

## **Preparing for any Electronic Records/Content Management Solution...key items to consider**

**By Robert M. Blatt, MIT, LIT**

When you think about an enterprise content management project, everyone thinks of 3 general steps: Step 1: Assessing/Evaluating, Step 2: Procurement and Step 3: Design / Installation. Other articles in this series on electronic records management articles being prepared specifically for the IIMC and will focus on those steps, but the focus of this article is to provide information on what the end-user organization should be doing to prepare themselves for the new technologies.

The ECM (electronic content management) industry has found that these organizational activities are critical and should occur in parallel to other design/implementation project steps. This approach actively addresses the fact that “users” need time to prepare for these technologies AND those “users” still have other work to perform. Not recognizing time limitations for many of the key knowledge workers is a formula for project failure at worst, or a “painful” project at best.

From that perspective, most vendor implementation teams really don't understand that everything cannot come to a stop simply to prepare data for an electronic records management system, so they don't place enough focus on preparing the “users” and their “data”. One without the other isn't of any value. In fact, that would be counter-productive to the whole concept of improving information management and access. Additionally, it is well recognized in the industry that not allowing users sufficient time (in a realistic time period) to prepare to utilize these technologies, almost always end up with greater stress on the organization and at times the projects actually fail due to the length of time required to get a process fully automated or establish the desired controlled libraries.

There are 2 general approaches to preparing for enterprise content management technologies; the first being to go straight into design and install the solution, then begin loading data, commonly referred to as “day-forward”; and the second general approach commonly referred to as a “modified as-needed” migration which includes complete sets of records, but only those that are new or completed. With the “modified as-needed” approach, in-process records are not migrated until those processes complete to prevent potential process interruption.

A key consideration on whether to use the “day forward” or “modified as-needed” approach is related to determining what content users need to access when the system goes live. Day forward includes very limited content until the process has continued for some period of time resulting in sufficient content after entire process has been online for a period of time. In the meantime, the users continue working with existing content wherever it exists, and not use the new system until they need to.

This typically leads to worker confusion over how to find information as now there is simply a new library to use, rather than a single consolidated library and in many cases users simply stop using the new system. Depending on several factors such as whether the information is processed in a short period of time, then archived, work processes are lengthy, etc. need to be evaluated to make the most informed decision by the organization.

The second approach includes a core set of documents from the full “process” or “activity” view,. This approach of identifying a sufficient volume of document/records across enough groups/departments is what can used to validate and support the initial solution rollout, system testing and overall solution stabilization. It should be kept in mind that while this occurs, users will be need to continue the cleanup and organization process for migration into the system when appropriate. This approach does require greater planning, but almost always result in greatly improved project experience for the client and further utilization of the various technologies.

The second approach also has been found to be of value to organizations as they begin to adopt the new method of managing records and content. Users are able to get their content under control while allowing all members of the group to know where to store and then search/locate necessary information. This “clean-up” process enables the organization to go into production mode with actual data and content users can begin working with as compared to sample data that may or not be actually relevant to all aspects of the work activities being affected by these technologies.

The “modified day-forward” approach ensures users have valid information they can share, when the vendor begins their review and/or analysis. Preparing the document taxonomy (or classification or requirements) information always should begin with the users identifying those processes/activities they need to bring online, including the documents created, used, and/or received. These taxonomies should demonstrate how the users organize their information as they conduct their business on a day to day basis and include sufficient information allowing the vendor to understand how the users need to save, organize, search and manage their information.

As each vendor/solution have different levels of capabilities and configurability, each vendor always need to review this information, so with the knowledge the champion users collect prior to vendor arrival, the discovery process resulting in vendor design typically results in more successful projects with less organizational stress.

Regardless of the approach taken by the organization, it is important that the organization begin the “clean-up” process as soon as possible and continue until all the electronic records to be managed by the ECM system are identified, (including the physical copies, if any), reduction of unnecessary duplicates, and separate this “organized” information from that still requires internal analysis by others. As the organization begin their cleanup and organization, they begin identifying what documents are created/received, require retention (or not), and all sorts of other information necessary.

This typically includes the relationship between documents, indexing needs, security requirements, etc. from the user perspectives. All this information, that shows how they want to manage and control their content should be captured in a format referred to in the ECM industry as the “taxonomy” or “classification”. This information is then analyzed and reviewed by the vendor and/or integration team to develop their system design and other internally required information to successfully implement the desired solution.

Typically the process to fully migrate to a new electronic document/records management system can take a year or two, depending on volume and complexity to be in full organizational wide operation. Rushing this process unless specifically required can adversely affect the organization, so well thought out conversation/migration plan that allows for changes as required should always be prepared.

