

# The Vital Asset for Today's Government

Investing in new enterprise content management technology delivers greater value for budgets, efficiency and public service



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### Should We Stay or Should We Go?

In the lifecycle of every government IT investment comes an important decision point: stay or go? Should we stay with the familiarity of our current system, even with its limitations? Or should we go ahead with investments of money, time and staff effort in a promising but new technology solution?

Many government organizations today are reaching this decision point for their enterprise content management (ECM) systems. Also pushing public sector organizations to this decision point are several new drivers for delivering more information online, with greater timeliness and responsiveness. James Burke, director of Information Technology Solutions for Olmsted County, Minn., brings up one timely example: "Complying with the Affordable Care Act will bring a lot of change and new work to our Community Services department, where we expect the medical assistance caseload to increase by 30 percent. To handle this increase, we need to either find and hire a bunch of people in a hurry or mitigate the impact by using technology to enhance the productivity of our current employees."<sup>1</sup>

Additional drivers that state and local governments face include:

- **New stakeholder expectations for online information.** Many public sector organizations are choosing to follow the same mandates that apply to federal agencies for providing digital access to public data and documents. In addition, governments at all levels are receiving more Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for documents and are looking for easier and less costly ways to fulfill them.
- **New demands for service efficiency and effectiveness.** Citizens increasingly expect online access to government

services, especially through self-service Web portals and automated information delivery via social media. Constrained budgets also mean that governments must look for ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of every operational function and constituent service.

- **Support for data-driven decisions.** There is a movement within many government organizations to become more data-driven when making decisions. To be successful, this approach requires timely, flexible and useful access to data and documents no matter where they "live" within the organization.
- **Increasing collaboration.** Government work increasingly involves collaboration across agencies, departments or functions. Everyone participating in this collaboration needs the ability to access and share common information and processes.
- **New types of technology.** Mobility, virtualization and cloud-based applications are examples of technology changes that have a far-reaching impact on IT services. Compatibility with these technologies is also an important factor in decisions about new investments.
- **Changing employee expectations.** As baby boomers retire from the government workforce, their younger replacements bring higher expectations for technology use. Mobile, social and cloud technologies are at the center of how these employees receive and distribute information and how they perform work tasks.

The scope and pace of these drivers mean most legacy ECM systems can't keep up. The reason: Legacy systems typically require difficult, lengthy and costly customization efforts for adding any new capability. While this reason might be sufficient on its own to justify a new ECM solution,

limited IT budgets require careful decision-making. Any new technology must offer a “too high to pass by” level of long-term value in order to receive investment approval.

Moreover, this long-term perspective isn’t just about investing in an ECM system, it’s also about investing in information as an important government asset.

### Government Information: An Asset Ready for Investment

How many of your organization’s functions could continue to run if they were cut off from their sources of information? Most likely, the answer is very few, if any. Data, images, forms, maps, audio and video files, and documents are too essential for running government operations and services.

Is your government treating and investing in information as a critical asset? Perhaps in one way, by protecting information through online capture and storage. But perhaps not yet in ways that can fully realize the power of information for improving operations, service delivery and decision-making.

Two local government IT leaders point out the value of information as an asset. “Bits and pieces of data by themselves aren’t really helpful,” says Michael Armstrong, CIO for the city of Corpus Christi, Texas. “It’s when you begin to combine different kinds of data from different kinds of systems that you begin to see patterns that can lead you to much better decisions.”<sup>2</sup>

When information is viewed as an asset, new ideas easily emerge for how to use it to full advantage. Describing how Olmsted County evaluated a new ECM system, Burke notes, “We weren’t looking just to upgrade from one electronic file cabinet capability to a newer one. We really wanted to have a robust content engine that would drive an automated workflow capability.”

Start looking around your own organization and it will be easy to see the benefits of managing information as an asset. Most visibly, government employees are able to work more efficiently and are better able to serve the public when they have easier and more useful access to information. Behind the scenes, better information helps



### Worksheet: Key Information Assets

The categories below will help you identify the most important information assets for a government entity.

- ✓ Documents and data sets that are required for initiating a service or function, e.g., a permit, social services or job application.
- ✓ Information that is essential to government operations, e.g., maintenance records and work orders, purchase orders and accounts payable documents.
- ✓ Public records, e.g., council and board meeting agendas and minutes, property records.
- ✓ Internal communications and documentation, e.g., project correspondence and proposal comments.

to increase the value of other technology investments when it is integrated with departmental or function-specific applications in order to streamline tasks, improve collaboration and enable shared services.

### Making New ECM Investments to Increase Information Value

Many government IT departments today are looking at ECM systems as one area of technology that’s worthy of new investments. This decision is supported by the strong advantages offered by innovative ECM solutions.

**Better data management for better decision-making.** Most government organizations face the problem of too much data and not enough useful information. Armstrong notes that the growing amount of diverse content creates the IT challenge of packaging unstructured data in a way that’s useful for decision-makers. By using the ECM system to organize and structure data, officials receive higher-quality information. In turn, that means less reliance on potentially outdated assumptions and justifications for decisions. “There’s no more reason to accept ‘I just know it’ as a rationale,” says Armstrong.

