

The Essential Guide to ECM

01 Introduction



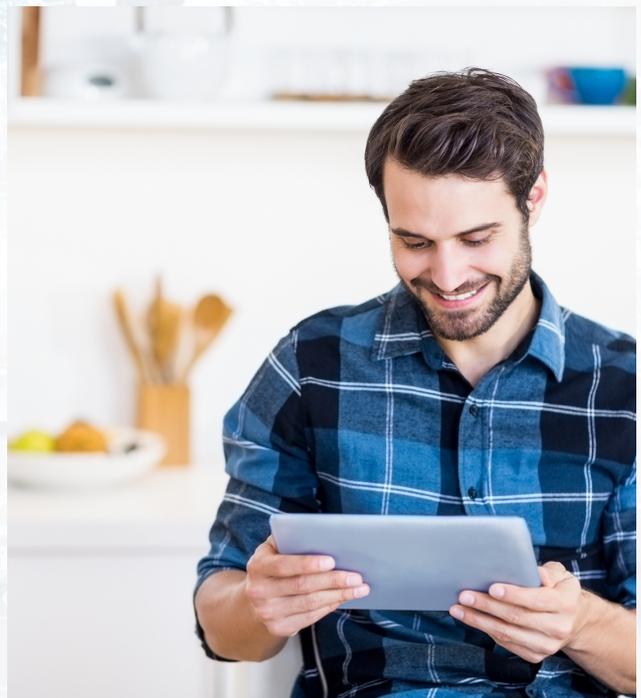
At Simflofy, we define ECM as the collection of tools and techniques required to digitally manage a company's information to support its processes and business goals.

As organizations globally learn to navigate the current COVID-19 crisis, managing information digitally has never been more critical.

THERE ARE MANY DEFINITIONS OF WHAT ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT (ECM) IS AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN BUSINESS.

This whitepaper will help you:

- Understand the need to manage information
- Discover the core components of a traditional ECM solution, and also some modern updates to this list
- Learn how best to select an ECM system
- Exploit a new or existing ECM deployment for maximum benefit.



02

What is Enterprise Content Management?

ECM has been around since the turn of the century and is the successor to Document Management (DM). Industry association AIIM positioned ECM as encompassing "...the strategies, methods, and tools used to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver content and documents related to organizational processes."

While being a very long definition, the term caught on and defined market demand for a range of services ranging from records management, workflow management, library services, document output, and other content-driven capabilities.

"FOR MANY, ECM IS NOT A TECHNOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, OR PROCESS BUT IS A MINDSET OR FRAMEWORK DESIGNED TO GET THE RIGHT INFORMATION TO THE RIGHT AUDIENCE, IN THE RIGHT CONTEXT, AT THE RIGHT TIME."

TODAY'S ECM SOLUTIONS, ALSO KNOWN AS CONTENT SERVICES PLATFORMS OR CSPS BY SOME, HAVE ADDED TO THE EARLY DM FUNCTIONALITY WITH A SERIES OF VITAL ENHANCEMENTS IN AREAS SUCH AS FEDERATION AND MIGRATION.



These modern ECM solutions offer enterprises the ability to:

- Manage information across the whole organization
- Feed business processes
- Drive AI-insight engines
- Ensure the privacy and security of personal and corporate information
- Access information from, and within, multiple business, collaboration, and productivity systems
- Realize the actual value and benefit associated with information and data

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Why Do We Need to Manage Information?

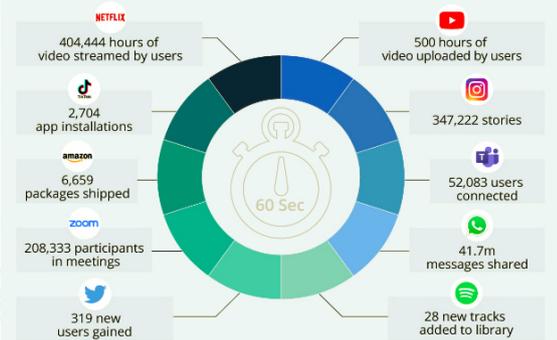
We live in the age of information. And this information is being created faster and in more ways than ever before - as you can see from the chart to the right.

Managing this information is a challenge for individuals but is essential for an enterprise. Information stored in emails, invoices, corporate reports, and personnel files must be carefully managed for numerous reasons.

