



WHITEPAPER

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Document Management software considerations for SMEs

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This document aims to give you an overview of the key selection criteria you'll need to consider when you decide to bring a Document Management or Content Management system into your organisation.

Introduction

The degree to which these criteria apply to you will depend on the complexity of your business, its scale and the systems you already have in place. However, you will find that many of the items here will apply in any case. Once you have these selection criteria clear in your own mind, it's recommended that you map them to your own needs – for example, bulk scanning may be irrelevant to your organisation so you would discount this as a major deciding factor, whereas the ability to handle email content may be critical.

This document will set out the main considerations and you may choose to score their relevance when making your choices to aid your selection process. Furthermore, you may well wish to consider a number of vendors in your review process and you can score these against your prioritised needs.

Finally, you'll see two terms used frequently here – Electronic Document Management (eDM) and Enterprise Content Management (ECM). The distinctions between them are getting blurred with technology improvements and market adoption changes. eDM refers to the capture, storage, security, auditability, versioning, records management, and searchability and discovery of documents in a document library or repository. ECM is a wider term covering content as information in its widest sense, from web content management to archiving. In this document it's taken as majoring on the searchability and discovery elements. (The "e" in both cases is also frequently dropped and we've used the shortened versions throughout this document).

What problem/s do you want to solve?

Before starting any journey involving new systems or processes you need a clear idea of what problem you are looking to solve. Can you write it down as a clear problem statement? Can you quantify it? Doing both of these will help crystallise your thinking and decision making.

Document and Content Management is relevant for all manner of organisations – professional services (accountancy, finance departments, IFAs, legal, architects etc.), manufacturing, food processing, construction, education and many more.

Your business's problem may be specific to you –for example, the storage and retrieval of project plans on a construction site is altogether different from a manufacturer's invoice handling and delivery tracking needs. Throughout this document you'll hear terms like information discovery, retention periods and Content Management and wonder what this has to do with you – don't be put off. These are universal terms but you'll be applying them to your own very specific needs.

Despite the "information age", most small to medium businesses still depend on some pretty "old school" methods of document storage. And even when you're storing electronically you know that it's a sea of information and discovering the right data quickly and efficiently can be a question of your own memory and luck. You are therefore likely to be running a business based on electronic documents (probably on a network drive or scattered across laptops) with many other documents still ending up in conventional filing cabinets. In either case, discovering information or content is a problem, or at the very least could be a whole lot more efficient and so it's costly. Let's break the problem down a little and see where your new system will bring benefits.

The cost of your time and the cost of space

Time is money so you don't want to waste it. Much of your corporate intelligence is hidden in documents and you need to free it and that can take time just on a discovery level. Added to which, you can never predict when a document has been misfiled or completely lost, or anticipate disasters like flood, fire, malicious damage or power cuts. All of which could seriously affect your business.

Hard copy filing is expensive in terms of time - a single paper document can cost as much as £15 to file*. Consider how many documents get filed every day, the cost to business soon mounts up.

*Source: Gartner

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This type of conventional filing is also expensive in terms of the valuable space it takes up. A filing cabinet costs a company on average £500 a year in floor space rental costs alone*. You might also have off-site archive costs to consider.

Storing information electronically is not in its own right the complete solution. How often do you think you know where a key document is stored, be it in a network file store, in an email, on your laptop or a SharePoint library? Finding and opening a document is typically a quick task, say 30 seconds - 1 minute per document. But when it's not immediate the time can really add up and delay your activity.

We've all spent time on a crusade trying to find information which we know is hidden away somewhere, only to find that the frustration and effort has eaten away an unwarranted length of time.
How about finding your document every time with a few key pieces of data in a few seconds?

According to Gartner, on average, staff spend 10% of their time looking for information*. That equates to nearly four hours a week - half a day's work wasted on hunting for information just to allow people to do their jobs properly. Cut this down to just seconds rather than hours and the savings could mount into tens of thousands of pounds per annum; savings then available to reinvest in the business to create greater profit.

What is a customer worth?

Demanding customers – we all have them. Then there's the silent majority whose customer service experience may be limited to occasional engagement but this shapes their experience with you and their propensity to recommend your business. Snappy, high quality service makes a world of difference to the customer experience - slow information retrieval increases the risk of losing existing customers and dampening new business growth.

Regulation, regulation, regulation

Allied to customer service, your reputation is also at the mercy of regulatory demands, e.g. Company and Tax law. Documents need to be kept for up to forty years and may be required for scrutiny at short notice, often with the stick of regular audits and investigations. HMRC audits, for example, can result in days of additional administrative work. Failure to comply could result in interest and penalties and other regulatory non-compliance could give rise to lost accreditations and more. Even successful compliance often generates an opportunity cost. Add actual financial cost, time-consumption and stress to the mix where there's an audit failure.

