

## ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT:

### THE EMERGING TOOL FOR MANAGING TODAY'S ENGINEERING FIRM

The past year's economic slowdown has affected business across the globe. Sales have slowed, financing has dried up, and companies have been forced to alter their strategies in order to compete in the global market. Engineering companies, in particular, have seen their business objectives change radically—from increasing production and output to decreasing costs and improving efficiency.

This environment demands that engineering companies achieve more with their existing resources. Certainly, firms are examining and improving their core engineering processes. But, they also can benefit by refining internal business processes. One effective way to do this is through the use of enterprise content management (ECM). Enterprise content management enables a company to maximize the value of existing knowledge and structures, while reducing costs and improving employee efficiency and productivity. With added functionality, today's ECM tools offer engineering firms new opportunities to streamline and enhance the way they work.

#### WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Most companies don't realize the extent to which their day-to-day business operations are slowed by inefficient, internal business processes. Just about every organization has opportunities to improve business processes—and, for most, improvement begins with how they manage information, documents, knowledge, or similar assets. For example, in a recent Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) survey, 43 percent of survey respondents said that inefficiently organized or paper-formatted data, documents and files have a negative effect on the flow of their core business functions. This not only promotes duplication of effort; it causes inconsistencies in communication between functional areas of a company or across a project team.<sup>1</sup> Enterprise content management can help address these and related issues.

#### WHAT IS ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT?

The term "enterprise content management" can cause some confusion, as it often is used interchangeably with terms such as knowledge management or document management. The important thing to recognize is that, regardless of the terminology, content or knowledge management is more than technology; it is a means for creating a knowledge-centric organization that leverages valuable intellectual capital to improve competitiveness and performance. An ECM system typically plays a key role, but it is just one part of a broader approach—an approach that involves a healthy dose of strategy, people and processes as well.

#### HOW CAN ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT HELP?

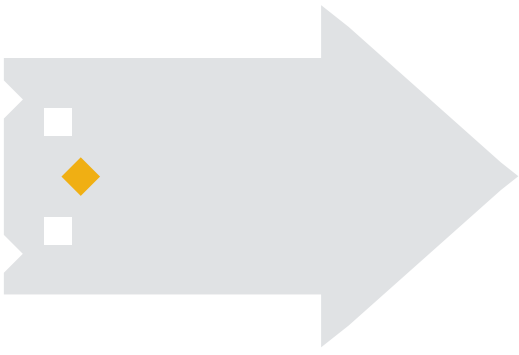
Organizations of all types and sizes can benefit from ECM. For example, ECM can help a company reduce paper costs, reduce technology infrastructure and data storage costs, and increase the organization's overall productivity through improved efficiency in finding documents, drawings, and necessary files. Applied in the right way, it can even help firms improve regulatory compliance and, thus, reduce risk. And this is just considering the document management side of ECM.

Looking more broadly, the right ECM approach and technology can improve a company's ability to communicate and collaborate, manage and track projects, and integrate business processes and workflows—in fact, facilitating more effective core processes in addition to improving the way it runs the business.

#### ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT AND THE ENGINEERING PROFESSION

Historically, ECM systems and tools have had a singular focus and a limited user base. Their lack of functionality restricted organizations' abilities to store and utilize documents. In the past, few ECM products have been truly useful to engineering firms.

<sup>1</sup> "ECM—From Components, to Silos to Solution Platform." AIIM's View On Enterprise Content Management & Content Management Solutions (2008): 1-6. AIIM. <<http://www.aiim.org/PDFDocuments/34993.pdf>>.



Today, engineering firms use ECM systems not only to streamline general business processes such as managing account and client data, but also to manage projects efficiently and improve storage and accessibility of CAD files. Enterprise content management can enhance the client lifecycle by managing data and documents for customer acquisition, retention, and growth processes—for example, campaigns, proposals, contracts, plans, account planning, etc.

While larger engineering systems have the ability to store and manage project files, many such systems have complex interfaces that restrict file usage to a limited number of trained users. Enterprise content management systems, on the other hand, typically utilize familiar user interfaces, making content accessible to a broader range of users, at all levels of an organization. This is particularly beneficial for larger engineering firms, which tend to produce work in disparate areas of the company. By centralizing work files and increasing accessibility to those files, an ECM system can significantly reduce duplicative efforts.

Enterprise content management also can expand access to best practices and process knowledge in firms where these have typically resided with just a few people. For example, an engineer has performed the same role for 30 years and has accumulated a lifetime's worth of knowledge and expertise. But, given the nature of his firm's operations, he is not able to share it easily with the rest of the company. When this employee retires, the firm will suffer a significant loss of intellectual capital—a real risk for engineering firms, which face significant aging trends. By capturing this engineer's knowledge and experience in an ECM system and sharing it throughout the company, especially with younger generations of employees, the company can maximize its information assets and enhance performance long after the employee retires.

### **EXPANDED APPLICATIONS FOR ENGINEERING**

Taking advantage of added functionality, engineering organizations are beginning to use ECM systems not only as a means of managing content and documents, but as a platform for integrating access to a variety of systems or for managing various business processes and workflows. Some common uses include:

- ◆ Client management and proposal generation.
- ◆ Managing and tracking project scheduling and timelines.
- ◆ Facilitating collaboration among project team members.
- ◆ Storing libraries of images, CAD files, and documents.
- ◆ Providing progress updates to clients via a secure web platform.

### **AN INVESTMENT WITH A SHORT-TERM RETURN**

Engineering firms, like most organizations today, have limited funds for internal investment. But, an investment in enterprise content management, in many cases, can directly support the organization's short-term goals—reducing hard costs, cleaning up inefficiencies, and improving project team effectiveness.

If your firm can benefit by improving the way it captures and manages intellectual capital and manages core business functions, talk to West Monroe Partners. We have applied enterprise content management systems and processes in diverse professional services environments and understand the complex content management and operational requirements of engineering firms.

- West Monroe Partners is an international, full-service business and technology consulting firm focused on guiding organizations through projects that fundamentally transform their business. With the experience to create the most ambitious visions as well as the skills to implement the smallest details
- ◆ of our clients' most critical projects, West Monroe Partners is a proven provider of growth and efficiency to large enterprises, as well as more nimble middle-market organizations. Our more than 300 consulting professionals drive better business results by harnessing our collective experience across a range of industries, serving clients out of offices across the United States and Canada.
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