Document Management for Accounting-Centric Applications:

Ask Why and Think About How

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> Organizations have many reasons for wanting to electronically archive documents. Ultimately, in one way or another, they all boil down to efficiency.

MultiValue integrators take note. UnForm Laser Forms software has morphed into a full document management solution platform. The best part is it's a low-profile horizontal application.

MultiValue vertical applications in every industry niche, including the most custom of custom applications, can benefit from an integrator-oriented approach to document management software implementation.

This first in a series of three articles should whet your appetite for efficiency-focused document archiving integration opportunities. Next issue, we'll focus on the morphing part—given technology trends in the last decade, how logical it truly is for a laser forms product to evolve into a full document management solution.

Serving as the primary communication vehicle between just about every type of organizational entity, it is logical that documents are becoming, in ways large and small, the focus of many organizations' IT strategies. This can happen at a strategic mission level, where an organization's documents become the central focus of a broad new IT paradigm, or at a lower tactical level, where the focus is on specific efficiencies to be gained from automating or computerizing document storage, workflow, and handling—very often on a case-by-case, document-by-document basis.

Much has been heard recently in the content management arena about what is referred to as e-discovery. There has been a consequent temptation to think of document management primarily in terms of corporate legal compliance issues and opportunities. But a 2006 survey by AIIM-ECMA (a primary trade association for the enterprise content management industry, www.aiim.org) discovered that cost-driven users outnumbered both compliance-driven and customer-driven users of content and document management solutions. Cost-driven users were those survey respondents who listed improved efficiency, reduced costs, or increased profits/improved performance as their main business driver for implementing a document management solution.

This probably comes as no surprise to most of us at work in the cubicles of technology, where a premium is

Document Management Solutions with UnForm®

Production › Delivery › Archiving › Scanning

UnForm is a powerful enterprise document management software solution that seamlessly integrates with any application. The UnForm suite includes laser form and electronic document production, document delivery via email and fax, document archiving and management, and document imaging/scanning. UnForm is a platform independent client server application for Windows®, Unix®, and Linux.

UnForm Laser Forms

UnForm seamlessly integrates with any software application.

- Windows-based graphical design environment
- Eliminate pre-printed forms with laser printer output
- Produce presentation quality reports
- Create e-Documents in Adobe® Acrobat PDF format
- Email e-Documents automatically
- Print bar codes in most symbologies
- Create laser checks with MICR encoding
- Dynamic image conversion and scaling capability
- Database access via ODBC
- Microsoft® Fax Server support
- PCL 5 and Postscript® printer support
- Extensive programmability

Document Archiving and Management

The UnForm Document Archiving and Management component provides the ability to capture, store and retrieve paper-based and electronic documents.

- Rules-based document archiving
- Archive concurrent with document printing
- Store multiple versions of a document
- 10 levels of user defined category indexing
- Document linking control
- Fast web browser-based retrieval
- Client API for application-based retrieval
- Index oriented archive browsing
- Full feature search capability

Document Imaging/Scanning

Windows client application that provides a document scanning and importing tool for capture of documents external to the UnForm processing environment.

- Windows client application
- Integrated work environment for image capture and upload
- TWAIN compliant scanning interface
- Multiple property assignment modes
- Barcode and OCR zone detection
- Automatically match or group images with related archive documents
- Extensibility via VB Script

Document Image Manager

Universal web browser document retrieval

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2195 Talon Drive
Latrobe, CA 95682 USA

(800) 446-7374 or (530) 672-9970
Fax: (530) 672-9975
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www.synergetic-data.com

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT FOR ACCOUNTING-CENTRIC APPLICATIONS *Continued from page 16*

placed on "roll-up your shirt-sleeves" approaches to problem solving in a competitive, fast-changing world. It simply becomes too big of a risk to tap what are usually finite budget resources to bet on costly or trendy technology that touts a whole new paradigm as a solution. Proposing that kind of technology becomes problematic when it needs to be expressed in terms of a payback period, that golden efficiency equation at work in most business decision making.

We've recently heard document management solutions being described affectionately as a blip on the radar screen of IT and other key managers. Whether the blip travels to bull's-eye center depends on a number of factors, not the least of which are economics and its close cousin for IT professionals, ease of integration.

So, let's put away for the time being notions of new paradigms in enterprise content management, and look instead at some of the nuts and bolts issues and concepts underlying the need for document management technology solutions. One thing that will become clear is the logic and elegance inherent in a solution that leverages the existing data resources of host MultiValue accounting, ERP, and other applications.

Why Archive?

Organizations have many reasons for wanting to electronically archive documents. Ultimately, in one way or another, they all boil down to efficiency.

