

Farm Credit Services of America Takes Control of Their Content

FCSAmerica improves information management and reduces corporate risk and unnecessary email storage using OpenText ECM Suite



A major concern that all businesses have today is the explosive growth of information—and the enormous costs and risks associated with unmanaged content. The challenges associated with mismanaged email are multifold and complex, least of which is the substantial IT cost and complexity associated with maintaining the mail environment and the frustration faced by end users who are overwhelmed by the volume of email they deal with on a daily basis.

Faced with the growing need to curb the rampant growth, cost, and risk of mismanaged email and the desire to provide a common records management service for all forms of information, Farm Credit Services of America (FCSAmerica) formed a work group in 2008 to look for the best way to meet the knowledge management and compliance needs of the association.

FCSAmerica, based in Omaha, Nebraska, is dedicated to serving the agricultural credit and financial needs of farmers and ranchers in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Overall, the Farm Credit System supplies the nation's agricultural industry with nearly one-third of its credit needs.

Following a thorough analysis, FCSAmerica purchased several components of the OpenText Enterprise Content Management (ECM) Suite to help manage and access all forms of information across the organization. The integrated offering features OpenText Content Server, a secure repository for organizing and sharing documents; OpenText

Records Management to control the retention of business content and establish control over their email records; and OpenText Email Management for Microsoft® Exchange. The company was using Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 with its email management capabilities for managed folders, and now the OpenText records management solution will provide the association with a single repository for the retention of vital business records to leverage this functionality. With Exchange Server 2007, users can organize messages into customized Microsoft Office Outlook® folders for individual departments, users, or functions based on FCSAmerica's corporate policy requirements.

Implementation strategy

After purchasing Content Server in 2008, FCSAmerica's executive team created a project called Business Information Management (BIM). Led by Todd Hartz, Business Information Officer, and Kevin Bratetic, Software System Engineer, the BIM project involved putting together a standard

INDUSTRY

Financial Services

CUSTOMER

Farm Credit Services of America

PARTNER

Axyon Consulting

CHALLENGES

- Lack of disposition of outdated information
- Reduced productivity and efficiency
- Inadequate email storage
- Unnecessary email
- Inability to retain records according to necessary laws and regulations

SOLUTIONS

- OpenText Content Server
- OpenText Records Management
- OpenText Email Management for Microsoft® Exchange
- OpenText Enterprise Connect
- OpenText Explorer Professional

BENEFITS

- Achieved compliance with company policy and practice
- Addressed both knowledge management and regulatory needs while controlling costs
- Decreased litigation expenses
- Increased electronic storage space while decreasing unnecessary email storage

and enforceable process for classifying enterprise content as business records and giving the 1,200 users across the association a much clearer understanding of what enterprise content represents.

Following a year of planning and testing, FCSAmerica contracted OpenText partner, Axyon Consulting LLC, a firm they would work with for the Content Server install in 2010 and throughout various phases of the overall implementation.

Hartz and Bratetic managed the rollout one department at a time via their BIM process. "What that entailed was meeting with each department and going through the basic records management process. We needed to figure out all the common and important

business records that each department had in their environment and determine how long we were going to keep that data," explains Hartz.

They started off by developing file plans with some pilot groups, including Human Resources and Legal. "The file plan addresses the department's shared data that was typically found on a file share or our 'S-Drive.' What we found as we went across the association was there is a pretty big variance in terms of what the departments saved on their shared drive," says Hartz. "It was hard to find data, and a lot of departments were storing everything under the sun. There were files from the mid- to late-90s that hadn't been updated since around that time. So users were really struggling to find information. In addition, our retention schedule wasn't really being applied. We were essentially keeping everything forever."

The first step for each department was to do a clean-up of all of their shared data and delete information that wasn't being used anymore. "Of course, we took into account if there were any laws or citations that we needed to follow, but we purged and got rid of any information that was outdated and wasn't needed anymore and then built a folder structure for Content Server that made sense to them so they could easily find information. This was all done before they even had an inkling of what Content Server actually was," says Hartz. "Once they cleaned up the files, we started working on the basic records management piece of building retentions around all that data. That meant figuring out, on a folder or sub-folder basis, how long they were going to keep data. And then obviously some departments have files that they need to keep indefinitely, so we mapped out the structure of their data, as well as the retentions."

