

4 Ways “ECM” Turned Out Differently Than We Planned



The single repository dream – get over it

The term Enterprise Content Management (ECM) has been with us for 15 years. It hasn't been a perfect term, and perhaps in truth has been better suited as a description of a *strategy* than as a description for a set of *IT tools and technologies*.

One of the byproducts of “the ECM term” has been an assumption that the desired outcome of an “ECM initiative” was to get everything into a single repository. Many of us within the ECM world purported to have a clear vision of how such a universal system should be applied across the enterprise, across multiple content types, and across multiple processes, managing the lifecycle of content from creation, through collaboration, distribution, process and archive, to eventual and defensible deletion.

Some of the original ECM suites grew from imaging and workflow products, others started with basic electronic document management, adding capture and records management along the way. SharePoint grew from project collaboration and content-sharing intranets to encompass a wide range of active-content management capabilities.

Inherent in this was the vision of a much wider set of knowledge workers working within a common content management environment. The reality, though, turned out to be somewhat different.

1 During the course of the past decade, the “presence” of ECM tools and technologies did expand beyond “ECM specialists” – but usability still lagged.

Consider a few data points from AIIM surveys of ECM adopters:

- 22% consider their ECM project to be somewhat stalled, and 21% have user adoption issues (AIIM).
- 52% admit that they are still dependent on their network file-shares (AIIM).
- Poor content management practices result in taking too long to find content (62%), duplicated efforts (52%) and insufficient re-use (46%) (AIIM).

2 Many have described ECM as an “enterprise layer,” but the reality is that implementation is still driven by departments and the content “silo” problem has exploded.

Both AIIM and Forrester surveys reveal the failure of the “single repository” dream. According to Forrester, 70% of organizations are using two or more ECM solutions, and 29% are using four or more solutions. AIIM reports that 52% of organizations have three or more ECM/DM/RM systems and 22% have five or more systems. The problem is even more challenging at the largest

organizations, with 38% reporting more than five ECM/DM/RM systems in operation. Of course, the information that is *officially* in ECM/DM/RM systems is only *part* of the information management story in most organizations. AIIM research concludes that the biggest current issues are improving user adoption (45%) and consolidating multiple repositories (42%).

3

The adoption of consumer and SaaS technologies has dramatically increased the volume of content assets in play in a typical organization -- and splintered the tools used to manage them.

The much-derided server file-share refuses to go away, and multiple cloud file-sync-and-share systems, often working outside of the information governance regime, are creating even more loosely-coupled information silos. Meanwhile, multi-channel inbound communications and document-centric workflows add another dimension, as they are linked to capture, case management, records management and compliance.

The adoption of file sync and share and cloud content management tools have brought this issue to a head. Luke Temple, Services Design Architect for Enterprise Collaboration Tools at AstraZeneca, notes “We had over 100 document management systems in our infrastructure, which led to all sorts of confusion. Getting all of that into Box has been our biggest challenge.” AIIM notes that 87% of organizations are concerned about cloud chaos.

4

The desire to shift strategies to embrace newer content management tools has refocused attention around migration and disposition.

Forrester notes, “While deployment of modern ECM systems with cloud and mobile-friendly architectures is becoming less complex than the first generation of ECM tools, the challenge of handling existing content is top of mind for many decision-makers. Technology managers know that a strategy for

handling this legacy content is essential: Doing nothing is not a viable option.”

There is clearly a migration in the direct of cloud content management solutions, which means that organizations have a decision to make relative to the large volume of documents in *existing* legacy systems. The challenge is that organizations may have millions of documents. Which should be moved and which should stay where they are? What can be safely archived or deleted?

Organizations typically adopt a hybrid approach to the question of content migration – they struggle with the decision about which information should stay where it is until some later point (or forever!), which should migrate into new systems, and how *both* should be surfaced within business applications.



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