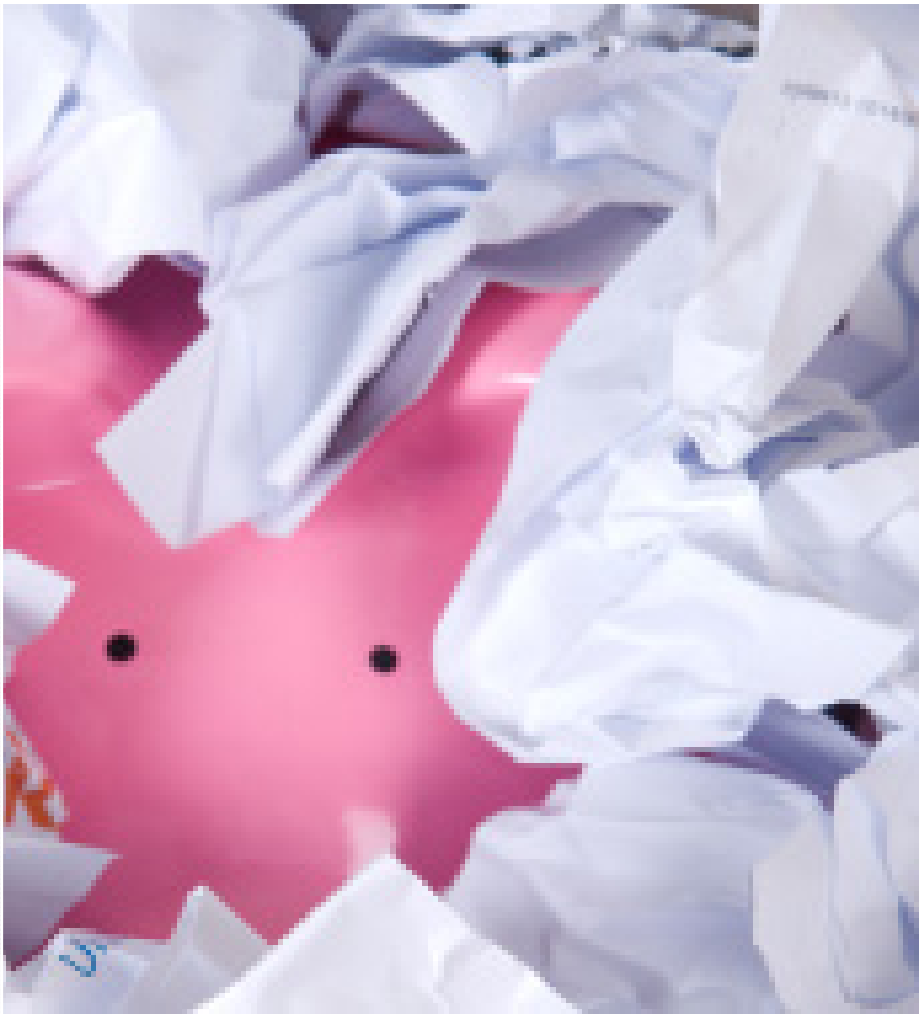
EDM White Paper



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Migrating from a paper based business environment to electronic documents is common for most businesses these days, however, it can be a complex process without the proper planning. In this white paper we will review these processes and hopefully educate the reader on best practices.

Electronic Document Management:
What it could mean for your organization

By definition, electronic document management (EDM) is a computer system (or set of computer programs) used to track and store electronic documents and images of paper documents. The term has some overlap with the concepts of Content Management Systems and is often viewed as a component of Enterprise Content Management Systems and related to Digital Asset Management, Document Imaging, Workflow systems and Records Management systems. Contract Management and Contract Lifecycle Management (CLM) can be viewed as either components or implementations of ECM.

Some history

Dr. Ralph Sprague is a Professor of Information Technology Management for the College of Business Administration at the University of Hawaii. He has over 30 years of experience in educating, research, and consulting in the use of computers and information technologies for organizations. His specialties include Decision Support Systems, the Management of Information Systems, and Electronic Document Management. In 1995, Dr. Ralph Sprague delivered a more elaborate work in which he introduced document management through using IT. He calls it electronic document management: EDM. He defines managing of documents as the "creation, storage, organization, transmission, retrieval, manipulation, update, and eventual disposition of documents to fulfill an organizational purpose", and he further stated that EDM improves communication among people and groups of people. (http://sprague.shidler.hawaii.edu)

Planning and strategy

There are key points when planning for and putting together a strategy for implementation of an EDM solution. Take a look at your current document correspondence lifecycle. This would include business forms & letters, incoming customer or vendor correspondence, shipping & receiving, deliveries; outbound and inbound, along with paper documents received.

