Taking ECM
From Concept to Reality

Here are five elements that can help organizations establish well-defined and robust management of all content.

Jeffrey D. Bridges, Esq.

Enterprise content management (ECM) combines hardware, software, and infrastructure to enable an organization to store, manage, and access information generated throughout the organization, without regard to its form or source. ECM manages a range of content as varied as e-mail archives, radio frequency identification-tagged inventory, and document management of paper files, to name a few.

Much like a human hand needs all five fingers to function properly, five elements are essential for grasping and manipulating ECM from concept to reality: 1) Leadership, 2) Methodology, 3) Change Management, 4) Records Management, and 5) Taxonomy. Working together, these five fundamentals ensure success in ECM. Without any one of the five elements, an organization is left with the latest technology sitting in its box.

Using these five basics, ECM is successfully implemented when:

- Users are aware of its presence, but they use it intuitively without detracting from their usual duties

- Content within the system is collected, identified, organized, and stored in an easily accessible medium and disposed of when and if appropriate

- New technologies introduced into the system are integrated seamlessly within ECM

To realize success with ECM, the five elements must come into play jointly. From the moment an organization commits to managing its glut of content in a cohesive fashion until final success, all of the following components are wholly interrelated.

Leadership

Top-down leadership is essential for ECM to achieve its purpose. While leadership should originate at the executive level, practical leadership and direction stem from the project lead and the governance committee. Executive sponsors, the project lead, and committee members together are the primary drivers of an organization's transition to a cohesive information management structure.

The sheer magnitude of an ECM project demands multiple "C-level" sponsors. Co-sponsorship by the chief information and chief financial officers and the general counsel offers visibility as well as a breadth of knowledge and skills in critical functions. Their support is essential to long-term success by ensuring continued focus and financial commitment throughout the project. This commitment will also resonate throughout their respective functions.

At the Core

This article

▶ Identifies five elements needed for enterprise content management (ECM) success

▶ Discusses how to successfully implement ECM

▶ Explains the importance of electronically stored information in any ECM program

The project leader is charged with the heavy lifting of implementing a successful ECM system. This person must combine exceptional project management and highly developed people skills, as the leader is the face of ECM to the organization, from CEO and board of directors to administrative staff and sales force. The leader must be sufficiently recognizable within the organization and must be highly credible. This role is generally assigned to a senior manager or to someone in a director-level position. While this person will likely have a full set of work-related responsibilities, the involvement of an ECM implementation requires that he or she be freed from all but the most flexible duties to devote full attention to the project.

The governance committee must be composed of individuals from various functions across the organization. This committee must be diverse and inclusive, comprising a combination of people – management and non-management and technical and non-technical positions – from across all major functional areas. There is even value in including new employees, as they are not yet familiar with the corporate culture and may offer an unbiased perspective. The goal of the committee is to determine the needs of the organization, select the best tool to meet those needs, and guide the implementation. If after full implementation, all functionality sought is present and a novice can navigate the system, the committee will have succeeded.

Methodology

ECM success centers on acceptance and approval by meeting the organization's business needs in the least disruptive manner. Methodologies may vary, but each should include certain basic steps:

- Determine the needs, goals, and expectations of the organization

- Create an inventory of all environments that ECM will encompass

- Identify possible solutions and assess against established requirements

- Test the solution as well as the various vendors under consideration

- Gain executive approval of the proposed solution

Determining needs requires understanding of the current status, which requires substantial contributions from the user community as well as an environmental inventory. Key stakeholder and user interviews throughout the organization, including in remote locations, provide valuable observations and input needed to assess current status. Including users in the evaluation process ensures a more meaningful product and its ultimate acceptance. The information accumulated defines the goals and metrics that gauge success.

These goals and metrics support the

strategic requirements that reflect the maturity and sophistication of the company's systems, industry, and workforce. Although legal and regulatory requirements are substantial motivators, they should not be viewed as exclusive. Determining strategic requirements demands that each organization gauge its needs against the following criteria, as well: type of industry, social history of the organization, litigation history, and the corporate culture as a whole.

