

The Ultimate Guide to Document Management

01 Introduction



Document management tools have been around since the invention of the term - “paperless office” in the 70s.

They evolved into enterprise content management (ECM) systems in the early 2000s, then subsequently into content services platforms (CSP) in 2017 - but recently, Document Management has been making a comeback.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT TOOLS HAVE BEEN AROUND SINCE THE INVENTION OF THE TERM - “PAPERLESS OFFICE” IN THE 70S

This whitepaper describes:

- what Document Management is
- what Document Management can do
- the core components that make up a Document Management System
- some great examples of modern document management in action.



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What is Document Management?

Electronic document management (DM) systems have been in existence since the early 1980s and were designed to remove the vast volumes of paper within organizations at the time.

The term “paperless office” became associated with DM as early systems focused on a scan-store-retrieve mantra. Still, in reality, document management was the first instance of a digital transformation within the workplace.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT WAS THE PREDECESSOR OF ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT (ECM) SYSTEMS.

THESE FUNDAMENTAL CAPABILITIES WERE OFTEN USED TO REPLACE FILING CABINETS OR DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLS BUT QUICKLY EMERGED AS TOOLS TO DIGITIZE SPECIFIC DOCUMENT-CENTRIC BUSINESS PROCESSES SUCH AS ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND HR ONBOARDING.



Initial solutions took scanned documents, typically stored as tiff images at the time, and allowed a limited amount of meta-data (or tags) to be associated with those images. Rudimentary search capabilities offered users the ability to locate and retrieve documents, although user interfaces were often less than intuitive.

Document management was the predecessor of enterprise content management (ECM) systems and went out of fashion for many years.

However, 2020 sees a renaissance for DM as organizations strive for simple yet effective ways to manage their digital information.

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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:



Fuelling Business Processes

Document Management (DM) was created 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 a Document Management System

The three core components of an original document management system were:

- **scan**
- **store**
- **retrieve**

These three capabilities have increased over time - with the following nine areas widely recognized as core components of a modern DMS.



Scan/Capture

Scan, or capture as it is now known, is one of the original trio of core capabilities from the first Document Management (DM) Systems. In a modern system, capture is about more than just scanning, hence the name change.

Capture encapsulates any way of feeding existing information into the DM 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 a Document Management System

Store

Once a document enters a DMS, it needs to be stored somewhere. Traditional DM 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 DMS (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.

Retrieve/Access

While the scan and store parts of a DMS are vital, most users focus on accessing documents once they are in a DM tool.

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

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

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Core Components of a Document Management System

Process

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

Modern DM 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 standard 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 a Document Management System

Analyze

The use of analytics has grown exponentially in all parts of the enterprise in recent years. Within a DM 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. ProcessOne 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 a Document Management System

Migrate

When an organization deploys a new document management solution, very rarely is it a "greenfield" installation - it usually is 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 DM 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 a Document Management System

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 a DM 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 DM system, accessed via the variety of user experiences provided by the DMS. The introduction of federation to the DM 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.

Integrate

A frequent criticism of many DM solutions was their lack of integration to other systems. Modern DM 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, allowing a vendor, or in-house developer, can quickly build an integration to show DM files in a customer portal on a website.

API-based integration offers organizations the ability to create internal information management ecosystems - unique combinations of tools and technologies, connected to deliver precisely what the organization needs, today and tomorrow.

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Core Components of a Document Management System

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 a DM 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 DM 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 a DM solution, especially when delivered in automated record declaration, metadata enrichment, and document classification.



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Document Management in Action

Document management has an almost infinite number of use cases.

Below we highlight three specific examples of where document management is making an impact on modern business.

1 Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A)

Mergers and acquisitions are a standard part of the modern business landscape. Integrating two or more organizations can be a considerable challenge; blending culture, staff, and IT systems is never easy. And running, often silently, through each stage of the M&A process is document management.

One of the most important phases of any M&A activity is due diligence, during which vast amounts of information are shared about the company being purchased. Using document management systems here has multiple benefits:

- Information to be shared can be identified from existing systems - if federation is in place, this can be done across multiple systems from one single point.
- Permissions can be applied to allow relevant levels of access to the content for the audit
- Information can be shared in real-time to anyone with appropriate permissions - irrespective of geography, timezone, or device type.

But the involvement with DM systems doesn't stop when the acquisition or merger is complete.

Post integration, the ability to use federation to combine information from across the diverse and numerous corporate systems from both acquiring and acquired organizations saves significant time and money in the early days of the consolidated enterprise. Eventually, migration of duplicate or redundant systems can be performed, but having the ability to get up and running quickly is the primary short term concern in this scenario.

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Document Management In Action

2 Enabling Work from Home

Enabling remote access to corporate information and workflows has long been a key benefit of document management systems - but not one ever used in high volumes. The COVID pandemic in 2020 has changed that as the vast majority of businesses worldwide were forced to make the change to remote working almost overnight.

As IT departments scrambled to deliver remote-access, those organizations with existing DM systems could go beyond simple remote-access to enable additional capabilities to enhance their employees' working situation. From simple document access to secure sharing to still being able to execute and interact with corporate workflows from home, document management has the edge over bulkier ECM solutions here with its ability to be more agile and rapidly deployed.

Furthermore, with many remote workers using less highly powered IT equipment from home than the office, the flexible and lightweight aspect of a DMS is very welcome. Modern functionality such as federation enhances this agility, allowing a DM system to be the single point of access to documents, files, and information from multiple systems - all entirely transparently for the end-users.

3 DM For Small Businesses

Speed is of the essence for small and medium businesses (SMBs). While lacking resources, sizable bank balances, and substantial client lists, small businesses have agility, nimbleness, and the ability to respond quickly to ever-changing situations. Document management is a perfect toolkit to assist an SMB in their day to day operations.

Smaller organizations still need access to information and documents. They still require approval workflows and still work using business processes. What they do not have is months to deploy and configure an ECM solution and the many thousands of dollars typically required to do so. They need a quick to deploy solution that can be used with a minimal amount of training and will not cost the earth. Put simply - they need a document management system.

06 Conclusions

Many forty-year-old technologies fade into insignificance but not Document Management, which is currently in the middle of a renaissance.

The modern world expects easy to use, fast to deploy, lightweight tools for everything - and the document management world expects the same. Cloud-based DM solutions offer an agile and nimble alternative to bloated, legacy ECM monoliths.



CLOUD-BASED DM SOLUTIONS OFFER AN AGILE AND NIMBLE ALTERNATIVE TO BLOATED, LEGACY ECM MONOLITHS.



As we have seen, the capabilities provided by document management in 2020 are on par with ECM but can be delivered without the bells, whistles, and complexity of ECM or CSP. Document management (DM) turned into enterprise content management (ECM), which subsequently turned into content services platforms (CSP).

As with many things in this wonderful world, technology has cycles, and in the information management world, the next cycle may just take us back to where we began - clean and simple document management.

For More Information

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

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