

Harness The Green Benefits Of ECM

Learn how your business can leverage ECM technologies to reduce paper consumption and transportation emissions, while generating an ROI.

by Ken Congdon

PANELISTS



Derrick Murphy,
president & CEO,
ibml



William Martin,
senior sales strategist,
Accusoft Pegasus



James True,
VP of business
development,
Cabinet NG



Mike Wessel,
team lead — education &
government solutions,
Perceptive Software

Businesses are becoming increasingly involved in the green movement as a means to contribute to environmental conservation and save their organization money. An investment in ECM technologies can put a business on the fast track to a greener existence, while improving operational efficiencies and cutting costs. *ECM Connection* recently spoke with four industry experts to gain more insight on the green benefits of ECM.

Q: WHY SHOULD COMPANIES CONSIDER LEVERAGING ECM TO BECOME GREENER?

Murphy: By its nature, ECM promotes efficiency and optimal use of resources. By replacing paper-based processing with electronic processes — and eliminating paper-related transportation, storage, and handling — ECM solutions can help organizations become greener. In fact, when you consider the hefty environmental impact of office paper

(the United States alone consumes about 100 million tons of paper each year, according to the Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC), ECM is a great way to get your organization started down the path to sustainable and green practices.

Martin: As companies look at ways of reducing expenses, automating traditional paper-based document management is a great starting point. The cost of physically storing documents is increasing in contrast to the low cost of ECM. There are also newer options available to electronically manage documents, such as hosted (cloud-based) SaaS solutions. In the long term, ECM systems offer easier access and improved security over managing paper files.

Q: HOW DO ECM TECHNOLOGIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE GREEN MOVEMENT?

Murphy: According to the Energy Information Association, information and communication technology account

for about 2% of all carbon dioxide emissions. ECM solutions can help reduce these emissions by reducing paper consumption and waste, automating paper-based processes, and eliminating document shipping and storage.

For example, the average worker generates an estimated 45 to 15,000 sheets of paper every day, according to the American Records Management Association (ARMA). ECM solutions allow documents to be processed, managed, and stored electronically, including delivery via email, significantly reducing the amount of paper the average worker consumes each day.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the average document in an organization is photocopied 19 times. ECM solutions allow organizations to distribute electronic documents securely via intranets, extranets, and broadband connection. The more work organizations perform online, the shorter

the paper trail and the less waste produced. By digitizing document-driven business processes, ECM solutions can automatically identify and route content (such as invoices requiring approval) to the appropriate users or applications, eliminating the need for transportation or multiple copies, as well as downstream document storage or shredding/destruction.

Finally, storage requirements for hard copy documents double every three years, according to ARMA and IDC. Storing documents electronically helps companies reduce their carbon footprint by reducing real estate/facilities needs



For more on the green benefits of ECM, visit <http://bit.ly/ald7aL>.



and the associated energy consumption.

Martin: In the United States alone, there are over 4 trillion paper documents. By its very nature, ECM technologies reduce the reliance on paper by transforming traditional “in-house” paper intensive processes, such as order processing and line-of-business operations like accounting, to attain this goal. Many of these day-to-day functions can be automated. Incoming fax transmissions can be automatically routed via a server and can “kick-off” a workflow, with no need to print out the fax. Document viewing functions can be customized per user levels to disable printing. Electronic Documents (web forms), along with electronic signatures, take paper out of the equation. Image compression software is also essential to reducing archiving costs. Utilizing a SaaS-based ECM solution removes the physical paper, the in-house electronic storage of content, and the associated hardware costs. All these ECM technologies reduce the physical storage, transport, and management of paper — all of which require various levels of energy consumption.

True: ECM technology does more than just save trees. Eliminating the use of paper documents saves trees, the energy used to create paper, and all the equipment and supplies needed to turn a blank sheet of paper into a document with printed information. A study by the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance estimated for each sheet of paper used, an organization incurs not only purchasing costs, but also storage, copying, printing, postage, disposal, and recycling, and it adds up. These associated paper costs could be as much as 31 times the purchasing costs (not including labor). So, a ream of paper that cost \$5 really could cost up to \$155!

Wessel: Sustainability and green initiatives often focus on energy conservation and efficiency or waste reduction and minimization. Document imaging and document management, two core components of ECM, pave the road for a paperless way of working every day and directly support both these areas. Consolidating documents into one cen-

tral electronic repository enables employees to access important documents at the click of a button from any location. With the ability to access documents regardless of geographic location, travel and transportation is reduced and so is a company’s energy consumption and carbon footprint.

Q: HOW CAN ECM HELP A BUSINESS GAIN A FINANCIAL ROI WHILE BECOMING MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY?

True: The key reasons to leverage ECM technology are to improve efficiency, reduce costs, comply with regulations, and/or free up space by eliminating filing cabinets. Becoming greener is just a built-in bonus of applying ECM in a business. Very few businesses justify ECM solely on the green factor. Justification is typically based on the measurable and proven business benefits.

Murphy: It costs almost \$10,000 in paper, toner, etc. to fill a four-drawer file cabinet. By leveraging technologies such as e-invoicing, companies can eliminate these paper expenses. Furthermore, physical storage costs an average of \$.14 per page or \$1,400 per file cabinet, according to ARMA and IDC. Storing documents electronically eliminates this cost. Finally, by sharing documents electronically, companies avoid the expenses associated with transporting documents across sites, including courier fees, postage, gas, and vehicle upkeep. Sharing documents electronically also eliminates the 280 hours per employee that ARMA and IDC say companies spend each year tracking down lost documents.

Wessel: With the deployment of ECM technologies, companies can save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year on shipping, paper and printing materials, transportation and courier costs, and much more. Workflow and electronic forms (e-forms) are additional ECM components that extend these benefits into the business process and deliver ROI that is not limited to the

hard cost savings mentioned above. Workflow enables documents to be routed and processed more quickly, enabling organizations to do more with less. e-forms can be completed online and allow a business to collect and process the information they need without creating the paper trail.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING ECM TO ACHIEVE GREEN BENEFITS?

Martin: Target paper at the point of capture, where paper is first “touched”. Examples include: (1) automating incoming faxes, (2) identifying email attachments (doc. types) and establishing a “document capture workflow” for the content, and (3) introducing distributed capture in remote office environments. Focus on identifying paper-intensive processes within organizational cost centers and look at ways to improve them through electronic means. Educate and engage staff members who work with those existing paper processes and in-turn will be the future ECM users. Start small and refine methodologies that will encourage adoption and enterprise use. ■

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