Whether we like it or not, most of this involves record keeping and the ability to access information quickly. Can you be sure that you have the right records available at short notice, discoverable every single time you need them? It's possible to spend all your time thinking about managing your records to be compliant with the regulations of the day – in fact there's a whole branch of document and content management devoted to this.

Recognise the need and ensure that you have your records securely held, easily retrievable and you have policies in place to retain and even purge as necessary and you'll be long way towards the finishing line.

Any good Document Management system gives you this and allied with your own processes you'll cover off your obligations.

Slow processes

If your organisation faces a high volume of transactional documents then you'll probably recognise the scenario where it seems to take an age to process anything. Purchase orders, invoices & proofs of delivery (PODs) need to be tied up and there's frequently a missing piece in the puzzle which leads to breakdown. Recognising these documents and automating the processes makes a massive difference in handling mundane, volume based tasks. Even the simple tasks like common HR activities (handling holiday requests etc.) can be more of a chore than they really should be. Automating approvals can be a simple exercise with disproportionate benefits.

We just don't talk any more ...

Consider how much information you have hidden in locally stored emails and documents. Consider also what key documentation is available only in a misfiled hardcopy or on a memory stick or laptop. Worrying? Do you have departments which own different parts of a process only to need a document held elsewhere? (Once again, invoices and proofs of delivery frequently fall into this category). Having a central document repository eliminates this. Sharing content and transactional documents is a major improver of communications and therefore efficiency.

Hidden information

When you know you want to find something specific then there's a good chance that you'll need it for a specific task in mind. When you're searching for content then often you're exploiting the documents, emails etc. as a knowledge base. When you build up a history of documents, you also begin to harden the organisation's corporate knowledge, making it available for more abstract research and analysis. This moves the business along a stage in its maturity from improvements in task efficiency to exploiting its inherent intelligence, mining it for more focused operations. The speed and accuracy of discovery is the true benchmark of a good content management system. Think about the next stage in your business's evolution, plan for operational improvements and beyond.

Keep It Simple Stupid (KISS) – the value of simplicity

Don't over complicate things. Electronic Document Management (eDM) brings all forms of information together into one central, secure, searchable electronic repository. All your inbound and outbound correspondence, email, transactions, official documentation, customer records, supplier information - everything that would conventionally have been stored in filing cabinets or a PC network - is stored in one instantly accessible and secure place.

That's it – keep it simple. When you've done this, you'll have a Content Management system in place that you can utilise to gain all the efficiency savings we've been talking about. If you really take this to the *n*th degree then you can end up with high cost and high maintenance. Go back to what you're trying to achieve:

- Fast information retrieval to maximise your working time
- Savings in physical space
- Better customer service
- Easy compliance with both internal and external operating procedures
- Efficient sharing of information & improved communications
- Exploitation of your business information

Automating the mundane and enhancing customer service

The immediate benefit of an eDM system is a reduction in day-to-day administrative costs. How does this manifest itself?

Time

It's one thing none of us can claw back.

Streamlining your processes and improving your business performance at least reduces time being wasted through inefficiencies.

For some organisations this is clearly measurable – professional service businesses will see more chargeable time available and therefore opportunities for additional premium value-add services; quicker turn round in compliance cases, important at the best of times but essential when up against those key deadlines like Self Assessment filing dates or strict conveyance timetables. For manufacturing, service, construction or other project based industries the time based efficiency is also a cost consideration – inefficiencies equate to competitive disadvantages. Don't expect a big bang transformation in your working, but when you implement a Document Management system you should see a return on your investment in operational time. It's an insidious change which will permeate those adopting areas in the organisation.

Reduce consumption

Consumption can be measured – it's one of the very tangible benefits so will always be high on any Content Management vendors success stories. However, this currency doesn't diminish the benefit – for example, you will free up office space. When this is at a premium you'll really see the difference. It's surprising how much space a filing cabinet or two will take up and quite how many you need and how stealthily they invade your space, all at a cost, be it actual ground rent cost or opportunity cost. Gone is the need for archive storage. Savings can also be made on paper, toner, print costs and storage consumables, small expenditure which quickly adds up. Of course, less consumption also means that you will also be helping the environment.

