

Protecting your assets

How document management through the cloud provides new opportunities

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

Many organizations don't do a good job of managing documents — their business assets. It also doesn't take many documents for disorganization to wreck havoc on productivity.

This is even more critical in professional services where documents are the primary work product. For example, attorneys develop and file documents, and accountants create reports and spreadsheets.

Organizations, or parts of organizations, must store, protect and organize these assets to maximize efficiency, says Philip David, director of Legal and Professional Systems at Blue Technologies Smart Solutions.

"I believe document management systems can positively affect almost any business," David says. "However traditionally, one problem with getting people to opt in has been the cost of the infrastructure, software and implementation."

Today, cloud-based systems are providing a new option for organizations that didn't think the numbers worked for them.

Smart Business spoke with David about how companies are turning to cloud-based document management systems.

What kinds of document management are available through the cloud?

Several on-premises document management vendors offer their solutions in the cloud, while other vendors offer cloud-specific solutions. Some vendors and third-party solutions follow a hybrid approach where only certain documents and/or content are shared in the cloud. For instance, a law firm might allow clients to access certain documents or create deal rooms, without opening the whole system.

Who is adopting these technologies?

Smaller organizations are adopting cloud-

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based document management because they get the benefits without a large investment in infrastructure or IT. At the same time, larger organizations are increasingly switching to these systems, as they find there's a certain peace of mind from leasing into a world-class infrastructure with better security.

Speaking of benefits, what are the biggest ones with a cloud-based document strategy?

First, implementing any kind of document management system — whether on-premises or in the cloud — allows you to protect, organize, index and search your documents with a full audit trail. You also have features like version control, so you don't accidentally send an older copy to a customer.

Another advantage is cost saving, particularly for smaller organizations. They don't have to invest in infrastructure and its ongoing maintenance and upgrades.

A cloud-based system or any system that puts documents in the cloud also allows for remote access. You can access documents when traveling, from a client site or at home.

Finally, the document management system is automatically backed up and typically housed at multiple data centers to provide disaster recovery protection. These providers also have advanced infrastructure and high-end security.

How do you respond to those hesitant to allow confidential information off-premise?

This is a common concern, but many of these organizations haven't made the same investments as cloud-based vendors in providing secure storage, such as world-class firewalls. Most management teams are at the mercy of IT and have difficulty judging the quality of services. Documents and intellectual property often are more secure in the cloud than on-premises.

Are there any inherent risks with cloud-based document management?

Like any technology investment, you need to ensure you realize the cost benefits you think you'll have. This is especially critical in organizations with more users that are now paying on a per user, per month basis.

Another risk is performance. You not only need enough bandwidth to achieve your goals, but also well-set expectations.

The third concern is the availability of integrations. If you want to integrate this key system into your billing or client management system, it can be more difficult with a cloud-based solution.

A cloud-based solution isn't right for everyone, but it's a trend many businesses are moving toward. To make the right decision, you'll need a technology partner who can help design the best system for you, whether it's in the cloud or on-premises. ●