## Is Your Current ECM Solution Up to the Task?

After you've identified the information assets and the information drivers for your organization, it's time to assess the current ECM system. Can it deliver the new capabilities necessary to truly manage information as an asset? Use the evaluation criteria in the table to determine whether your current ECM system is ready or if it is time to consider a replacement.

| Content Management Need   | Required ECM System Capabilities   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Document Management</b><br/>Features for receiving, indexing and managing access and storage of documents, whether scanned from paper or imported in electronic form.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Converts paper documents to scanned images or electronic records with flexible indexing.</li> <li>Offers simple creation of online forms for entering new data.</li> <li>Supports transparent, rules-based management of records retention.</li> <li>Provides flexible and efficient tools for information searches and access in a Web-based portal or mobile device app.</li> <li>Stores data in templates for information that is common to multiple documents or workflows.</li> <li>Scales to support a rapidly growing base of documents, workflows, users and system integration needs without a comparable increase in staffing levels for implementation and support.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Workflow Automation and Application Integration</b><br/>Getting government information online is a start, but measurable improvements are possible when that information can trigger automated processes. This automation becomes even more powerful when the content and workflows can be integrated with other systems.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Automates document processing with workflows that can be repeated across functions or tailored to specific tasks and procedures.</li> <li>Integrates with other applications to reduce duplication of data and effort, along with the associated potential for errors.</li> <li>Enables shared services and a standardized ECM solution across the agency or government.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Records Security</b><br/>Cyber security is becoming a more important consideration in light of increasingly sophisticated online attacks and growing concerns about personal data privacy.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains secure backups and archives of data files and documents.</li> <li>Supports both role-based and user-based controls for file and document access.</li> <li>Allows development of controlled portals for self-service access to public records.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Management Audits</b><br/>Regular audits of the ECM system and how it is used are essential for meeting compliance requirements and improving data security.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains an audit trail of all document access.</li> <li>Supports content management audits to verify compliance with policies and procedures.</li> <li>Provides flexible capabilities for generating reports of ECM system activity.</li> </ul>   |

**Implementation of shared services.** IT services that are shared across agencies or departments have proven their value for ubiquitous functions such as email. Today, extending the shared services concept to document-driven processes opens tremendous potential for cost savings and operational efficiency.

State and local governments are already developing shared information and collaborative work services, both within their own domains and in cooperation with other jurisdictions. “The biggest pain points for information sharing and workflow are usually across multiple areas, so we look for projects that will benefit multiple departments,” says Burke.

**Comprehensive tools for workflow automation.** A form is completed, a service request is made, a case is opened. These are among the seemingly simple actions that start a cascade of work processes, review and approval steps, and additional data gathering for many government functions. Throughout all of this work one thing remains constant: the need to access all pertinent information easily, in one place and with minimal duplication of document handling and data entry.

Workflow capabilities meet this need both for content that is entered directly into the ECM system and through integration with other enterprise systems. Workflows can both pull information from and push information to enterprise resource planning (ERP), geographic information system (GIS) and customer relationship management (CRM) solutions; and other specialized applications. In this sense, workflow isn’t just automation, it’s also integrative middle-ware — connecting disparate systems and providing an underlying foundation for integrated information.

“The real power of a content management system is in the workflow capabilities,” says Burke. “It’s the ability to leverage information from the time when that content is entered in order to drive things happening in the organization.”

**Information scalability and adaptability.** Because an ECM system maintains all content in a standardized, central repository, IT can provide access to data without creating silos of data in individual departmental application native formats. “Getting rid of silos will become even

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more important as our data continues to grow rapidly, and more departments and more applications need to access and share information,” says Todd Shanley, IT manager for Cabarrus County in North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

To match changing information needs and work processes, the ECM system should be easy to adapt and customize without an extensive development effort. Adaptability also means having the tools to effectively deliver information through a variety of formats to serve both internal and external communications.

## How Governments are Making the Most of ECM

Forward-thinking governments have invested in a new ECM system in order to address specific information challenges and improve operations and service delivery.

### Eliminating Data Silos

When it comes to data, the Cabarrus County IT Department has a goal to eliminate silos and create standardized formats for storage in a central repository. “We don’t want to support legacy applications just because it is the easiest way to access data stored in their native format,” explains Shanley. “But data conversions to a standardized format can be expensive and painful, especially for information that has a large number of records and requirements for lengthy retention periods. We’ve found a workable solution by exporting the existing data as a report for storage in our ECM system, then we can eliminate the legacy application.”

Identifying this strategy to manage both stored and new data was important because the IT team is using a common ECM system to serve most of the county’s 23

## Checklist: Criteria for Evaluating a New ECM Solution

Use the factors below as a quick checklist to guide your review of potential ECM systems.