Enhanced processes

The sea of documentation so many of us face is normally the result of a process flow. It might be a purchase order – invoice – proof of delivery – payment trail. It could be as simple as a signing off a holiday request. Automating these processes can power assist the adoption of a Document Management system and seriously enhance its impact. Workflows can be added to many good quality eDMs, automating day to day processes, even simplifying them. This is aided by the ability to read key data on, not only electronic documents, but also scanned-in paper images – it is therefore possible to automate invoices based on authorisation limits, for example. Where an invoice is routed to will be based on a combination of the amount and your policy. A potentially long-winded exercise can be reduced to moments.

Moreover, you can augment your processes by triggering email links, drawing data from other systems and setting up advanced capture rules based on frequently used document types. Once your data is captured, there are even content manipulation tools which can enable you to leverage your documents and repurpose them.

No more lost files or risk of disaster

Paper documents in particular are vulnerable to loss, destruction or misfiling. They don't stand up well to physical wear and tear either, from multiple handling through to physical threat like fire or flood. Electronic documents fare better of course, but unless well indexed or stored in a guaranteed location they can also be lost or at least take an age to discover.

Good ECM gives almost instantaneous file retrieval, removing the wasted hours spent searching for documents. There's no more risk of lost files, or different versions of the same file being in existence on several different computers.

Of course, by it's nature you can also backup your system, so all information can be instantaneously duplicated and filed securely off-site, almost impossible in paper format.

By streamlining the capture process and building it into your day to day processes you can ensure that the gap in which you may lose a document is minimised. Multi-functional copier/printer/scanner devices can seamlessly link with a quality eDM system. Any information that comes into your office electronically can be filed instantly in one centralised, secure and easily accessible place.

Improve customer service

The real bonus of eDM comes in terms of customer service. Customer information is instantly accessible so you can answer queries on the spot. You will have an audit trail at your fingertips of past communications and transactions with that particular customer. You won't have to ask the customer to wait while you retrieve relevant information, or call them back, instant answers ensuring great customer service.

Instant information retrieval

eDM isn't just about instantly calling up information using document attributes (whether added automatically or manually). This metadata is extremely valuable and acts as a shortcut to finding documents, especially when filtering results. However, you should also have the ability to interrogate a document's content. Text searching the body of a document gives you real analytical power and ensures that you'll always find the right document, with the relevant phrase often highlighted throughout. These searches are quick so you won't see an overhead. A good quality eDM system should give you this content searching ability as soon as the document is saved, but do beware of those which save these up as a batch job instead.

Regain control

eDM allows you to control company information. With organisational success so often depending on quality and timely information on which to base decisions, the very fact of having all key data available massively enhances your decision making capability. Consider the variety of sources that you may have to search otherwise – physical files, network drives, email accounts, memory sticks, CDs, archives. Every time a physical file is left on a desk it's no longer available to your organisation. Every time, a critical email with important attachments is saved away in a local archive it's lost unless you really want to trawl through backups and Exchange server databases. Holding key information as the property of the organisation gives you control and allows you to ensure that you remain compliant and much better informed.

What about SharePoint?

Our Whitepaper, "Confused about SharePoint" covers SharePoint and where it sits in the eDM space. The paper aims to identify the distinction between SharePoint and eDM/ ECM systems. It's recommended that you read this if you have SharePoint or you're aiming to invest in a full SharePoint implementation. [Click here](#) to view the whitepaper.

eDM & ECM – just for enterprise sized organisations, surely?

For a long time, eDM and ECM has been the preserve of large corporations. This technology is now available for all business types and scales without the enterprise level price tag. Because eDM systems in particular generally require some tailoring to get the very best from them, the total cost of ownership isn't as low as you'd expect from off-the-shelf software so be prepared to factor in some professional services time. This consultancy will make your end deployment really work for you with minimal disruption to your existing working practices.

Of course, the more bespoke you want your system to be then the more consultancy you can expect to need. It's recommended that you establish your processes first so that you optimise your consultancy costs. You'll not only save on the implementation but also ensure greater familiarity on day one and better staff buy-in.

Where you have bulk processing requirements then you'll find that once again you may need to spend a bit more on sophisticated capture tools. Likewise, really making the most of the tools by greater automation will involve configuration and more sophisticated functionality, especially if you need deep integration with your existing line of business applications.

There are scalable solutions across the board and it's worth doing your research to ensure that you find what best fits your organisation's profile and needs.

Product criteria

A good Document Management system is intuitive in its operation, improving productivity across all departments and job roles. So, what should you be looking for? Here's a few of the baseline identifiers you should ensure are in place. There will undoubtedly be other bells and whistles available in some systems, but these should be your priorities.