FCSAmerica then brought back Axyon Consulting for their experience in electronic records management and to help them update their record retention schedule. "We have been pleased to work with Axyon Consulting regarding our approach to content, records, and email management. They assisted us with applying industry best practices in a relevant and pragmatic way while focusing on our needs. We have been impressed with not only their depth of experience but also their willingness to share and contribute ideas. I am looking forward to continuing our partnership with Axyon and would highly recommend them," says Bratetic.

Axyon provided the initial design and build for their Community, Information, and Security (CIS, or the structure of user groups, folders [categories/classifications], and permissions). "CIS modeling is essentially where you map out a department's folder structure, their security, and their retention schedules. Those are the three main pieces that we worked on with each department," explains Hartz.

Folders are organized by topic or job function, depending on the department. "For most of our departments, it's topic-based," says Hartz. "For example, with HR, we created a process and procedures folder structure and one for all the employee records. In the past, HR had a giant file room where paper was stored, and it was really hard to manage. So they scanned everything. We also have a couple departments where the folder structure is based on job functions."

BIM champions help ensure user adoption

The project team worked primarily through BIM champions for each department. One or two people per department assisted IT with the file clean-up and setting up the security and retention schedules. "For some teams it was kind of eye opening because they didn't realize what the security was on their data since it had been set up so long ago," explains Hartz. "That filtered down in Content Server with all the permissions that we set up."

Employees receive ongoing training, and Hartz and Bratetic send out weekly or monthly knowledge-based articles or quick 'how-tos.' "We gave the BIM champions specialized training, and they are the first level of support for the department, individual, or office," says Bratetic. "They can answer a lot of the questions, and we empower them with a few more tools and knowledge. However, we do have a full staff of tech support, and we are also available to assist when needed." Hartz adds, "We try and keep open communications, and if we find a department that is struggling a little bit more than others, we will pop into their team meetings and go over some of the training issues and remind them of some of the extra functionality that they may have forgotten about since they first started using the system."

"We really think that as long as you have a BIM champion to help out, that's a really good way to direct knowledge and training. It also helps to free us up to work on other projects," adds Bratetic.

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FCSAMERICA



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Simplifying the user experience with OpenText Enterprise Connect

Most users access Content Server through OpenText Explorer Professional, but some staff have access to the repository through their Outlook mailbox using OpenText Enterprise Connect. "We have roughly 350 active users on Enterprise Connect, and I believe around 800 on Explorer Professional," says Bratetic. "The people who have Enterprise Connect are very happy with the upgrade. In the next two months, when we roll out Windows® 7, all users will be on Enterprise Connect."

Enterprise Connect is a revolutionary user interface paradigm designed to empower information workers to access and interact with all their business content, applications, and processes directly from familiar desktop environments, including Microsoft Office (Word, Excel®, PowerPoint®), Windows Explorer, Microsoft Outlook, and browser-based interfaces.

With OpenText Enterprise Connect, employees can easily interact with content from multiple repositories, drag and drop objects between repositories, and apply metadata and records classifications to objects.

"One thing our users like about Enterprise Connect is the ability to access content within Outlook, whatever it might be, to see the files and the details about those files," says Bratetic. "And a nice feature is the quick preview right within Outlook, no matter what the format is. They see a screenshot of the email details: To, From, Subject. Our users really think this is great; it's a big enhancement. They can work in Outlook all day long without having to go to a file share as long as they stay in Enterprise Connect."

Bratetic adds, "Other nice features with Enterprise Connect include the ability to search for keywords within the document and being able to see if there are any holds on the record or email. You can see the audit trail, if you have permission, right within the email. Enterprise Connect has evolved our system immensely."

Reducing email overload

FCSAmerica's key objective when they purchased Email Management was to reduce the volume of email. "We saw the pain of what was involved with legal hold, of having to deal with the millions of emails that we had in our association, so we wanted to find a solution where we could really bring down our volume of email but also help our users to find email a little bit easier," explains Hartz. "We have size limits on their mailboxes that are fairly strict, so a lot of our users would get messages every once in a while saying that their mailbox was full, and they would have to drop what they were doing and start deleting information that maybe they actually wanted to keep."

"Content Server provides extra storage, and this helped when we introduced Email Management because, by putting retention around their email, which was new for them, it offered the added bonus of having extra storage. This helped us sell that idea," adds Hartz.