- ✓ Comprehensive tools for managing data capture and storage, as well as compliance with retention requirements.
- ✓ Process orientation with powerful capabilities for automating workflows based on data and documents.
- ✓ Support for repeatable shared services internally within the organization and collaboration services that involve both documents and processes with other agencies or entities.
- ✓ Open architecture for integration with core business systems such as ERP, CRM and GIS, as well as function-specific applications.
- ✓ Adaptability to allow easy customization for specialized information and workflow needs, supported by created development tools and resources.
- ✓ Non-proprietary file formats with federated search and scalability for highly diverse data and document types.
- ✓ Support for secure data and workflow access from mobile devices, with role-based protections.
- ✓ In-depth audit trails that enhance information detection and integrity.

departments. By adopting an enterprise view, the IT team is developing integrations with applications for shared services such as accounts payable and payroll. Even the office all-in-one printers are integrated, serving as an input device that allows employees to scan expense report receipts and other documents for storage and workflow activation in the ECM system.

“Integration with our ECM system is so important to our work that it’s now in the top five requirements for every application we consider that involves document management,” says Shanley.

### Managing Tremendous Data Growth

For the city of Corpus Christi, data storage has already reached 33 terabytes and is growing by another half terabyte every six weeks. But while managing this data volume is itself a significant activity, the bigger challenge comes from the unstructured form of most data.

“We manage a tremendous amount of unstructured data and it’s very hard to get value out of that for process automation and decision-making,” says Armstrong. “As we roll out our ECM system, we’re paying a lot of attention to structuring data because that form is a whole lot easier to manage.”

Although structured data in the ECM system will be used in multiple departments, an important new service will be sharing data locally for emergency management purposes. “In our area we have a port, refineries, chemical plants and military installations,” says Armstrong. “We know that being able to share the right information with other local organizations is critical to emergency preparedness and response.”

### Enabling a Continuous Improvement Organization

For Olmsted County, “Having an ECM system is changing how we do business and it’s helping us move to a continuous improvement organization,” says Burke. The positive changes brought by the county’s system include:

- Integrating with other applications for structured document storage and streamlined automation of document workflows
- Capturing documents not as images but as data that can be searched and integrated with other applications for greater usefulness
- Eliminating data redundancy and enabling templates for common information such as name and address
- Implementing stronger data security and privacy controls

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As the county moves forward with ECM implementation across multiple departments, two other important benefits are emerging: knowledge capture and improved citizen service. “This is a crucial time for knowledge capture because nearly 17 percent of the county’s employees are eligible to retire in the next five years,” says Burke. “And by looking at the ECM analytics, we’re able to recognize opportunities for more efficient workflows and delivering better services to citizens.”

### Insights Gained from ECM Experience

The IT professionals interviewed for this white paper offered several recommendations to their peers in other governments based on the experiences they gained from implementing new ECM solutions.

- **Evaluate the architecture.** Look for an ECM solution built upon an open architecture that will allow you to leverage other applications, especially for automating workflows.
- **Identify departmental requirements.** Before launching the search for a new ECM system, take the time to define the requirements of individual departments. “These discussions will help you deliver what they really need, not just what they ask for,” says Shanley.

- **Define taxonomies.** As part of establishing ECM governance, create the data and document taxonomies that a new ECM solution will need to support.
- **Assess the fit with other technologies.** Cloud-based and mobile applications, as well as virtualization, are trends that will impact your implementation, functionality and support requirements for any new IT investment.
- **Prepare for changes in staff roles.** As IT systems move away from in-house implementation, IT teams will likewise move away from providing application support to managing integration projects and cloud-based solutions.
- **Develop or apply a maturity model.** Understanding where your IT organization currently operates on the spectrum of a maturity model can help in planning new investments such as ECM. For example, the decision factors for investments will be different if your organization operates only in reaction mode to needs as they arise, compared to making investment decisions based on well-defined IT and enterprise strategies.

### When the Right Decision is “Go”

At a time when every government budget dollar is under intense scrutiny, investments in new or refreshed technologies must prove they deliver high value in terms of cost savings, efficiencies and public service. Given the increasing importance of information in every aspect of government, it’s clear that managing information as an asset — and choosing the right ECM system to support it — is the place for renewed investment of mission-critical IT funds.

### Endnotes

1. All quotes from James Burke from CDG interview conducted July 3, 2013.
2. All quotes from Michael Armstrong from CDG interview conducted July 1, 2013.
3. All quotes from Todd Shanley from CDG interview conducted July 2, 2013.

### Resources

- Factors and calculations developed by Ramsey County, Minn., for evaluating the return on investment (ROI) for an ECM system, [www.laserfiche.com/SolutionExchange/Article/7046](http://www.laserfiche.com/SolutionExchange/Article/7046)
- Center for Digital Government White Paper, “Streamlining the Business of Government,” [www.govtech.com/library/papers/Streamlining-the-Business-of-Government.html](http://www.govtech.com/library/papers/Streamlining-the-Business-of-Government.html)



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