

Creating efficiencies

How implementing an enterprise content management system can create efficiencies **Interviewed by Sue Ostrowski**

How much time do your employees spend each day tracking down documents or recreating those that have been misplaced? Even if it's just a few minutes — and at most businesses it's much more than that — that's time that those employees could be doing something more beneficial to the company, says Nano Zegarra, director, Imaging Solutions Division, at Blue Technologies.

"People waste a lot of time getting up to look for files," says Zegarra. "And while they're up searching, they bump into someone, and three minutes turns into 10. An enterprise content management (ECM) solution can eliminate that wasted time by placing all of your organization's documents, regardless of format, in an easy to search centralized repository. There is no real need to get up and search for documents."

Smart Business spoke with Zegarra about how an ECM system can create efficiencies for your company and allow your employees to focus on growth, not on searching for documents.

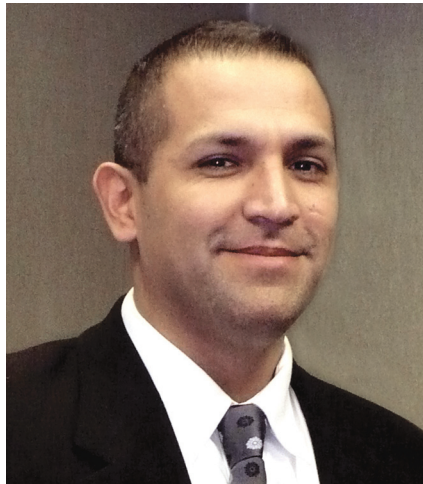
What are the benefits of an enterprise content management system?

Many companies have unstructured document storage, with some documents on paper and some in electronic format stored on a network or on their computers, with multiple versions of the same document in different places, lacking any kind of consistency.

Paper documents can be easily lost, damaged, misplaced or they may be overlooked altogether, causing you to recreate them. And with paper-based workflows, you have documents moving from one person to another through multiple levels of approval with no real way to audit the trail or link related documentation.

But with ECM, the related documentation is always at your fingertips and one can easily monitor a process to see where the inefficiencies lie. It offers a huge return on investment.

Another benefit is customer service. If a customer calls to question an invoice or a contract, there may be some timely investigation needed. That may entail calling someone to request a document or looking for old e-mails, then calling the customer back with the information. But with an ECM solution everything is stored centrally, so you can quickly log into the system, enter your search criteria and have



Nano Zegarra
Director, Imaging Solutions Division
Blue Technologies

everything regarding that customer in front of you, giving you the ability to quickly answer any inquiry and provide the necessary documentation to the customer if needed.

All of the work that is now sitting on your desk or that is scattered in files across multiple locations can now be sitting on your computer for quick and easy access from anywhere in your organization.

How can a company get started implementing an ECM system?

It just takes someone recognizing pain points or inefficiencies in the way they do business. Too often, companies get into the mindset that paper documents are the way they've always done it so that's the way it needs to be done. It takes a proactive thinker to recognize that there has to be a better way.

When people think of ECM, they often think they need to involve the IT staff, but that is not true. The best place to get started is to identify your biggest problem point, the area where you have the biggest inefficiencies when it comes to processes, especially paper-driven processes. Once you recognize that this is something you need, contact an ECM professional, who will ask about your processes to analyze your needs and identify inefficiencies that could be eliminated with an ECM solution.

NANO ZEGARRA is director, Imaging Solutions Division, at Blue Technologies. Reach him at (216) 271-4800 or nzegarra@BTOhio.com.

Aren't a lot of companies already paperless?

Yes, and a lot of companies think that because they are paperless, they are doing it right. But simply being paperless isn't enough. After companies gain an understanding of what ECM can do for them, they realize that even though they are scanning everything, they can still make that process more efficient.

There are a lot of bottlenecks in organizations, even in those that have gone electronic. Someone has to digitize a document, and someone has to categorize it.

Some ECM solutions can capture data automatically, relieving you of the timely indexing, and pushing it right into a workflow process. That's where you see the biggest cost savings: workflow processing. It is the best way to handle any type of transactional data.

When you look at return on investment, you have hard costs and soft costs. Obviously you need less paper and storage space, but there are also the soft costs gained in people not wasting time tracking down paper documents, sitting on the phone waiting for someone else to track down a document or waiting on approval.

ECM speeds up the process and allows you to repurpose employees for more meaningful tasks. Then, as a company begins to grow, it doesn't have to add people to process more. It can tweak the workflow, adding efficiencies, and, as it continues to grow, it can tweak it again.

What should a company look for in an ECM provider?

Look for a solutions analyst, a company that is not just trying to sell you a system or software but that will partner with you, listen to your needs, analyze them and find the best solution.

Also make sure the system is user friendly so that you can tweak it yourself. With many systems, when you want to change something, you have to go back to the vendor for every change. A proper solution should be handled by the user; you are the one that knows your organizations and processes better than anyone. The job of the solutions analyst is to make sure that you not only have the tools but the knowledge to make your business workflow better. <<

Insights **Technology** is brought to you by Blue Technologies