Meeting with your different departments to evaluate how they currently access this information, how they respond to customer inquiries for current workflow procedures along with the document accessibility. Once you have a good understanding of the current practices, you can then start strategizing on streamlining these processes through electronic document distribution, archival, scanning, and retrieval methods. The right choices will reduce costly missteps and allow you to realize the gains in your company's productivity and ROI.

Initially, by reviewing your current workflow, document accessibility and your document archival needs, will give you a means in which to measure the electronic document process that will best fit your business and streamline your business practice.

Some questions to ask of your organization could include the following;

- ✓ Are there delays in Accounts Receivable?
- ✓ Is customer service affected negatively by having to spend time locating information in order to assist a customer?
- ✓ Is crucial business correspondence difficult to access or missing all together?
- ✓ How much money is spent annually on pre-printed business forms?
- ✓ Could these internal issues that may be costing your organization thousands of dollars in labor and materials be reduced through EDM?

Reviewing your document lifecycle is an important step in the planning process. Ask yourself details such as who needs the information, what information is critical, when is the information needed, and why is the information needed. Collecting this information will be beneficial in setting up objectives to managing your electronic documents and procedural rules. A well developed plan will define how your documents are used and help you with the next crucial step of considering a solution that will best fit your organization.

Benefits

Let's review some of the benefits organizations experience almost instantly after implementing an EDM solution:

- ✓ Improving document retrieval time through immediate access to critical information
- ✓ Reduce labor costs through eliminating the copying, mailing and manual faxing steps by providing document access electronically for electronic delivery methods
- ✓ Maintain document security
- ✓ Centralized repository for all business correspondence (system generated and paper-based)
- ✓

Choosing a solution

When evaluating the many choices that are out in the industry, look at what is important to your business. How the documents are created, stored, indexed and accessed by your users plays an important role in choosing the right solution for your business.

The documents should be stored in an open format, not proprietary. The solution should enhance and streamline your current business rules, not change them. An EDM solution should offer your organization growth, not limitations.

When evaluating the EDM solutions, integration with your existing host system will allow the workflow of your documents to be automatically processed, distributed, indexed and archived without user intervention.

Easy to define business rules for forms processing and distribution is a key function to a successful implementation. Choosing a solution with an intuitive design tool to create form overlays, which many have the WYSIWYG design functionality, makes the initial creation of your documents easy to use with very little training requirements.

Flexibility in the linking of your data to the form overlay is also a crucial consideration. There are many features available in different products, from GUI drag-n-drop functionality to defining database files to the proper positions, make sure you choose a product that offers flexibility in this area.

Defining key business rules for the electronic distribution, storage of your documents and indexing for later retrieval are key components to choosing an EDM. Most products allow you to manage your document processing rules without any programming changes.

Your organization's business and your user's needs should define the document viewing requirements. Allowing open format of the documents stored makes it easy to view all of your system generated documents, incoming emails and faxes, and incoming scanned paper documents, using existing viewers already provided by the different standard software packages, such as PDF, PC files and TIF images.

Successful EDM implementation

Once you have your requirements planning completed, an EDM solution provider can assist you in putting together a plan that meets those requirements. Mapping out the best methods of creating, distributing, indexing, storing and retrieval of your business correspondence, builds a roadmap to the future.

Having a well-planned strategy for moving from a paper-based environment to an electronic document environment can uncover useful information about your current processes that can streamline your operations and improve productivity. The most important benefit of all is the money saved with your return on investment for implementing such a solution.

The ROI

The Return on Investment is often realized in the "soft-costs" versus the "hard-costs". Many times organization's management will only look at the hard-costs saved, when it is employee productivity that is where the real savings comes in. Searching for documents, reprinting or copying of documents and lost correspondence is time consuming for any employee. They spend hours each day doing these tasks. Having the business-critical information at a user's finger tips not only increases productivity, but also customer service.

Imagine a customer on the phone who has a discrepancy with an invoice. Rather than the Customer Service Representative keeping that customer on hold, for what feels like "forever" to the customer, while the representative locates the proper information in paper-based environments in order to address the concerns of the customer.

In an EDM environment, the information is immediately available and can be emailed or faxed right from the CSR's desk. Now the CSR and the customer are having a productive conversation.