



When to Jump into ECM

Unmanaged information becomes more unmanageable each day

— TK Train

With the continuing consolidation of ECM vendors, one of the most frequent questions I get is “When is the right time to jump into ECM?” Or “Shouldn't we wait until technology advances more?” The fact is there is no time like the present to start implementing ECM! There are a host of reasons that might convince us to wait:

- The high cost
 - Technology is changing so fast
 - ECM isn't “mature” yet
 - It is too complicated
 - We are not ready
- [insert your own reason here]

The truth of the matter is that information overload isn't decreasing, in fact, it is increasing each day. Each day information is left unmanaged it becomes more unmanageable. In the case of e-mail, information reproduces itself exponentially each time it is sent, forwarded, replied to or copied. How many of us print information because we are more comfortable working with information in print, rather than electronically? How often does that printed material get filed in our file cabinets and eventually sent to off-site storage because people don't have the time to go through it all? In this time of economic challenges, more and more companies are having to cut their labor forces, which means more information has been abandoned in hard drives, shared drives, filing cabinets and off site storage as the stewards of that information did not have time to share the location of the important or historical documents before they were escorted out the door.

Years down the line, someone will come across what was left behind and have to spend a considerable amount of time reviewing and trying to determine what is in all these stores of data and paper. However, because they don't have the time to go through it all, it ends up in off-site storage or on a shared drive under the last known “owner's” name like this: Joe Smith's Desk Documents, or even worse, Joe Smith's stuff! Meanwhile, top executives are making multi-million dollar decisions only on the information they have at hand, not necessarily on the correct information which may be buried in Joe Smith's “stuff” or other similar caches of information.

At the same time the risk of non-compliance with records retention laws and regulations increases as each day passes. Not to mention the risk of being unable to locate relevant information for legal discovery should a law suit ensue. Often the cost of legal discovery alone could have paid for a full-blown ECM strategy and the technology and resources to implement it. Ultimately, the likelihood of such a company flourishing is in danger, as it



is literally consumed by tons of unnecessary, unidentified, duplicative and unmanaged information.

Every company, large or small needs to start **NOW** dealing with its information “dump”, **start looking at and managing information as the business asset it is.** This begins with an Information Management Compliance (IMC) Program which includes an ECM strategy. ECM is not a silver bullet, it does not solve the problems overnight, it is not implemented in a day and one does not implement all aspects of ECM at the same time. Next month’s article will discuss an approach to IMC that has proven successful at many small, medium and large companies I have worked with.

In these monthly columns, I will be exploring specific information management compliance (IMC) considerations and issues as they pertain to ECM from the trenches and viewpoint of a well seasoned end-user. If you have particular topics you would like to have discussed in this column, please contact me at tk.train@imceds.com.

--TK Train is a board member with AIIM.

*Printed by permission from AIIM from Infonomics –
12/31/2008*