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# Almost Paperless

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE GETS CLOSER AND CLOSER TO ITS GOAL.

BY TED NEEDLEMAN

*Every few years or so, a new application superstar emerges.* For the past several years, CRM, or customer relationship management, was the application getting the attention. More recently, the term “document management solution” is the one that you hear bandied about.

Many users equate document management with having a paperless office. While document management may be a core technology for a paperless office, it’s neither the same thing as a paperless office, nor a panacea for paper clutter.

In fact, exactly what document management consists of depends on whom you are talking to, and what their agenda is.

With some applications, you know exactly what to expect in terms of features and capabilities. For example, accounting applications are pretty much cut-and-dried. An accounts receivable application is going to track bills for services and products, and record payments when made. Accounts payable is going to do the same for purchases made on credit. And general ledger software is going to consolidate the transactions from these and other subsidiary ledgers, as well as record adjustments, then produce standard reports such as a general ledger, a trial balance and financial statements.

That’s far from the case when it comes to document management.

There’s no industry standard as to what constitutes a document management system, or even what a “document” is. The net result is that there are applications in the several-hundred-dollar price range that can be legitimately tagged as document management systems, as well as applications costing hundreds of thousands of dollars that are also called document management systems. Obviously, the applications at these two extremes differ in both functionality and scale.

With all of this uncertainty, where do you start to decide if a document management system will provide your entity with enough benefits to justify its cost, and if it will, what features are necessary?

The first step is to understand the different kinds of docu-

ments that you work with, and just what managing them might entail.

## WHAT IS A ‘DOCUMENT’?

Defining a “document” is a little like defining a “widget” — it’s pretty much up to you or the vendor of a document management application to make of it what you will.

For the purposes of this discussion, we’ll go with a broad definition — that a document is anything that contains information or data that we want to be able to store and retrieve. Under this definition, a sales order or purchase receipt is a document, as is the image of a canceled check returned to you by the bank (in lieu of the actual physical check). An e-mail can be a document, as can a fax. In many companies, even a “While you were out” message might be a document that you want to be able to access at a future time. Your Outlook calendar is another potential document.

To some extent, how broadly you define the documents that need to be managed will have some affect on the application that your company will require.

Another factor which has a large affect on application suitability is the degree to which you need to manage the information contained in the documents. At the entry level of document management, managing the “document” is often simply a matter of storing it in an appropriate folder on a hard disk on your PC or on the network.

Some of the entry-level document managers, such as Nuance’s PaperPort Professional 11 and NewSoft’s Presto PageManager 7 Deluxe, also allow you to specify the format in which the document will be stored. Often, with a paper document that is scanned into the DM application, this format is PDF to save disk space and make the document easier to transmit and handle.

An important part of any document management application is OCR, or optical character recognition. That’s because many documents are captured as images, rather than as read-

able text. Running a document, regardless of the source, through OCR allows it to be searched by the document management application. PaperPort Professional 11 is particularly adept at this function of document management, as the vendor is also the developer of the popular OmniPage OCR application.

Many multi-function printers and scanners are supplied with one or the other of these packages. For example, some of Lexmark's MFPs are provided with PageManager, as are a number of scanners from Plustek, while many units from Visioneer, Xerox and other vendors are provided with a copy of PaperPort.

At the very least, this type of entry-level DM application allows you to turn document images into user-editable text, and store documents from a wide variety of sources in a logical manner, so that they can be retrieved at a later date.

## IT'S IN THERE

That brings up another facet of document management — content management. In some applications, such as those developed for Sarbanes-Oxley or other compliance requirements, being able to backtrack to a particular e-mail, invoice or memo is often all that is necessary. Even entry-level document management applications can accomplish that. A lower-end DM application, however, might require that you specify one or more keywords that describe the content of each document being stored. These keywords are stored in a table with pointers that allow a search engine to locate the documents that contain the desired keywords.

As the document management applications get more sophisticated, so do the ways that documents can be filed and retrieved.

In many document management implementations, it's the content of the document that is given primary importance. The search engines of these applications are capable of extensive filtering and searches using binary operators ("and," "or," "not," and the like.) This provides the ability to

retrieve a document or documents on the basis of what they contain, rather than where or how they are stored.

Content management is usually a feature of higher-end management systems. These use heuristic rules and tables to detect content-specific words embedded in the document, and present them to you for use as keywords attached to the document header when the document is being stored. It is these keywords that the application scans to try and retrieve the documents that you specify during a search. In the more entry-level document management applications, the software will ask that you determine what keywords you want associated with a document, and often require that you enter them manually.

## SENDING OUT AN SOS

Document storage and retrieval and content management are two facets of document management. A third is document and content routing. This type of application is more prevalent in larger organizations, or in those that use a higher-end MFP or high-speed scanner.

A document and content routing application, such as the popular Omtool AccuRoute, allows you to scan or otherwise capture a document, and automatically send copies of it to the appropriate recipients. Generally, the routing is managed by a table for handling specific types of documents, or documents from a specific source. For example, you can build a distribution list for the weekly P&L report, and automatically send it to dozens of recipients when scanning it once.

You can, however, override these distribution lists if desired. One major advantage of a tool such as AccuRoute is that the software keeps a record of what document was routed to which recipients. This makes AccuRoute and its ilk very compatible with Sarbanes-Oxley and other compliance requirements. You also receive many of the benefits of more limited document management, such as document compression and smart document storage and retrieval.