Current status cannot be assessed without an inventory of what tools, software, and environments exist. This inventory addresses the technological side of the methodology and seeks to identify custom-created applications designed to accommodate a particular need or process. The inventory includes, among other things, e-mail exchange, and identifies all storage locations with a goal of identifying all potential sources and locations of the organization's records.

A survey of the functions used to identify the various types of applications running throughout the organization is a useful tool in developing the inventory. Do not assume that IT is aware of everything that has been added within the functional areas. Despite policies to the contrary, rogue applications have a way of working their way into a system, especially in a large organization dispersed to remote locations.

As a portion of this inventory, identify the electronic routing for each of the applications and the location of information throughout the electronic system. Include the location of obsolete and legacy information still stored by the organization. This information will reap early dividends if and when the organization is later faced with litigation. In addition, by creating this map of the electronically stored information (ESI) location, an organization will be better equipped to address the early disclosures required under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP), rule 26(f), resulting in immediate litigation costs savings. A comprehensive inventory of relevant information sites offers a convenient reference for developing the wish list of

Records Management Infrastructure Questions

- Does the records management infrastructure meet or exceed industry standards?

- Does it comply with established practices?

- Does it work at all levels?

- Has the records retention schedule been reviewed and updated during the past two years?

- Have the records management policies and procedures been reviewed and updated in the past two years?

- Are electronic records included in these rules?

- Do the retention schedule, policy, and procedures accommodate for ECM?

- Are records stored and disposed of based on the retention schedule?

- Is there a mechanism to halt the routine destruction of records in the event of an audit, investigation, or litigation?

components to include in ECM.

To adequately evaluate possible ECM components and packages, leaders should develop a wish list without regard to price. This wish list should focus on accessibility, navigability, and scalability while requiring seamless operation for the users. The wish list should be compiled after exercises that include observing possible products in use, brainstorming ideas relying on committee members' accumulated information gathered from their functions, and listening to user responses on how processes are performed and their observed deficiencies, including retrieving less-recently stored information. By not hurrying this process, a variety of different perspectives and observations can be considered.

After a thorough review of products has yielded a vision of the solution that meets the wish list, candidly evaluate the marketplace. Compare various products for functionality and costs. Costs include not just the product itself – i.e., hardware and software – but also costs associated with implementation, change management, and retooling workflows, to name a few. Certain costs will exist regardless of the product chosen, while others are incurred or enhanced based on the prod-

uct. These extraordinary expenses are the real costs to assess against the value added.

With a favored candidate selected, a proof of concept (POC) mini-pilot offers a good evaluative tool. The POC is conducted by a functional group that is representative of the organization, yet savvy enough to identify the positives and negatives of the proposed program. Enterprise roll-out failure can be avoided by adequately testing a variety of extreme scenarios. An online collaborative journal offers a convenient location for each user to record observations and review co-workers' notes. A robust journal, in turn, provides an objective basis for the committee's product recommendation.

Upon completion of the POC, it is essential for the committee to agree on the proposed solution. Its members jointly evaluate the lessons gained from the POC and develop a single-minded recommendation to the executive sponsors. This recommendation provides the sponsors sufficient information to secure ultimate approval of the ECM plan and adequate funding from the executive leadership.

Change Management

Successful change management motivates users to do their jobs differently.

> The key to change is acceptance by the workforce. The more people who are part of that process and make contributions, the smoother the transition. The change champions are the voice for change.

Educating people about the advantages and benefits, delivered via a designed strategy, is essential. This strategy consists of three components: a plan, change champions, and communications and training. The first steps of change management commence before naming the committee.

The change plan concentrates on the full life cycle of change from start to finish. It identifies milestones, including triggering events and specific targets to evaluate progress. Starting with the initial ECM announcement, it outlines the forms and content of communications and training as well as identifies the "change champions" and defines metrics of success.

Change champions represent each functional area of the organization and are led by a change manager. The change manager ideally is drawn from senior management and is accountable for the success of the change. This manager should be actively involved in the committee and report progress to it, as well as serves as a conduit of change in both directions.

