The Future of ECM is All About the User

By David Jones, Vice President, Marketing, AODocs

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In the beginning, there was Document Management (DM)—solutions built towards the end of the last century that provided the ability to scan, store, and retrieve digital versions of paper-based documents.

Then along came Enterprise Content Management (ECM), which took document management and beefed it up. Where DM focused on single documents, ECM started to allow us to process content in bulk. Also, while DM focused on digital versions of paper documents, ECM expanded the reach and allowed us to store any type of file, including digital-born content such as spreadsheets and presentations.

ECM also added automation, or the idea of creating structured workflows to automate processes within the business. And finally, because of the changing nature of the surrounding technical landscape, ECM started to add different ways to access solutions and content—from desktop apps to web-portals, to (eventually) mobile devices and limited integrations to other business applications.

This apparent democratization of content within the business was limited, however, with ECM systems failing on three major fronts: the high cost of solutions, terrible user interfaces, and, most importantly, the significant complexity of and time required for deployment.

Despite those challenges, the market grew to be a multi-billion-dollar market—until 2017 when Gartner declared that ECM was dead, and its successor was the Content Services Platform (CSP).

The CSP debate still rages on to this day about whether it is a good term, the right term, or even required at all. **But what is a CSP?**

Put simply, a CSP builds on top of DM and ECM. It does everything that both predecessors did, but in a more modular, open environment.

ECM vendors often provided a single piece of software to do everything, offering a single solution to address content capture, indexing, retrieval, workflow, records management, archiving, and more. Most often they failed, or at least only addressed *some* of the areas well. A CSP is designed to be a platform that can connect different content services together, from any vendors or source. So, for example, a capture solution from one vendor can be integrated into a visualization solution from another.

This really should have been the democratization of how content was used within the workplace, but, unfortunately, in the first three years of CSP, this has not come to pass.

Why? Because in 2017, Gartner missed a single, critical piece of this puzzle: the user, or, more specifically, how users want to work.

User First ECM

One of the main arguments against the introduction of the term "CSP" was that ECM was not *just* a technology but more of a philosophy and a methodology for implementing change. Most implementations of ECM or CSP solutions require replacing an existing system. In these situations, the change management required has two parts: technical and human.

Technically you need to map fields and migrate data. But from a human perspective you need to change the way people work, understand how they want to create, and store

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and access content. This is change management and was largely ignored by Gartner at the time.

What happened in parallel was the consumerization of IT: the explosion of personal devices, such as mobiles and tablets, and the massive increase in the technical awareness and capabilities of regular people. This led to massive changes in user expectations. People were now used to creating content in a variety of ways—writing emails, sharing pictures and videos, using txt spk 2 tlk 2 frnds—and this spilled over into their work environments. No longer were employees happy working in the single manner that their old ECM solutions forced on them. A revolution was underway.

This user revolution was recognized and fuelled by the likes of business systems such as Slack, Google Drive and Suite, and Office 365. Allowing users to easily create, collaborate on, share, and publish content was liberating. And to their credit, Gartner realized this and now offers a "new work nucleus"

approach that describes how this paradigm shift is influencing organizations. **But how does this relate to DM/ECM/CSP?**

For legacy vendors, it is horrific. They need to completely re-engineer software architectures that have been around for years but are no longer flexible or agile enough to work in a modern environment.

But with adversity comes opportunity—and a whole new breed of information management vendors are grasping this. These vendors are cloud-native, or born in the era of the cloud, are focused on solutions with simple interfaces, mobile-first approaches, and collaboration baked in, and are open and integrated with anything and everything.

The Future is Here

Indeed, many of these disruptors have not even come from a DM/ECM background but, instead, have come from collaboration and cloud-first environments, then added core information management capabilities to their existing suites. This set of vendors does not come to the table with 20 years of technical and ideological baggage from this industry; it comes with fresh ideas, modern technology, and an energy that is set to disrupt the information management industry forever.

But, most importantly, this new breed does one thing that sets them apart from the legacy of the past: they focus on the user. For the long-suffering users of DM and ECM systems of the past, that is certainly something to celebrate. ∎