

THE NEXT WAVE:

Moving from ECM to Intelligent Information Management

by John Mancini
Chief Evangelist, AIIM

In Partnership with



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How did we get to where we are?

The past 12 months have certainly been filled with enough change to last a lifetime.

At the macro political level, we witnessed the “ouster of the incumbents” with first the Brexit vote in June and then the U.S. Presidential election in November. In the sports arena, the insurgents triumphed and two teams with a collective 176 years of frustrated championship expectations battled for the World Series. PokemonGo swept the world and led to a host of injuries when enthusiastic participants careened into each other and into stationary objects whilst staring at their screens. Alexa Echo Dots began appearing on every imaginable surface, listening ...listening... listening. And perhaps because of the need to be silent in the face of all of this listening, silent Mannequin Challenges became all the rage.

And then, in a moment near and dear to all of us who try to eliminate manual, paper-based process, the failure of the ultimate, previously foolproof and bulletproof paper-based process — the Academy Awards!

The past 12 months have also been pivotal for content management. Leading ECM companies like Xerox and HP and Kofax and Lexmark and Documentum variously split up or were acquired. In December, Gartner put a capstone on the year by announcing it was “retiring” the term “ECM” and replacing it with something called “Content Services.”

Gartner: “ECM is now dead (kaput, finite, an ex-market name), at least in how Gartner defines the market. It’s been replaced by the term Content Services.”

Forrester also chimed in on “Content Services,” splitting the market into two parts — 1) Transactional Content Services and 2) Business Content Services, with the former most closely aligning to “traditional” ECM.

Before merrily marching off to some new term, let’s think a little bit about where we’ve been and what that might tell us about where we’re going. Amidst all of this change, there is a great deal that is consistent and we can build upon, even as core underlying technologies undergo enormous change.

At its core, what suppliers in this space provide are solutions and strategies that help end user organizations manage the complex interaction between PEOPLE, PROCESSES, and TECHNOLOGY. HOW this interaction is managed evolves as technologies evolve. I believe there are three (at least!) distinct but overlapping species of “content management” currently actively in play in the marketplace:

	DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT & WORKFLOW CIRCA 1995	ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT CIRCA 2005	MOBILE & CLOUD CONTENT MANAGEMENT CIRCA 2015
PEOPLE	Solutions are difficult to use and require lots of training – users are specialists.	Focus shifts from ECM “specialists” to knowledge workers, but usability still not a top priority.	Usability becomes everything. Lines blur between home and the office.
PROCESSES	Focus = automating content intensive, complicated, mission-critical processes – departments. at large organizations.	ECM believes it’s an enterprise layer, but is often still driven by individual departments – silos explode.	“Appification” of processes and “Good enough” solutions emerge for the mid-sized market.
TECHNOLOGY	Complex, custom and expensive implementations purchased by business buyers.	Rise – and then decline – of the “suites” – SharePoint disrupts the traditional ECM market.	Configuration, connection and mobile skills become key – File sync & share and cloud disrupt the market.



The core challenge in describing these three different “species” of content management — 1) document management & workflow, 2) enterprise content management, and 3) mobile and cloud content management — is that they are not nearly as distinct as the above chart implies. Things do not seamlessly evolve from one species to the next; they overlap. Successive species don’t replace what came before; they are stacked on top of what came before.

On the vendor side useful content solutions can be found across all three species. On the user side, you can find end users doing some very advanced things that combine all of the above capabilities — and more from the analytics realm — and you can also find users very proud that they have finally driven the paper out of their accounts payable process. These varied solutions and use cases are not individually bad or good.

But they are different, and that’s where a lot of the current confusion in the content space arises.

How does the world of content management tie to the broader enterprise IT space?

If things are not confusing enough in the content management space, think about what is going on in the broader enterprise information management space. Consider the following emerging broad trends — trends that will mold and shape the world of content management in both the short and long-term, creating a need for a broader and more encompassing industry description than ECM.

EMERGING TRENDS	IMPACT ON CONTENT MANAGEMENT
Explosive growth in volume and variety of data AND content. Billions of new connections between objects — the Internet of Things.	Users need to do so much more than just capture documents and information; they need to ingest information of ALL sorts as early as possible into business processes, and standardize and automate these processes. They then need to extract insight from this exploding volume of information and prepare for the era of machine processing and artificial intelligence. Finally, they need to develop policies and automatic processes to dispose of information without business value.
Rise of new data-centric technologies — Hadoop, NoSQL, Blockchain.	The availability of new tools to manage data at massive scale increases the need for effective management of metadata.
Incorporation of core content management capabilities directly in file platforms themselves (Office365, Amazon, Google, IBM/Box, DropBox) and collapsing prices for storage.	Add-on core content management increasingly under price pressure, driving many solution providers to shift their focus to applications and solutions.
Expanding and increasingly challenging national and regional compliance and regulatory demands — and the growth of cloud and privacy “nationalism.”	Organizations need to take as much of the human element as possible out of governance by first converting everything to digital form (i.e., tackling the paper problem head-on) and then by applying semantic and auto-classification technologies.
A clear shift among the leading solutions providers to cloud-first R&D investment strategies; large-scale end users with major on-premise legacy systems are left playing catch-up.	Users want content management solutions with a clear cloud strategy — even if they say they’re not ready for the cloud right now.