When designating the change champions, the temptation is to assign this role to the ECM committee members. While there may be instances where such action would make sense, as a rule, non-ECM-committee members are preferred. The key to change is acceptance by the workforce. The more people who are part of that process and make contributions, the smoother the transition. The change champions are the voice for change to the

organization while expressing the concerns of their individual functions. They act as a reality check by evaluating success at the grass roots.

The third major element of change management is communication and training. Many of the same concepts discussed here apply to later discussions of records management communications and training. Because much of the hard costs associated with change management occur in training and, to a lesser extent, communication, consolidating efforts will minimize costs.

Communications planning for change management begins the day senior executives make the commitment to proceed. The initial communication announces the decision to pursue an ECM solution and describes the vision and benefits for the organization. This announcement serves as affirmation from the CEO of his commitment to the project. It should occur before the committee members are selected as a primer for future action. Periodic progress updates – sent no less frequently than monthly and more often as events dictate – will follow.

After the ECM products are chosen and implementation is underway, two separate training modules for the general users and records coordinators are needed. The users' training consists of a product overview providing generalized awareness of the basic operations, but with specific applications left to functional area training. Records coordinators, as the records subject-matter

experts, are well-suited to undertake that responsibility for ECM, as well. Because training the users will be the records coordinators' responsibility, the records coordinator training must be correspondingly robust.

Records Management

The importance of records management infrastructure to the success of ECM cannot be overstated. A January 2007 Gartner Market Scope unequivocally advised readers to "consider records management as an integral part of your enterprise content infrastructure." The records management infrastructure is the guidance for management and retention of the content. There are several basic evaluative questions to address in broad terms related to records management infrastructure. (See sidebar on page 32.)

A good records management infrastructure is a three-pronged proposition: people, process, and program. To be effective, all three must work in tandem.

Records management is everyone's responsibility. It requires executive support and endorsement. Specific roles are assigned based on the organization's needs. At minimum, each organization should have a senior management person responsible for its records. This person is an authority on the management and storage of both electronic and paper records and has a yeoman's understanding of the electronic storage environment as well as the laws affecting records management and litigation readiness.

Training should be more than a PowerPoint or computer-based presentantion given to new employees. It must move users beyond the rules to intuitively apply those rules to their jobs.

Within each function, a designated records coordinator serves as subject-matter expert for that function's records, both for creation and storage, as well as any relevant peculiarities. In most organizations, records coordinator is a role, in addition to their usual duties, entrusted to an employee with appropriate skills and acumen. This person is the liaison between the records management staff and the users. Coordinators provide day-to-day updated training within the function and are responsible for ensuring their functions' records management practices are compliant.

Due to the expedited requirements of the FRCP, the role of ESI coordinator has become a necessity for litigation preparedness. This person must be knowledgeable of the electronic storage environment and policies and procedures governing records, as well as legal hold processes. In the event of litigation, he or she will be an immediate source of information for counsel and assist with many aspects of e-discovery. The U.S. District Court for Maryland adopted Local Rules requiring litigants to designate an "ESI coordinator" who is available for these discussions. Other district courts are following Maryland's lead.

Process is defined as the rules controlling the organization's records. It consists of an enterprise-wide policy, complemented by appropriate procedures and a holistic records retention schedule. The policy is an unequivocal statement governing the information life cycle, regard-less of media, ensuring that records are managed and retained consistently throughout the organization based on a legally compliant retention schedule. It establishes roles and responsibilities of the various people within the organization and defines the circumstances that require the organization to halt records destruction. Procedures outline the workflows that implement the intent of the records management policy. The retention schedule identifies records by classification and their business process and establishes their retention based on business and legal requirements.

The program component includes communications, training, and review. Its purpose is to enhance user awareness, ensure compliance, and constantly improve the records infrastructure.

Communications and training are intertwined and exist to improve user skills and understanding. An effective and well-executed communications plan is the least-expensive and most-effective means of increasing user competence and knowledge. It uses all corporate resources available, such as newsletters, intranet, and portal postings. It is a general plan that identifies objectives by discrete topics and specific publication dates.

