

The future of ECM is coming into focus

STEPHEN LUDLOW

Senior Director, Enterprise Product Marketing, OpenText

sludlow@opentext.com

Enterprise content management (ECM) is changing. It's an idea everyone has been hearing with increasing frequency over the past couple of years. And it's driven by the reality that organizations' information management requirements are transforming immeasurably: the digitalization of information results in new information streams flowing from a wide variety of sources across the enterprise.

This information has standalone intrinsic value—in both the business and legal sense—that makes its effective management critical. It can also be merged with other relevant data to give knowledge workers a comprehensive view of initiatives, accounts, and cases. The result is smarter decisions, made more quickly.

But the ever-increasing volumes and sources of digital information also mean the traditional method of attempting to blanket the entire organization with an all-encompassing ECM solution doesn't work anymore. The scope has become too big and too unwieldy. Organizations are no longer willing to undertake implementation schedules that span years. They need to solve problems and create value immediately.

As a result, progressive enterprises are now embracing simple, lightweight solutions—ones that nimbly address varied and specific productivity and governance issues. These targeted applications can be in the cloud or on-premises and, like blocks in a foundation, build on each other to result in optimal, cross-enterprise ECM coverage.

It's such a step-change in concept and practice that the respected analysts at Gartner have even decided that ECM

doesn't cut it as a sector name anymore. In their estimation, the new topography is better named "Content Services," a nod to the decentralized, purpose-built applications organizations find much easier and more effective to implement.

All this may promise unheralded levels of agility and impact, but it also conjures the grim vision of LOB and IT executives shaking their heads and thinking: "We've just spent a decade investing in our ECM infrastructure. Are you saying we have to start all over?"

The short answer—and single, most important thing to remember—is: no! The key to sustaining momentum and achieving future ECM success is centered around building on what you already have. The best next-gen technology will allow organizations to leverage the sizable capital and knowledge investment they already have in their current ECM platforms. There's just a new way of thinking about what comes next.

ECM for tomorrow

Future ECM success will be found in implementing technology that adds new functionality to legacy ECM implementations. Tomorrow's most effective ECM systems will be both a source of agile, lightweight solutions to solve specific business issues, and a platform for managing massive, document-intensive business processes.

As an example, new ECM systems can integrate into previously isolated ERP, CRM, and HCM silos to organize and govern the information within. They also provide the framework to consolidate, manage, and distribute that information to people across the organization through contextual workspaces.

Critically, ECM will sneak into the background as part of these applications and processes, functioning as a fully integrated, behind-the-scenes facilitator supporting productivity. Adoption will no longer be an issue. Knowledge workers will continue to work in the applications they use every day. Most won't even realize their organization's ECM platform enables and manages the flow of information as they perform their daily tasks.

Agility and stability: the best of both worlds

The bottom line is that business needs are vastly different than they were in the heyday of monolithic ECM repositories a few years ago. Digital transformation has changed everything—the volume of information, expectations of employees and employers, customer relations, the supply chain, and every aspect of good governance.

Organizations now require light-touch solutions to quickly and nimbly address a wide variety of opportunities. But enterprises cannot ignore the need to integrate these targeted applications into a stable, enterprise-wide information management foundation. The core fundamentals of ECM—aggregation, access, and governance—remain at the root of success.

Future generations of ECM technology will need to offer all of the above to ensure success. Despite the fact that it's viewed as a mature concept, ECM is morphing like everything else as it adapts to offer value in the digital world. Its best days are still to come.

www.opentext.com/contact