

What Do Enterprise Content Management Systems Do for the Enterprise?

The ECM Association ,AIIM, defines ECM as: "...the technologies used to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver content and documents related to organizational processes. ECM tools and strategies allow the management of an organization's unstructured information, wherever that information exists."

The focus of the definition above is on tools and technologies. AIIM itself emphasizes that while tools are important, it is the way that they are used that is important. Content must be managed in a way that furthers the organization's goals.

According to AIIM, the four primary areas in which ECM helps organization are: Compliance, Collaboration, Cost and Continuity.

In each of the areas, you must have clear strategies and policies before you start using ECM tools. Strategies and policies are derived from organizational goals and your particular environment.

COMPLIANCE

Compliance with regulatory requirements involves costs. The variety of regulations, and the ongoing legislation of new regulations and requirements, adds to the costs. Only a proactive strategy developed with the involvement of legal, technology and administrative personnel can help minimize these costs. This kind of a proactive approach will bring out possibilities for using ECM tools to ensure compliance with applicable regulations at a maximum of convenience and minimum of costs.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration helps people with different expertise to contribute to the overall business results. Overall business results are helped by finding faster ways to get your product or service to the market, reducing your operational costs and completing activities and processes quicker and in a more streamlined fashion.

ECM provides tools like instant messaging, emails, online meetings and whiteboards to facilitate collaborative working. These tools make it possible to participate instantly, or at a time of your convenience. You can review the up-to-date status of a problem or solution, ask queries, make suggestions or presentations and get feedback. All these allow you to get involved and contribute meaningfully.

COSTS

When you start thinking of how ECM can help with costs, the first thing you might notice will be the cost of the ECM system itself - an addition to cost rather than a reduction. However, if you have a proper strategy in place, even tentatively, you will also be able to evaluate how ECM can help you achieve larger-scale business results at lower costs.

The key is clarifying your objectives and their implications. Don't let existing information processing technology constraints limit your expectations in these matters. With ECM, information can be made available on tap by all those who need it (and are authorized to access it). This would include not only employees in your organization, but also suppliers, customers, and governments outside it.

You won't have to spend most of your time actively contacting everybody and conveying your requirements or meeting theirs. The result will be not only savings in time, but also better quality results in all areas. You will soon begin to see how ECM can help you operate on a much higher scale and at much less relative costs.

CONTINUITY

Keeping your business going 24/7/365 is critical in today's global corporations, and even many smaller organizations. Natural or man-made disasters must not be allowed to disrupt operations too seriously.

Achieving this objective will first involve developing clear strategies and policies. You will determine which content is business critical, how quickly each type of content must be restored, how such restoration is to be arranged for, and all the other incidentals involved.

ECM, with its comprehensive range of capabilities, will then help you implement the strategies and policies.

CONCLUSION

ECM provides a great set of tools and technologies. It can help achieve great business results through increasing speed of marketing and other operations, mainly through faster access to relevant information.

However, you need to sit down with your people and develop clear strategies and policies, un-constrained by present information system limitations, before you start implementing Enterprise Content Management Systems.

About the Author

Ademero develops document management software, [document imaging software](#), and [enterprise content management software](#). Ademero's main product is [Content Central](#).

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