While some people refer to this process as “taxonomy development”, some call it the beginning of the “Design” and others have many terms for this document. Regardless of what this process is called, the following activities should begin as quickly as possible:

- Initiation of and ongoing change management process related to saving content following the agency policies as compared to users storing as they determine appropriate
- Identifying key users who can articulate processes, activities, and associated documents (inbound and out)
- Enable each group to identify all the locations where documents and records are currently being saved, archived, and/or being worked on; NOT JUST THE official or formal copy(ies) that get created when process /activity is completed or “handed-off” to another group

- Get the users to begin reviewing the electronic content they have stored in multiple data silos and begin removing what is not needed
- Have users begin organizing the content that needs to be in ECM
- Have groups agree on which copy is the official/original copy and determine what to do with the various copies and where to save them (short term) in the event some of that information turns out to be required
- Determining whether the content belongs in ECM or should remain where it is (personal documents, non-business related documents, databases, applications, etc.);
- Etc.

As the team examines existing data associated processes, the team also needs to determine which groups and/or users will be the first groups trained to use the new technologies. These groups need to have their information organized in an agreed structure that can then be shared with the vendor for use to begin their analysis.

As noted throughout and to re-iterate, the purpose of collecting this information into a “Client Taxonomy” document is to create a single place where users can identify, in a structured fashion information they want to save, how documents are related (if they are), how documents are associated with other, who this information is shared with, etc. The industry has recognized that the time necessary for users to go through (typically) years of old files and documents is daunting and most users don’t have adequate time to properly review all existing electronic content they have saved over the years. This “client taxonomy” document should be created from direct input from selected user representatives for each of the identified processes and associated documents to be managed by the ECM solution.

Along with getting the organization ready for the new technology, this information is collected to provide the analysis/design team, thereby giving the whole project team a great start on looking at information already identified as possibly relevant for the initial project phases. This is not to indicate the vendor cannot or should not look at other documents or information, but that information might not be in a form allowing accurate analysis or review until the “owners of those documents” begin the process above.

This is due to the fact that over the years, electronic content kept building and building and expanding as users share the information. Keeping these concepts in mind as the organization prepares for these technologies should not be over-looked or discounted, as the level of information users maintain is significant and without their full support and participation, these projects commonly fail, create cost over-runs, ongoing change orders, etc.

Several members of the national (ANSI/AIIM) and international (ISO) standard setting bodies associated with electronic content/records management will be presenting information on how these technologies support “Trustworthy Records Management”. These standard setting bodies are responsible for creating standards and best practices in the areas of electronic document/records management and associated technologies. Mr. Robert Blatt, Ms. Jo Dunlap, and Mr. Steve Levenson will be presenting a team session on Trustworthy Electronic Records during the Sunday Academy session at the annual conference along with several sessions during the general conference.

If you are unable to attend the upcoming records management related academy session or the general session presentations, or need additional information, please contact Mr. Robert Blatt at [Blatt@eid-inc.com](mailto:Blatt@eid-inc.com) or 805 529 – 0600.

## About the Author

Mr. Blatt has over 30 years of extensive technical experience working with a significant number of diverse electronic content management (ECM) technologies assisting and guiding organizations through all project phases beginning with the planning activities through design and implementation. Along with being the Vice-Chair of the US Delegation to ISO TC/171, Mr. Blatt has participated in the development of numerous ISO standardization work efforts including standards associated with planning, assessing, and implementing Trustworthy ECM solutions including ISO 15801, ISO 22957, ISO 18759 and ISO 18829. Along with these ISO standards Mr. Blatt has been involved in the development of an extensive number of technical reports and standards at the international level since 1990. Other international standardization work includes functioning as the TC/171 Liaison officer to TC/46 SC11 and the TC/171/SC23/TC42 joint working group and as the ISO convener for TC/171 SC1 WG8 and TC/171 SC3 WG4.



Inducted into the AIIM Company of Fellows in 2005 (#173). Established in 1963, the Company of Fellows honors those individuals in the association who merit recognition and distinction for their outstanding contributions to the enterprise content management (ECM) industry. Since 1963, a total of 175 people have been given this award on a world-wide basis. Mr. Blatt has been chairperson for several ANSI/AIIM standard setting committees including C21 (Advanced Data Storage), Implementation Guidelines (ARP 1), C27 (Document Management Technologies), C27.3 (Trusted Systems), and is a current member of the AIIM Standards Board. Mr. Blatt has developed and participated in the development of numerous ECM industry and ISO standards and best practices and has been recognized as an international industry analyst for the past 20 years.

Accredited in 1997 with the AIIM-Master of Information Technology, and the AIIM-Document Imaging Laureate in 1998. This was followed by the industry Laureate accreditation levels in Document Imaging and Workflow technologies, both in 1998. Appointed to AIIM/ANSI US TAG in 1998 and elected Vice-Chair of the US Delegation to ISO in 2006. This committee represents US interests in the Content/Document Management and Workflow industries establishing international standards.

Mr. Blatt is President and Principal Consultant with Electronic Image Designers (EID), Inc. EID is one of the industry's first vendor neutral consulting organizations focusing on large enterprise implementation efforts, always working directly with the client/end-user organization. EID has several very senior level resources providing client services ranging from the legal to the records management perspective, and all aspects of the technologies being selected, designed, and implemented. EID has provided these services for over 18 years at both the national and international levels bringing a level of expertise benefiting organizations that require direct knowledge related to industry standards and how these technologies actually function in the "real-world" environments.