The Next Wave — Moving from ECM to Intelligent Information Management

This is not to imply that the world of content management is the same as the broader world of data management. Nor is it to imply that the emergence of Hadoop and Blockchain and other analytics and cognitive technologies replace the need for organizations to understand how, where, and why they must manage their information.

But we do need to understand that the broader enterprise technology story influences the more niched content management story. The broader story influences how content and information management capabilities are utilized and consumed by real-life end users trying to solve ever-more complex problems.

As time goes on, content management capabilities are going to be viewed much less as a monolithic “solution” and much more as a set of capabilities that will be consumed in a much more modular fashion — tied to the needs of particular business processes. Content capabilities will be tied to processes — both custom and SaaS. In the end analysis, this is the world that Gartner now calls Content Services.

So is Content Services really all there is? Is ECM really dead? The term might be straining a bit, but the idea isn't. We think the conversation is a bit more complicated (and to be fair, so does Gartner).

We need to re-think the term ECM. We've been saying this for a number of years — see for example our report from back in March 2015, [Content Management 2020: Thinking Beyond ECM](#).

For years, we at AIIM have described ECM as:

“Neither a single technology nor a methodology nor a process, it is a dynamic combination of strategies, methods, and tools used to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver information supporting key organizational processes through its entire lifecycle.”

This Capture-Manage-Store-Preserve-Deliver continuum (which many of our training students can likely recite by memory) is probably not a bad core structure as we think about the future.

But the problem is the frame is wrong.

We think the best label to describe all of this moving forward is “Intelligent Information Management.”



What is Intelligent Information Management?

The role we expect content and information management to play in our organizations is clearly more than ECM (especially in its more traditional transaction-centric and records-centric definition), and it is clearly more than Content Services. And neither of these labels will be sufficient to describe the issues and strategies that organizations will face as the above content management “species” are further morphed by the coming tidal wave of big data and analytics.

A Digital Transformation Roadmap – Key Intelligent Information Management capabilities

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Of course, Content Services is just another label. “Retiring” ECM doesn’t mean the need for content management capabilities goes away, nor does it mean that everyone should run out and rip out all of those mission-critical ECM systems. But it DOES mean that ECM is an insufficient term to describe all of the “content-y” things people are doing, how they are approaching them, and all the different flavors of content solutions that exist to solve very different problems. It is also a recognition, that content intersects with all line-of-business operations, and its role is no longer confined to an isolated, centralised archive for compliance purposes, where “content goes to die.” Content is an active participant in daily decision making and needs to be actively managed as a key asset.

What organizations are doing with content has outgrown the traditional definitions. We need a new “technology roadmap” for the information management capabilities that are critical to Digital Transformation and to meeting the challenge of *radically redefining experiences* with customers, employees, and partners.

The disruptive forces driving a refocusing on customer, employee, and partner experiences are all around us. Digital Transformation begins by shifting your focus from the “inside-out” to the “outside-in.” Business Transformation – as opposed to mere technology improvements – begins with a focus on customers, employees, and partner experiences.

Intelligent Information Management capabilities are integral to delivering upon the Digital Transformation challenge of *understanding, anticipating, and redefining internal and external customer experiences*.

A Digital Transformation Roadmap – key Intelligent Information Management capabilities

Goal: Understand, anticipate, and redefine internal and external customer experiences

WHAT Core IIM capabilities	HOW For organizations to digitally transform, they need a much broader – and more “consumable” – content toolkit than was offered by ECM.			
Modernizing the information toolkit.	Cloud content management	Internal & external collaboration platforms	Low-code and “self-service” development platforms	Content integration & migration tools
Digitalizing core organizational processes.	Robotic process automation	Business process management	Multi-channel intelligent capture	High-volume process optimization
Automating compliance & governance.	Records management & digital preservation	eDiscovery & legal	Industry & geographic specific applications	Blockchain
Leveraging analytics & machine learning.	AI, content analytics & semantics	Data recognition, extraction & standardization	Metadata & taxonomy management	Document classification & PII identification

1 Intelligent Information Management

Intelligent Information Management means that new world is all about Data AND Content, not Data OR Content. We've operated in the past with a convenient dichotomy between data management and content management. If this dichotomy ever made sense, it makes less and less as time goes on. The kinds of customer-centric problems that must be solved require competencies and technologies from BOTH the data management and content management worlds.