Training should be more than a PowerPoint or computer-based presentation given to new employees. It must move users beyond the rules to intuitively apply those rules to their job. To accomplish that goal requires a holistic approach, as every interaction with the user is a training opportunity. For that reason, training and communications are planned and executed in tandem. When applied thoughtfully, the goals of heightened awareness and modified user behavior are attainable.

Review has as primary objectives, consistent compliance with the rules and evaluation of the success of training/communications while improving the infrastructure. Traditional audits that only identify deficiencies do not adequately accomplish these goals. An objective standard of specific questions that report positives, as well as negatives, is preferable.

An annual review of the overall records management infrastructure ensures its continued competence. It assesses records staffing as well as records coordinators for both correct quantity and quality. It evaluates policies and procedures for their relevance and the records retention schedule for its currency. It considers the records storage environment for adequacy and security. In short, the annual review measures the organization against industry best practices and standards that emerged in the ensuing year.

Taxonomy

If the first four elements are the fingers, the fifth element, taxonomy, is the opposable thumb that enables the electronic hand of ECM to identify and grasp valuable information. Without a well-developed and constantly evolving taxonomy, including a thesaurus and pre-defined metadata capture, the best ECM

technology is useless.

Taxonomy is simply a means of categorizing information based on its purpose and use. A well-developed taxonomy is derived from the word usage and business culture of the organization. In that context, an organization's successful information identification, access, and administration are dependent upon the use of a unique, structured taxonomy. That taxonomy also requires the use and adaptation of unique terms (nomenclature) drawn from each industry associated with the organization's functions and specialized lines of business.

Taxonomy is hierarchical. In order to function well, taxonomy defines the identities of information and record sources. It matches both the structure and nomenclature used in an organization's records retention schedule. Taxonomic rules are used to identify electronic pathways, assign document titles, and index information created, received, and retained within the electronic environment.

Included as part of the taxonomy effort is a thesaurus, which is a reference to acronyms. It serves as the authority source for enterprise-wide naming conventions and indexing. When there are multiple terms used to identify information, objects, or common industry-related concepts, the thesaurus identifies the preferred terms for identification and indexing.

The thesaurus' content is based upon nomenclature derived from a combination of the business process, history, and organizational practices for adapting unique terminology. The thesaurus also provides guidance for applying these rules to terminology typically found in the records retention schedule and in use throughout the organization.

Once populated in the ECM system, taxonomy will continue to evolve as new terms of art emerge within the organization or business culture. These emerging terms of art will post to the thesaurus based on embedded artificial intelligence. The longer the system operates, the more robust a taxonomy will become.

Applying the four fingers and thumb approach during the early ECM evalua-

tion stage will pay dividends later in the process. These dividends appear in the form of well-defined and robust management of all content, requiring little user involvement. Users will be aware of ECM's existence with little to no disruption to their work day, as there is no more

stress encountered than in creating and storing documents on a network-shared drive. As new applications are added, they will integrate throughout the organization with little or no user disruption. ECM allows each user to do his or her job while it does its job. ◗◖

Jeffrey D. Bridges, Esq., is an associate in the corporate department in the Atlanta office of Locke, Lord, Bissell & Liddell LLP, where he focuses his practice on records and information management, enterprise content management, and litigation readiness. Previously, he served as the records practice manager and chief legal counsel for the Cadence Group, an information-management consulting firm in Atlanta. Bridges credits two co-workers from the Cadence Group, Lee Pendergraft and Mary Sullivan, for their valued contributions to his understanding of the mechanics of taxonomy. Bridges may be contacted at jbridges@ lockelord.com.

References

"Believe it – eDiscovery Technology Spending to Top $4.8 Billion by 2011." Forrester *Market Overview*, 11 December 2006.

Chin, Kenneth. "Market Scope for Records Management 2007." *Gartner Core Research Note*, 30 January 2007.

"Suggested Protocol for Discovery of Electronically Stored Information," *In re: Electronically Stored Information*, The United States District Court for Maryland, 2007. Available at *www.mdd.uscourts.gov/localrules/localrules.html*.