• In the here-and-now for an enterprise, lowering paper usage lowers supply costs, but perhaps more importantly, eliminates physical handling steps which can translate immediately into increased labor efficiency.

• Savvy organizations key in on the document-matching capabilities that

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electronic archiving can provide. Many key accounting and business workflow activities revolve around matching up related documents. To the extent that a computer system itself can perform, this function can increase efficiency and reliability, with human resources acting in higher-level monitoring and exception-handling roles.

• Many companies strive for a streamlined organizational efficiency of either a fully paperless environment or, at least, a minimization of clutter associated with storing paper files and archives. Often, an improvement in employee morale and retention can be traced to such efforts.

• Filing systems to handle paper resources themselves are costly and can occupy valuable commercial office space better used for more productive assets.

• Many acknowledge or believe that going fully paperless is impossible or impractical, but envision being able to relegate paper to a backup position in the scheme of retention and accessibility.

• Enhanced security over document resources can be a factor addressed by electronic archiving, as archive libraries
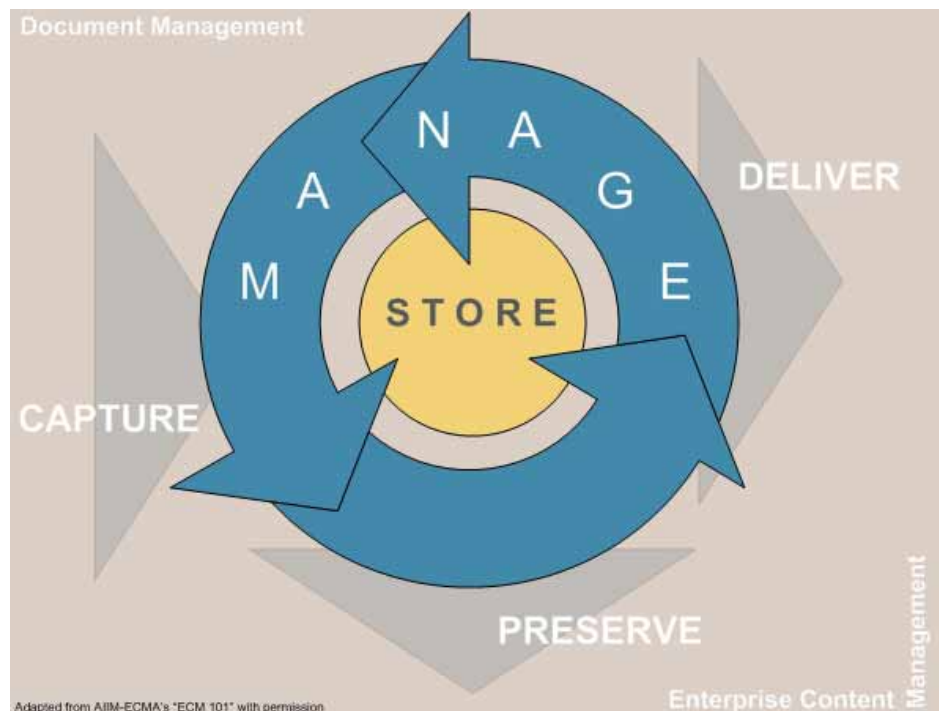

FIGURE 1 Enterprise Content Management

are able to be secured from non-authorized access in an environment familiar to system administrators. Paper copies of documents, if retained, can be stored with greater security because access to them is only needed on a rare or exception basis.

• Legally-mandated compliance issues in larger organizations can be a driver for the implementation of electronic archiving, and increasingly it is the efficiency of the up-front computerization of the archives that is measured favorably against the after-the fact costs of compliance in a litigation scenario where speedy and efficient access to documents has not been previously established.

• Environmental reasons related to better managing earth resources through lowering paper usage ultimately boil down to efficiency, albeit in a longer-term ecological sense. But in today's so-called green social and political climate, it's really not a bad idea to adopt
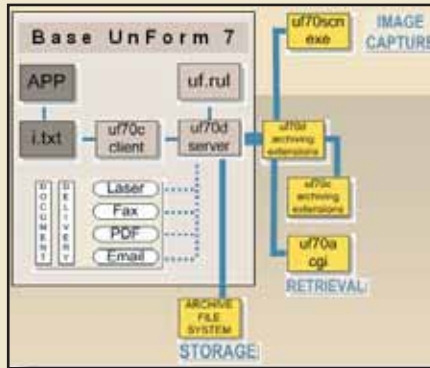
Figure 2 - A graphical depiction of a document management solution that integrates with an existing accounting/ERP application via a client/server API model:

• Archive PDF storage is essentially a simultaneous document delivery method that happens seamlessly and transparently when documents are printed, faxed or emailed.

• Retrieval is provided via a browser/CGI interface or API integration with the host application.