What does this mean as you build your Information Management strategy?

2 There are many "flavors" of solutions.

Intelligent Information Management means that there are many levels of complexity in thinking about the content management challenges facing organizations, and as a result, many flavors of information management solutions. Organizations need to identify: 1) exactly what they are trying to accomplish, in business terms; 2) map those goals against the required capabilities in the Intelligent Information Management roadmap; and 3) understand how solution providers map against their required capabilities. Everyone does not need everything and despite what solution providers may say, not every vendor does everything.

There are a wide variety of solutions in the marketplace, doing everything from basic back-end process automation at scale to providing a sharing platform for knowledge workers to fueling an integrated and innovative data/content customer journey across multiple sub-processes (like procure to pay, for example, or new customer onboarding). Understand that the point from which you are starting will likely determine a lot about how far you can go in the next 12 months, and be realistic.

3 Digital Transformation requires both a top-down and a down-up strategy.

Every organization is on a quest to transform and digitize their business. C-level executives go to conferences and come back proclaiming a need for a bold "Digital Transformation" initiative, not always realizing that the raw material — and skills — necessary for transformation likely lie in some of their past experiences with ECM and Information Governance. Content and records practitioners do not understand their potential value to Digital

Transformation initiatives and fail to update their skills and mindsets to connect to the bigger world of data AND content. Both parties are critical to a Digital Transformation initiative, and organizations need to consciously work to connect these perspectives.

4 Digital Transformation is not likely to occur via a Big Bang.

Not every business process is a gigantic, millions of documents, straight-through process (in other words, a "traditional" ECM process). But all of these much more modest day-to-day processes are still information intensive, and automating these day-to-day processes is a critical precondition to digitally transforming the business.

5 Resist the impulse to simply throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Where do you want to rip and replace and where do you want to leave things alone? How do you leverage your existing ECM investments? How do you allow existing mission-critical legacy systems to continue AND invest in new customer-centric initiatives? Most organizations have many more systems and repositories than they think. Understand the purpose of each major content system, how current it is, its cost, whether there are opportunities to consolidate suppliers, and whether there are more modern and flexible solutions available. As you consolidate, keep in mind the core functional requirements listed above.

6 Make a commitment to metadata.

Metadata is the key to moving from a storage mindset to an applications mindset. It is also key to building some element of sanity around both the ability of your knowledge workers to find information across multiple repositories and your ability as an organization to put some framework around the management of your information assets. The days of imagining that everything would wind up in a single repository are over.

7 Adopt a day-forward bias.

The information management challenge facing most organizations is akin to a leaky boat filling more quickly than the people in the boat can bail out the boat. Are you better served by adopting point solutions to deal with legacy information, and focus your efforts on day-forward initiatives? Do you understand that when information variety and volumes are growing geometrically, a preoccupation with legacy data and information will mean you will never get ahead of the problem? Focus on the water coming INTO the boat first.

8 Invest in building new data competencies.

In the world that is coming, not everyone will need to be a data scientist, but a LOT of employees will need to be information entrepreneurs. In addition, the worlds of data and content are combining/colliding, so invest in building competencies that understand the intersection.

9 Lastly, stop thinking about all process issues through an ECM "prism."

There is a tendency for those in the "ECM Community" — both users and suppliers to think of all issues through an ECM prism.

There are still many, many organizations who have yet to automate these core back-end ECM processes. But it is only part of the story.

The focus is shifting to applications that leverage content capabilities for specific business purposes. The focus is shifting to the integration of content capabilities into our existing applications — including SaaS applications — finally providing the long-promised benefits of ECM without the adoption issues we have struggled with for so long. The focus is shifting to the desktop as more and more traditional content management capabilities are being "baked into" platforms like Box, Office 365, G-Drive and Dropbox.

Welcome to the world of Intelligent Information Management.

About the Author



John Mancini
Chief Evangelist
AIIM

John Mancini is an author, speaker and respected leader of the AIIM global community of information professionals. He believes that in the next 5 years, a wave of Digital Transformation will sweep through businesses and organizations, and that organizations now face a fundamental choice between Information Opportunity and Information Chaos.

As a frequent keynote speaker, John offers his expertise on Digital Transformation and the struggle to overcome Information Chaos. He blogs under the title "Digital Landfill" and has over 10,000 Twitter followers and a Klout score in the 60s.

John can be found on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook as [jmancini77](#)





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+1 301 587 8202



hello@aiim.org



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