Seamless integration with existing systems

Two of the most frequent citations as key blockers to adoption of new software are familiarity and ease of integration. Both of these relate to the impact on day-to-day operations. However, in the case of integration there is a longer term issue – good, clean integrations will add process benefits and efficiencies which will last long after any short term lack of product understanding.

The ability to work as part of your normal operational process is a key identifier of a mature eDM system. Sitting alongside your existing ERP, CRM or line of business applications, your eDM system will be a natural extension to the way you work, giving you the benefits we've already outlined above without disruption to your working practices.

Instantly searchable

You'll need any eDM and ECM system not only to capture and store documents but also to find them on demand – and quick.

Allocating metadata at the time of capture allows for these hooks to be immediately searched. They are also great for grouping and filtering. However, completing metadata needs to be quick or, better still, automatic to avoid the metadata tagging effort outweighing the benefits of quick discovery.

More powerful is the ability to search content. The majority of eDM systems will provide both metadata and content searching. The better systems will combine the two, searching simultaneously without affecting performance.

Your results should be rapidly viewable with filter and grouping options for further clarity. Thumbnails also help. Having instantly recalled the relevant documents you should be able to find the target text highlighted within the document, whatever the type, invaluable for lengthy documents.

Auditability and version control

To meet legal admissibility requirements you'll need a comprehensive audit trail as a minimum. By tracking all actions on a document, including updates for versioning you'll be aware of the who and the what of any modifications. This confirms the document's authenticity and gives you confidence when using it, especially important if it's needed for legal, accounting or project purposes. Very low end eDM systems may not have this in place, but it's an essential requirement if ever you need solid documentary proof or you come under legal challenge.

Security

The document repository will become a bedrock of your business. It therefore must be secure, not only at data security level but also at document level. Confidential files are stored securely, accessible only by those with user rights and passwords. There is no risk of tampering or intrusion by unauthorised third parties or hackers. You'll need to ensure that your eDM or ECM system has strong role based security and/or options to password protect individual files.

Remote access

You'll find that your eDM system will become part of the way you work every day. The days of centralised working are long behind us, with more people working from home or needing access to critical information on the move. Efficient remote access has become essential. There are fully web based document systems available, whereas others are locally based with permission based access via VPN for off-site users. Having access to all the documents in the office anywhere and anytime is immensely powerful (if not more convenient than paper files). Look out for this when considering your choice of product.

Customisability

All businesses have differing requirements and a good eDM system needs to be flexible for any tailoring to suit the individual organisation. Review your business processes and ensure that they're optimal. Then you can shape your eDM to work in line with your best practice rather than imposing unnecessary training needs or unnatural changes to your business practices.

Your choice of eDM/ ECM should be configurable enough to meet your specific needs. This may raise a red flag on the consultancy cost front. This depends on how bespoke you want your system to be. Although eDM tools remain fundamentally the same between organisation types, the widely differing configurations should be catered for, whether it's a construction firm, a solicitors, a pharmaceutical firm, a food processing plant or an accountant in practice. Often this is catered for by use of a boilerplate template relevant to the industry domain – this can be used to jump start the configuration with individual adjustments made in consultation with you and your stakeholders.

Ease of Use

Simplicity and ease of use can be hard to achieve for software vendors. However, it's difficult to over- emphasise the importance of that sense of familiarity, that "I can work with this" moment of recognition and relief. Ideally, you shouldn't need extensive training and it shouldn't intrude on your day-to-day working practices and processes. If it does, then you'll find yourself meeting operational resistance and poor take-up. This will be improved if there is slick integration with your line of business software applications.

Document sharing

You may hear document specialists referring to “payload” – it’s jargon of course, but it recognises the fact that a document is very seldom the purpose of any processes. Instead it’s likely to be the focus for a task which may involve a number of personnel i.e. a process.

Many eDM systems allow for document distribution and you should look out for this. By electronically routing a document as part of a process, say an invoice approval, you can retain integrity and maintain control.

Quicker than any manual distribution, this also removes the need for multiple copies and ensures that the process itself is tracked. Many systems will have simple document tracking and routing functions – look out for these as a minimum requirement.

Automating such document distribution with additional rules and triggers really power assists your operation so consider processes in your business which would benefit from workflow. Ensure that your chosen eDM system has a workflow capability, even if not for day one adoption. As you roll out eDM to the business, you won’t have ruled out the option to gain additional major benefit from your investment in the future.

Take advice and listen to others

Obvious really, but validate your need, the experience of others and your final decision. Of course, only you know what’s best for your organisation, but ensuring you have ratifying feedback can be easily overlooked when you are under pressure to make a decision. You need to make sure that you’ve made the right choice. Hopefully, this paper will have helped you to do so.