Some of the driving forces to manage information properly include:

A Minute on the Internet in 2020

Estimated amount of data created on the internet in one minute



Source: Visual Capitalist



statista

Fuelling Business Processes

One of the reasons why ECM, and its predecessor Document Management (DM), was created was to digitize manual, paper-based business processes. Information is the lifeblood of many business processes such as invoice processing, customer onboarding, and claims processing - but is also an essential feed into almost every business process in existence.

Privacy & Security

Storing information securely to only allowing viewing, editing, and creation by the right people has always been important. But regulations such as GDPR and the CCPA, which govern personal data's use and privacy, heighten the need to get this right.

Compliance & Governance

Each industry has its own rules and regulations regarding how information needs to be handled. In banking, for example, financial statements need to be retained, unaltered, for 7 years. Other industries have different specifics, but each industry expects information to be managed properly.

Enabling Remote Working

Digital information is an essential requirement when enterprises look to enable remote working. This has been a growing priority for organizations over recent years, but in 2020 became an essential component of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic - as many skilled employees pivoted to home working almost overnight. Without well-managed information, this could not have happened.

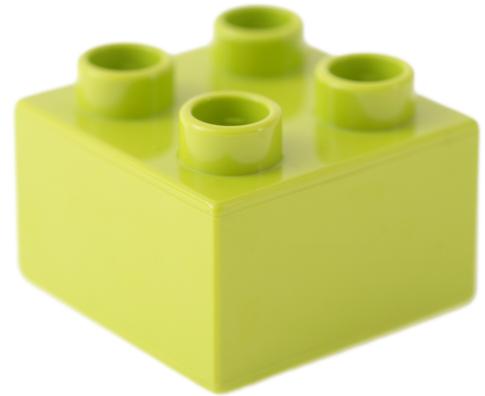
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Core Components of an ECM System

In this section, we describe each of the core components of an ECM system.

The majority of these - capture, store, access, process, and analyze - have remained unchanged since ECM was conceived.

However, this core component list has expanded recently to include three new capabilities - migrate, federate, and integrate. Each of these is also described below.



Capture

Capture is one of the original trio of core capabilities from Document Management (DM) systems - the original systems were called scan, store, retrieve systems, with the scan now renamed to capture.

In a modern system, capture is about more than just scanning - it encapsulates any way of feeding existing information into the ECM system. That can be from scanned images, but equally can be from emails, images, faxes (yes, they still exist), and forms completed by users.

Capture is concerned with the extracting of core information from the incoming content, the classification of the content (either via a simple name or increasingly via multiple metadata fields), and the routing of the content (either to storage, to a process, to a user, or another system).

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Core Components of an ECM System

Store

Once content is added to an ECM system, it needs to be stored somewhere. Traditional ECM solutions stored content either in a database or on the local filesystem with an associated index in a database.

This model has changed dramatically in recent times, with content now able to live in multiple locations and be referenced by the core ECM system (see federation below).

However, wherever content is physically stored, it needs to be carefully governed. This includes applying comprehensive user and role-based permissions, detailed audit trails, and in records management and eDiscovery scenarios, the ability to lock particular versions of files to enforce integrity, and disable any changes.

Access

While the scan and store parts of an ECM are vital, most users focus on accessing content once it is in an ECM system.

User experience was a failing of early ECM solutions, but modern solutions provide numerous, user-friendly ways to get access to content:

- Simple and Advanced Searches
- Folder browsing
- Mobile & Tablet Apps
- Headless ECM (access to ECM content from a non-ECM application such as a CRM system or website)

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Core Components of an ECM System

Process

The ability to define business processes within an ECM system is critical. These so-called workflows allow users to create flowcharts that route content through various steps along the process.

Modern ECM solutions provide visual tools to enable non-technical users to build and manage workflows. Workflows range from simple approvals to complex multi-layered business processes. Document-centric processes for invoice processing and HR onboarding were common in early DM and ECM systems.

However, increasingly single documents do not form the center of the process, but multiple documents and information sources are drawn into processes and applications as and when they are needed. A solution to manage insurance claims is a classic example of this - using numerous documents such as images of the accident, quotations for repairs, forms from the claimants, claim history, and much more.



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Core Components of an ECM System

Analyze

The use of analytics has grown exponentially in all parts of the enterprise in recent years. Within an ECM system, numerous layers of analytics can exist.

