

The future of ECM in government: Modern content services



Digital technology has reshaped the way our society communicates, collaborates and consumes goods and services. But many government agencies remain tethered to the analog world of paper-based processes.



Those that have made substantial strides — by implementing document management systems or more advanced enterprise content management (ECM) solutions, for example — know that the information contained in the content they access is critical to providing superior service to citizens and effectively delivering on their missions.

But even in agencies with mature ECM implementations, an enormous amount of critical content remains hidden in information silos across the enterprise — in scattered applications, email inboxes, network drives and consumer-grade file-sharing tools. As a result, employees often waste time looking in multiple systems in an attempt to see the whole picture, such as for citizen applications, FOIA requests and internal processes.

By taking advantage of modern content services, agencies can establish a strategy that delivers information to the right people, at the right time, right where they need to see it.

So how does an agency make the shift to content services? Let's start with a brief history lesson.

The evolution begins

In ECM's infancy, the industry categorized digital solutions as "document imaging software." As solutions evolved to include search and retrieval capabilities, the term became "document management software." Solutions soon grew more complex, accounting for the full life cycle of content across the enterprise and incorporating workflow tools to optimally route documents like applications or forms. That's when "document management" became "enterprise content management."

The evolution continues. In 2016, Gartner, a technology research and advisory firm, announced it was retiring the term "enterprise content management" in favor of "content services." The firm said, "Going forward, the practice of managing content will be enabled as a set of services that coordinate content usage by all parties: Users, systems and applications."

Gartner's decision reflects a step change in the way government agencies create, use and share content, both internally and externally.

Whereas organizations primarily used ECM to transform paper documents into electronic information and distribute it to employees, digital government demands more comprehensive content services. Agencies don't need monolithic document repositories; they need low-code platforms that can aggregate

content across multiple repositories to connect disparate applications and minimize IT sprawl.

They need to provide staff with complete, centralized views of the information required to work most effectively — ideally within the applications those users already know and use, like Salesforce, PeopleSoft and SAP. And they need ways to securely share content with stakeholders and constituents outside of government firewalls.

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The power of content services

Gartner's shift to redefine the market to a more inclusive content services moniker means that agencies ready to replace outdated ECM systems should search for a true enterprise information platform — one that provides a wide range of services for managing content, processes and cases and deployable in the cloud or on-premises.

The platform should:

- Connect to and help consolidate systems to reduce legacy debt across the enterprise
- Scale to meet the needs of departments large, small and everywhere in between
- Integrate with core applications, allowing agencies to pull relevant documentation from within the applications users already know
- Offer flexible deployment options, including on-premises or in the cloud

How to make the transition to content services

The shift from ECM to content services denotes a transition away from focusing on the storage of content across the enterprise to the active use of content in context by individuals and teams inside and outside the organization.

"It is no longer strictly about the storage of content for the enterprise, but rather about the consideration of how content is used by individuals and teams — internally and externally — to create, collaborate, share, transform and leverage that content in business processes and to gain insight," said Gartner in its report *Reinventing ECM: Introducing Content Services Platforms and Applications*.

The first step in making the move from an outdated ECM to a modern content services approach is the deliberate decision to make information work better for you, your employees and your constituents. This requires strategic analysis to determine what content services tools are currently available and where gaps exist across the information life cycle.

Modern content services tools include:

Omnichannel capture

- Acquire digital and paper content from any source, including scanners, email, mobile devices, databases and business applications
- Automatically find and extract relevant data and seamlessly integrate it into your core systems
- Accurately identify document types and classify information at the time of capture

Cloud-based document management

- Support a remote, hybrid or field workforce with anywhere, anytime access to information in the cloud
- Centralize, organize and optimize content across the entire organization so users can find the information they need when they need it

Intelligent/process automation

- Automatically route relevant content to the right workflows, systems and people
- Streamline tasks to accelerate review and approval tasks and expedite decision-making
- Automate routine, repetitive manual tasks with robotic process automation (RPA) so staff can focus on higher-value work and exceptions

Rapid application development

- Speed solutions to market with low-code/no-code application development
- Deploy applications faster and more easily without costly custom coding with open source platforms, point-and-click configurations and reusable components and services

Federation and in-place records management

- Enable searching and managing content across systems from a single user interface and without bulk migration
- Streamline user adoption and increase efficiency
- Drive compliance across the department

Once your agency completes a gap analysis and implements the right content services platform, your team should engage with the solution and gain insights for continuous process improvement. This approach can help your agency future-proof operations while accomplishing your modernization goals in a digital-first world.

The last word

The content services paradigm shift has the potential to free government from the one-size-fits-all ECM systems of the past. With a content services layer to tie everything together, agencies can choose applications and components a la carte to meet specific business needs.

Content services platforms empower organizations to:

- Harness their information no matter where content resides
- Move it into workflow and case management tools to drive critical processes
- Surface it within the context of core business applications where employees are already working
- Securely share it with others, both inside and outside of government walls
- Deliver it to users working on desktops, laptops and mobile devices, anywhere across the globe

In today's digitally connected world, content services enable agencies to modernize legacy ways of working, keep pace with evolving citizen and staff expectations, and work toward true digital transformation. Are you ready?



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(571) 636-1100 /
info@versivo.com