparate content and systems through Information Architecture can be significant:

**eCommerce can be Accelerated** – In eCommerce, improved findability across channels equates to increased sales, and time to market often beats the competition – if they can’t find it, they won’t buy it (from you). One large retailer was able to validate through A/B testing that a \$200,000 investment in improved website information architecture produced \$10mm in incremental sales.

**Field Service can be Streamlined** – A field service organization with 3,000 technicians saved an average of 8 hours per week per technician in search time for repair information across multiple systems using information architecture principles. Hard dollar savings are in the tens of millions of dollars. At another company, a recently re-architected knowledge portal is projected to reduce call center headcount by 80% through self service.

**Customer Support can be Dramatically Improved** – A call center reduced time per incident for second tier support calls by 50% by implementing a new knowledge base with information architecture principles.

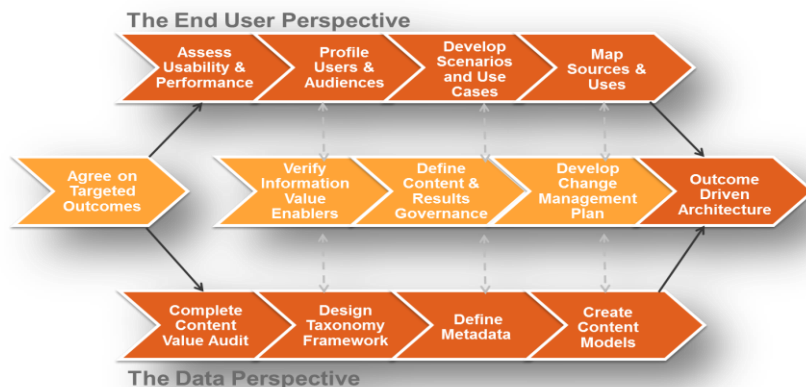
## Outcome-Focused Information Architecture – the E&A Difference

Earley & Associates offers the path forward to solving technical, contextual and business justification challenges with *Outcome-Focused* Information Architecture. We've taken the pragmatic (yet amazingly unique) approach of placing measurable business targets, not just requirements, at the center of Information Architecture roadmaps and projects. Being outcome-focused creates a more valuable approach, with measurable and achievable scope, giving companies the context that creates measurable results in a shorter time.

We start by defining specific benefit stretch targets for the team, providing benefits in four main areas that we synthesize to create an Outcome-Focused Information Architecture solution:

- **Time to market**
- **Increased productivity**
- **More efficient use and curatorship of data, content and digital assets**
- **Improved sales performance**

We focus the team's work on addressing the most important priorities, increasing the chances that our Information Architecture matters to the business, achieves important changes and business results and, therefore, gains sustained support and funding. Benefit targets are broken down into achievable projects, so our architecture work begins on realistic, consumable, evolutionary change. This approach also leads to smaller projects with measurable returns, creating early wins, excitement and organization momentum.



The diagram shows two parallel paths of design: *The End User Perspective* and *The Data Perspective*.

We've realized that Information Architecture is best designed by looking at usability and process at the same time as understanding systems and underlying structures that define the current business. By benchmarking within both paths, we ensure that we identify the critical gaps to achieving achievable benefits of future state targets.

Many approaches to Information Architecture focus on satisfying all possible enterprise requirements. While laudable, this often leads to "feature creep" and lengthy design and development. At the end of the project, the team attempts to justify the expense and has no idea how to pull apart a complex design to get future phases funded. We resolve this challenge by starting with and staying focused on measurable outcomes.

**The End-User Perspective** – User-centric design focuses on defining the characteristics of the user audience – who are they, how can we identify and describe them? What do they need to do? What are they interested in? How do they think of their problems? What kinds of things do they need to accomplish? What specific information do they need to do their job or solve their problems?

**The Data Perspective** – Information environments are complex and heterogeneous. Getting consistency across content and systems requires an understanding of information flows and the dynamics of various tools, processes and applications. It is less about managing information than it is about enabling increased flow of information and metadata so that decisions can be made more quickly and effectively.

**Alignment of Objectives and Outcomes** – Data and content support processes, processes enable department objectives, objectives align with organizational strategy. By keeping this linkage clearly defined and measurable, information projects will attract and retain the attention of the organization and its leadership. Not showing this alignment is a fast road to defunding and wasted efforts, since long term resource commitments require formal, hard dollar business cases in today's economy.

**Sustainable, Results-Driven Governance** – These elements are held together by the glue of governance. Governance consists of decision making units with decision making criteria. Decision making is driven by outcomes and verified through metrics. In this way, resources are correctly allocated, leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness. This cycle is fueled by the continuous source of motivation at the heart of every organization – the drive to create enterprise value, not just optimize work.

As work progresses through each path in an Outcome-Focused Information Architecture initiative, the team comes together to continually check in on targets. For example, governance is not just about terminology, data quality or technology – it is also about managing to business impact and benefits. Change management plans include a heavy component of communicating about and managing to new levels of performance, and the final plans provide practical, evolutionary steps to deploy change, achieve incremental benefits and create momentum.

In this way, E&A's Outcome-Focused Information Architecture gives you the context you need to achieve funding, get to new levels of performance, and measurably make your information more findable, usable and valuable.

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**Earley & Associates** is an information management consulting company.

We help market-leading brands and organizations up their game – maximizing the strategic impact and contribution of people and information assets. We take a comprehensive approach to information management, taking into account people, process, technology, and content.

Fortune 2000 companies and large non-profit organizations work with us to:

- Enhance online customer experience
- Improve operational productivity and quality
- Increase working value of digital assets through reuse
- Ensure value results from investments in content management and search platforms
- Bring context to customer analytics

For more about Earley & Associates visit our website at [www.earley.com](http://www.earley.com) or contact us at [info@earley.com](mailto:info@earley.com).