Structural

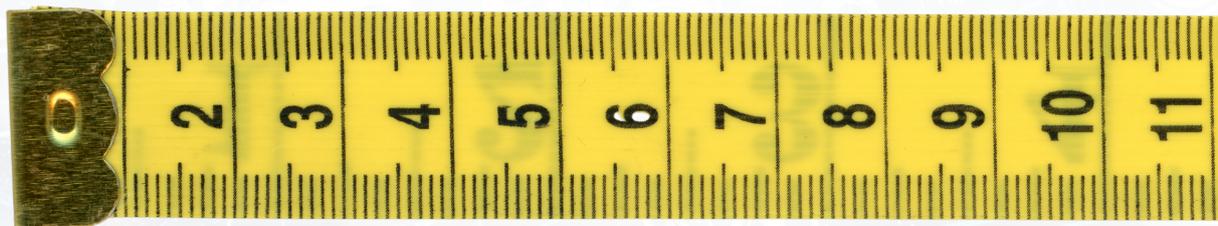
Standardized reporting of metrics such as the number of files stored, what file types are stored, the sizes of files, the number of users, and so on.

Behavioral

Behavioral data such as who accessed content, which user stores the most files, which files are being frequently used, what time of day sees the most users log on, etc. One of the benefits of digital workflows is measuring their efficiency from start to finish, allowing for constant increases in productivity and efficiency.

Insight

In addition to the tactical analytics described above, analytics can be utilized to deliver business insight - informing decisions around marketing strategy, product design, customer support, and more. The analytics uses range from managing system maintenance to detecting fraudulent activity to driving optimization of core business processes.



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Core Components of an ECM System

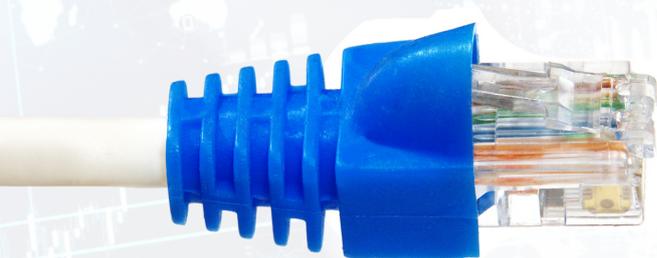
** NEW ** Migrate

The first of the new world ECM components is the ability to migrate content.

When an organization deploys a new ECM solution, very rarely is it a "greenfield" installation - it is normally replacing an existing solution. In this case, migrating the old system's content into the new system is a significant part of the installation process.

This migration capability must offer a wide range of possible source systems to migrate from, a controlled migration process, with rollback capabilities and the ability to selectively control what content, metadata, and audit trails are migrated to the new system.

Migration is a vital part of any modern ECM solution - without a successful migration, the move to the new solution is virtually guaranteed to fail from the start.



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Core Components of an ECM System

**** NEW ** Federate**

Every organization stores information in multiple systems - this is a fact of life. In the past, these various information solutions were rarely (if ever) connected, no common language or structure was in place (no taxonomy, to use the correct term), and each system had its own set of capabilities.

This made it virtually impossible for business users to get their job done, for compliance staff to get a single version of the truth, and for IT to integrate the systems. Federation allows an ECM solution to connect to other systems and reference content as if it were in the native system. This allows content to remain "in-place" but still be incorporated into workflows, managed using the same permissions as the core ECM system, accessed via the variety of user experiences provided by the ECM solution.

The introduction of federation to the ECM suite allows organizations to integrate with and link to core business systems to make it easier for users to find information and deliver context, relevance, and intelligence into business processes.

**** NEW ** Integrate**

A frequent criticism of the first generation of ECM solutions was their lack of integration to other systems. Modern ECM systems overcome this criticism thanks to their open nature and the inclusion of REST-API capabilities.

For the non-technical, this allows systems to interact with each other - for example, meaning that a vendor, or in-house developer, can quickly build an integration to show your ECM files in a customer portal on your website, or conversely, your ECM solution can enrich the metadata on image content via integration to AI-based image processing.

API-based integration offers organizations the ability to create their own information management ecosystem - a unique combination of tools and technologies, connected in a way that delivers exactly what the organization needs, today and tomorrow.

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Core Components of an ECM System

**** NEW ** Automate**

Automation describes the use of technology to perform a task otherwise performed by a human. This is often a collective set of actions in an ECM solution, combining other core components such as workflow, federation, and access. In many cases the automation is the critical element to allow for unattended execution of a set of actions - for example, in a migration from a legacy system to a new ECM solution, the automation consists of:

- The technical connection between the systems
- Details of any field or metadata mappings
- Formulas or transformations to be applied during the migration
- Notification and alert details
- And much more

Automation is one of the key benefits that the business sees from an ECM solution, especially when delivered in automated record declaration, metadata enrichment, and document classification.