With the system rolled out across the association, FCSAmerica has been able to reduce their overall email volume. "We looked at where we were at the end of 2010 compared to the end of 2009, and we have reduced our overall email volume by a little over 500,000 emails. That obviously made our legal team happy," says Hartz.

Retaining and disposing email in accordance with company policy

FCSAmerica's customized email solution entails the use of Microsoft's managed folders with Exchange 2007. There are three zones—Zone 1 for inbox, sent, junk, and trash items that would be deleted after 180 days; Zone 2 for managed folders created by users that would be deleted after two years; and, finally, Zone 3, designated as business record storage, where employees can drag and drop email into an appropriate folder for the type of retention they need. Emails designated as business records are stored in the OpenText archive, where retention is based on the association's corporate record retention schedule, applied using OpenText Records Management.

"About 80 percent of emails are transitory. Those are non-critical messages. We wanted to give those emails a retention period of around 180 days. Also, sent and deleted items are considered Zone 1," says Bratetic. "Zone 2, which is about 15 percent of the email, is tasks, to-dos, a lot of attachments; things that they need to get a project or task done. We give unlimited storage in Zone 2."

However, in Zone 2, we use stubbing and archiving, so the message header and message body is still kept in Exchange, but the stubbed images and the attachments are in Content Server. This greatly reduces the storage size needed."

OpenText Email Management runs a stub-and-archive every 15 minutes on any email in the user's Zone 2 managed folder. "So if it's a managed folder Zone 2, our email management job will run, find new items, stub them, and archive them in our email management solution," says Hartz.

When OpenText Email Management archives email, it leaves a link behind that looks like the email, and if the user wants to open it, even if there are attachments, it's just a click, and back comes the original email. "When a user double-clicks to retrieve it from the archive server, it rebuilds that email in its native format and displays it. Our Word documents are retrieved from Email Management for viewing. What we've identified is that it reduces the storage space on most users' inboxes by 50 percent. We cut it in half by just moving images and attachments out of Exchange and into Zone 2," adds Bratetic.

FCSAmerica uses Exchange rules to move email around. "For example, for Zone 1, we do a query every Friday night that says, 'All email older than 150 days will move to the Zone 1 clean-up folder with Exchange policy.' The items are stored in a Zone 1 clean-up folder for 30 days," explains Bratetic. "Our users are educated that every Friday this runs, so every Monday, they should go into their clean-up folders and clean it up. We give them 30 days. There is no pop-up, no email alert. They know that this runs every Friday night. It's their responsibility to manage their email."

Email in Zone 2 is kept for two years. At 700 days, every Friday night an Exchange job runs that states, "Any email older than 700 days in Zone 2 will move to a Zone 2 clean-up

folder." The items in Zone 2 clean-up will be deleted in 30 days. "That's a natural progression of how our email is moved from Zone 1 to Zone 2 and in both of those environments, they run the full cycle of creation, retention, and deletion," says Bratetic.

Zone 3 is for their legal and business records and documents. "We know we're going to need to keep them longer than two years. Zone 3 email is moved right into Content Server. We drag and drop the emails right out of Exchange into Content Server," says Bratetic. It is up to the end-user to classify whether an email is Zone 1, 2, or 3. "We give the users full control to make that decision."

For Zone 3 emails, the association is leveraging the Enterprise Connect integration in Outlook. Emails can be dragged out of the Exchange inbox and become a business record in Content Server with access through Enterprise Connect.

Conclusion

Using OpenText ECM Suite, FCSAmerica is ensuring that business policies and legal requirements govern the retention and disposition of content and email. Documents and email are secure and accessible within Content Server, reducing storage costs and improving productivity by making content easier to find. "We've had really good success with OpenText technology in our organization. OpenText has a great solution," concludes Bratetic. ■

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A worldwide professional services organization headquartered in Dallas, Texas, Axyon Consulting provides clients with delivery-proven business solutions that simplify and secure the lifecycle of documents and records. Axyon specializes in helping companies maximize utilization of their content, rapidly increasing productivity while substantially reducing cost. Axyon provides a wide range of business services and subject matter expertise. Working with the top, industry-leading software providers such as OpenText, Microsoft, and Oracle®, Axyon is able to ensure that our clients are offered the best solutions for their specific needs. In 2010, Axyon was awarded Partner of the Year, Americas by OpenText.

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