## Document management software vendors

### DocuXplorer

Archive Power Systems Inc.  
New York City  
(212) 496-9871  
www.docuxplorer.com  
Pricing: Two users —  
\$1,600, plus \$250 to \$500  
for QuickBooks integration

### CNG-SAFE

Cabinet NG Inc.  
Madison, Ala.  
(800) 621-6501  
www.cabinetng.com  
Pricing: \$995 per user.

### AccuRoute — Financial

Omtool Ltd.  
Andover, Mass.  
(800) 886-7845  
www.omtool.com  
Pricing: Contact vendor.

### PageManager 7 Deluxe

NewSoft America Inc.  
Milpitas Calif.  
(408) 503-1200  
www.newsoftinc.com  
Pricing: \$89.

### AutoStore

Notable Solutions Inc.  
Rockville, Md.  
(240) 683-8400  
www.nsius.com  
Pricing: Contact vendor or dealer.

### PaperPort Professional 11

Nuance  
Burlington, Mass.  
(781) 565-5000  
www.nuance.com  
Pricing: \$199.

### DocuShare

Xerox Corp.  
Stamford, Conn.  
(800) 735-7749  
http://docushare.xerox.com  
Pricing: Contact vendor.

## AS WITH MANY APPLICATIONS, DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT IS CONCEPTUALLY SIMPLE, BUT MAY BE A BEAR TO SET UP AND ACTUALLY GET GOING. DON'T LET THAT STOP YOU. THE PAYBACKS IN TIME SAVED ARE BOTH LARGE AND IMMEDIATE.

Finally, document management applications are often paired or integrated with a more generalized business process management system. These applications are more oriented around the flow of documents through an organization, rather than the content of the document itself (though content and the ability to retrieve it is certainly of primary importance, even in BPM applications).

### TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

Document or content management is usually a fairly time-consuming application to initially install, though it can save a considerable amount of time and effort over extended use.

That makes some of the higher-end DM applications that are generally targeted at the enterprise user attractive to a smaller company that anticipates needing to scale up.

For example, Xerox's DocuShare is a document and content management system that simply scales up as you add more user licenses. The underlying document database doesn't change, so you can start out with a five-user license and simply buy additional licenses as needed. When you get into very high document volumes, you may want to ramp up your server and storage capacity, but even a fairly modest office-caliber PC is capable of handling a good amount of traffic. With Xerox's DocuShare CPX, the underlying document management system is extended to include content and process management. DocuShare CPX is probably overkill for many smaller and mid-sized businesses, but if your organization has complex filing and workflow needs, it may be the answer.

Xerox is certainly not the only vendor in this market space. In fact, most of the vendors in document management are targeting midsized and large organizations simply because those are the most likely customers for a high-end application. Another popular vendor catering to midsized and large companies is Notable Solutions Inc. NSI's AutoStore series of document and business process management and automation applications are generally sold through many of the same dealers and value-added resellers that sell or lease office automation equipment (MFPs in the range of \$12,000 to \$20,000).

### ALREADY THERE?

In the middle of these two extremes are the dedicated document management capabilities that some vendors build into or offer for their applications. For example, Thomson Creative Solutions, CCH and other vendors of accounting-oriented applications have let you electronically attach documents to records for years. These capabilities are available from a separate application. Thomson Creative Solutions calls its

FileCabinet, while CCH ProSystem fx Office has its ProSystem fx Document. CaseWare and AccountantsOffice, other popular vendors of accountant-centric software, have also offered document management capabilities for years.

Many inventory and fixed asset applications allow you to attach images of inventory items or assets, making it easier to find or identify parts and items, especially if they are unique or difficult to describe. These images can be considered "documents," and the applications that allow you to attach or retrieve and view the images can justifiably be considered document management.

### PIN THE DM TAIL ON THE APPLICATION

As DM becomes more commonplace, you can expect to see applications that add this capability to other popular applications. Accounting software is a prime example, simply because it is so popular, and document management adds a lot of value, providing features such as being able to attach an image of a sales invoice to an expense transaction.

A number of vendors are already active in this area. Cabinet NG has its SAFE (Shared Access Filing Environment) application, an enhanced scanning, filing and distribution application that integrates with accounting software including Peachtree Accounting and QuickBooks, as well as applications such as Act!, Microsoft Office and others. An optional Web access module provides remote client access.

DocuXplorer for QuickBooks, from Archive Power Systems, is another add-on document management system that integrates with QuickBooks, or that can be run as a stand-alone application to manage a business' documents. The base DocuXplorer 4 Small Business, which is a two-user application, is priced at \$1,600, and you will have to add another \$250 or \$500 (single-user or multi-user) for the QuickBooks Integration Utility. That's more expensive than the entry-level products such as PageManager, but still quite affordable for many small and midsized businesses.

### READY, SET, SCAN!

As with many applications, document management is conceptually simple, but may be a bear to set up and actually get going. Don't let that stop you. Installing and configuring a document/content management system may have a large up-front investment, but the paybacks, in time saved and not spent searching through numerous filing cabinet drawers for miss-filed documents, are both large and immediate. Just take the time to think things through before you start, and you'll be up and running quickly. **SMB**