05

Choosing An ECM Solution

Selecting a new ECM solution is not a task that should be performed lightly. The system that you select will manage your corporate secrets, will be used by every single member of staff, and will need to comply with every geographical and industry regulation applied to your business. This is an important decision. During the selection process, many key questions need to be answered.

<p>Solution Fit</p> <p>Does the ECM vendor provide a solution that fits your specific needs?</p> <p>Do case studies exist for similar sized organizations in your vertical?</p>	<p>Deployment</p> <p>Does the vendor provide installation services?</p> <p>Can the solution be configured and/or extended by professional services?</p> <p>Does the vendor provide configurable training options?</p>	<p>Ongoing Support</p> <p>Does the vendor provide comprehensive ongoing support and maintenance?</p> <p>Are there flexible options for support - or is everything predefined?</p>
<p>Core Capabilities</p> <p>Which Legacy Core Capabilities are offered by the solution?</p> <p>Capture Store Access Process Analyze</p>	<p>Core Capabilities</p> <p>Which ** NEW ** Core Capabilities are offered by the solution?</p> <p>Migrate Federate Integrate Automate</p>	<p>Architecture</p> <p>Are On-Premises, Cloud, or Hybrid options offered?</p> <p>What database options exist? e.g., SQL or NoSQL</p> <p>Does the system have an Open Architecture (REST-API)</p>
<p>EcoSystem</p> <p>What partner network exists for the solution?</p> <p>Is there a user group?</p>	<p>Recommendations</p> <p>Does the vendor appear in Analyst Reports?</p> <p>What do Peer Reviews say about the vendor and the product?</p>	<p>Pricing Model</p> <p>What pricing options exist?</p> <p>Subscription Model Per-User Pricing? Per project Pricing?</p>

06

Making the Most of An ECM Deployment

Whether your organization has a new ECM deployment or is working with the same ECM system for many years, getting the most out of that solution requires effort. Below we detail four key areas to ensure that your ECM system doesn't sit in the corner of the room waiting to be used properly.

1

Ensure Users Are Trained

The role of user training in new system installation is well recognized - yet many organizations roll out new systems without adequately training their workforce or even communicating why the new system has been deployed in the first place.

User training and communication are essential when a new system is deployed and regularly once the system is established. As new features and processes are rolled out, updating users on their usage, or even just giving them refresher training, will keep users engaged and skilled in using the ECM solution.

2

Focus on Streamlining Access

Delivering an intuitive user experience is vital in the modern work environment. For ECM, this means providing multiple ways to interact with corporate content.

This can include simple filing from email or productivity apps, mobile and tablet retrieval of content, and seamless records management - all of which make interacting with the ECM system a painless and natural operation.

3

Integrate to Other Systems

The integration of information across multiple systems for business users is essential for an effective business. The ECM system plays a critical role in that data exchange, acting as an information broker, integrating content from multiple systems via federation tools, and sharing them with the end-users' preferred tools and interfaces.

Planning how systems are integrated requires cooperation from business users, system owners, and IT - but the benefits of getting this right are far-reaching.

4

Keep Up To Date

Organizations with cloud-based ECM solutions are used to getting new versions of their applications regularly - keeping them up to date with the latest functions and features without them having to do anything.

This is not the case for on-premise customers, where updates are a more manual and prescriptive process - but the importance of remaining on the current version of the software is no less vital. The most recent software version not only includes new features but also incorporates bug fixes and often plugs security holes - increasingly important in the modern business environment.

07 Conclusions

Document Management (DM) systems first exposed the true value of effectively managing information across the enterprise, and that value has continued to grow through Enterprise Content Management (ECM).

From removing human errors when rekeying invoice data to enabling remote working in a pandemic, ECM systems are the natural successor to DM systems and provide an information backbone for the enterprise.



"THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC, IN PARTICULAR, HAS REINFORCED THE VALUE OF INSTANT, DIGITAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION."



ECM may have been around for 20 years or so, but with the recent additions of migration, federation, and integration capabilities, the importance of careful yet innovative stewardship of content is once again being recognized.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has reinforced the value of instant, digital access to information - meaning that if you are new to ECM or a 20-year veteran, your skills and those provided by your systems are more in demand than ever before.

For More Information

For more information on how Simflofy can help you make the most of a new or existing ECM solution, visit our website at

www.Simflofy.com

or email us at

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