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TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR » DECEMBER 2009/JANUARY 2010

BY KIMBERLY SAMUELSON, LASERFICHE

Building an INFORMATION FOUNDATION

ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ARE A FRAMEWORK FOR IT GOVERNANCE.

At its most fundamental level, government is in the business of information. Yet it's one thing to collect information and quite another to make it useful. As simple and humble as it sounds, usefulness of information and systems has emerged as the gold standard. Unfortunately sharing and usefulness of information in government are still in their infancy, according to a number of public CIOs.

Many municipalities have Web sites that are essentially billboards to push out information. Some of these sites do have capabilities, such as forms, to pull in information. While these sites are more useful than billboards, they are far from providing true collaboration — and useful communication — with constituents.

Public communication is just one problem. What about internal communications? Many CIOs face a tangle of departments, policies, information silos and systems, including legacy equipment.

And unfortunately, legacy systems prolong legacy attitudes.

Control and security are critical to government. The challenge is controlling information while letting it be processed and accessed appropriately. This is where the roles of IT and automation can shine, especially if compliance and e-discovery requirements are incorporated.

Managing information assets is the key to service allocation and delivery, but how do we get there? Establishing a channel to allow the free flow of information is fundamental to these efforts. Although security is important, locking down content won't enable anything or anyone.

GOVERNANCE THROUGH 'ECM'

Let's talk about usefulness and start thinking about enabling enterprisewide information management. Let's also talk about governance as where we want to go.

THE GOAL IS TO ENABLE AN **ECM ARCHITECTURE THAT ALLOWS ACTIVITIES** TO HAVE HIGH IMPACT ON OPERATIONS OR SERVICES.

If we consider usefulness to be the gold standard, then government needs information governance as a framework to make information truly useful — ultimately allowing better services to citizens.

This framework consists of information, information management, process management and risk management, which sounds rather overwhelming from a technology planning perspective. A good, useful tactical start would be to begin a needs analysis that leads to the implementation of a content-management application. It's not the answer to all information governance issues, but it's a big push in the right direction.

Enterprise content management (ECM) has moved way beyond the old finding-and-filing days to a technology that not only manages information, but also processes it. In some of the most innovative uses I've seen, ECM serves as an integrative middleware, which speaks to its agility. It can manage information regardless of its source or use, or it can be a uniform repository for all types of information assets. ECM allows information to be truly useful and is a foundational component of information governance.

Specific to ECM in government, four forces are driving the adaptation of the enterprise approach to planning and deploying content management:

1. the compounding growth of content generated by government and citizens;
2. the need to integrate that content within government's work processes;
3. the need to support user content access and collaboration within multiple systems; and
4. the need to maintain governance and control over content to ensure security of information and regulatory compliance.

BUILDING HIGH-IMPACT ECM

How do you get started? Begin with a governance committee. While it sounds like a grand notion, consensus building and a common approach to knowledge management capabilities are crucial. Rather than seeing it as a burden, look at it as exercising positive control over your methods, data and systems. Include department heads, legal, records management and, of course, the IT staff. Of special note should be the departments that sit horizontally across your organization. The more buy-in you get, the less likely you'll have to deal with the siloed "it's my way or the highway" attitudes.

This common approach will allow you to develop standards. While sometimes difficult to get to, standards make everyone's life easier.

Start by standardizing your metadata across applications. Establish best practices and be willing to let them evolve. Next, build your use cases and ensure that you can enable functional, repeatable processes that take user preferences into account. Interoperability is the key. To do this, you'll need flexibility and agility in your ECM application.

The goal is to enable an ECM architecture that allows activities to have high impact on operations or services. High impact can be as simple as eliminating a storeroom of paper or as complicated as letting citizens purchase copies of accident reports via the Web. Some departments might only want search and retrieval, some might require workflows, some might be required to do a lot of forms processing, and some might need external access to the system through Microsoft SharePoint.

Used in these ways, ECM becomes an integrative middleware within an enterprise. It can enable processes and generate innovative solutions. For example:

- IT staff for Okotoks, Alberta, uses ECM as a permitting application that generates revenue. By creating a simple workflow through the city's records, clerk's and finance offices, permit requests now come in via the city Web site; the permit is automatically processed, paid for and issued.
- York County, Pa.'s Central Booking Center uses a video arraignment booth and custom e-form to automate prisoner processing and case distribution through its ECM system.
- In Bakersfield, Calif., Information Services Director Bob Trammell has integrated the city's enterprise resource planning and ECM systems so work crews can track costs associated with each graffiti cleanup. In the process, crews create what are considered graffiti mug shots, which the police can use to arrest repeat offenders — and the prosecutor can use to mount a civil case against the tagger's family to recoup cleanup costs.

LAST, BUT NOT LEAST: CONTROLS

Finally you must have all of your controls in place — including security, compliance and records management. All of these controls should be transparent to your users — good governance is transparent. Your ECM strategy should allow information control, but give users the flexibility they need to do their work. Putting the power in the users' hands will lower the burden on your staff, and enable the user to make better, faster decisions and ultimately better citizen services. ☉

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Tel: 562-988-1688 Toll Free: 800-985-8533 Email: info@laserfiche.com