• Scanned document support is provided using a client MS Visual Basic image manager workstation which uploads images to the archive via a connection with the server component.

• Document indexing and identification metadata properties are open to the developer/integrator to customize the properties for the particular accounting/ERP application or end user's needs.

a corporate position that acknowledges the positive impact our own individual practices can make on the life and sustainability of our community as a whole.

• So, which reason or combination of reasons fits your particular scenario or environment?

It is not so much a matter of debating the merits or pitfalls of particular reasons for adopting a particular strategy or response to an organizational problem or opportunity. There is a diversity of need and experience which does not conform to a boiler plate mold. It is, rather, a matter of recognizing the opportunity presented by the fact that the evolution of technology is actually to the point where the cost of improving organizational and administrative efficiency puts the solutions within the reach of virtually any size organization.

Delivering Efficiency

Once an organization's particular reasons for considering an electronic archiving and document management solution have been analyzed and have crystallized into a list of concrete expected benefits, the key requirements and/or necessary features of a prospective solution usually emerge. Properly addressed, they should result in the promise of the ability to deliver the benefits envisioned. The capabilities of the prospective solution are evaluated for their fit with the needs of the organization's business or administrative processes, and for their fit with the organization's expectations for efficiency improvement.

The special needs of every organization are of course different, but there are generally common needs that revolve around administrative functions that many organizations share. For the archiving component of a document management solution, there are some key capabilities and features that are needed to

address common organizational needs for efficiency improvement:

• Ease, speed, and flexibility of document access.

These are the key demands that usually stand front-and-center when considering archiving solutions. This includes not only a general stand-alone document retrieval interface as part of the solution, but also integration with the existing accounting or ERP application itself.

• Logical and flexible pre-defined and custom-indexing and linking capability, preferably custom-tailored to the user's business model or specifications.

This can add such efficiency to the document retrieval process that employees' time can be much better utilized in higher-level aspects of their job description, or can flat-out reduce or eliminate the need for clerical support staff in some areas, reducing costly overhead.

• Barcode-enhanced and OCR enhanced image scanning capability for certain documents that cannot be archived directly from the driving accounting or ERP application.

This can apply to stand-alone document types, like outside vendor AP invoices, or to attaching related documents to parent documents from the accounting or ERP application. Signed delivery copies of packing slips being batch-scanned and uploaded to match-up with the parent packing slip document are a good example.

• Automated document matching.

Workflow considerations often involve a matching of documents. A system which enables multiple workflow-related documents produced or acquired at different points in time to match up with each other in the archive can produce obvious clerical-handling efficiency benefits.

Typical examples include an accounts payable vouchering process that relates and matches a purchase order, packing slip, receiving report, and vendor invoice; or the revenue-cycle matching of quotes, sales orders, work orders, packing slips and accounts receivable invoices.

• A minimum amount or level of intrusiveness to the driving accounting or ERP application.

The amount of synergy which can be generated from a system which transparently or seamlessly integrates with existing systems is in direct proportion to its non-intrusiveness. Synergy is another word for superior efficiency.

The above list is not meant to be all-inclusive. But it is intended to start the problem solving wheels turning for the process of finding creative ways that a particular software technology can be employed to deliver efficiency benefits in an organization.

The entry cost to the above technologies and their corresponding benefits is down at a level where they can make sense for even the smallest of organizations. And, the entry or investment cost is always a critical factor in measuring the overall efficiency of a business solution.

Accounting–Centric Solutions

The enterprise content management solutions industry, known as ECM and best thought of as a technology umbrella, has over the last decade come to encompass a very broad range of information and document technologies. The result is that the gamut of content and document management solutions being offered often must be filtered down to eliminate those that focus on needs that are not currently central needs to the organization at hand.

The term *accounting-centric* is seeing use as a way to distinguish between

broad enterprise-wide content solutions and those that focus more narrowly on managing the documents and output generated by accounting and ERP applications. Such output is intended directly for the conduct of the resource-oriented or transactional-trade aspects of an organization's activities.

In an *accounting-centric* document management solution there are some important distinctions made between types of documents. Those distinctions are useful in understanding how a particular solution approaches document generation or handling activities differently based on those different types.

Trade And Non-Trade Documents

The term *trade documents*, as the name implies, refers to documents used to conduct trade between different entities. Entities include things like customers, vendors, and employees. The accounting terms *trade accounts receivable* and *trade accounts payable* gives a sense of the meaning. Enterprises generally trade products and services for money. Specific legal documents like purchase orders, packing slips, delivery slips, invoices, statements and timecards are used to control the process of trade.

Trade documents are usually the main output of accounting and ERP applications. If a document management solution provides an API for communication with a host accounting or ERP solution, then the push of trade documents into the archive is via a mechanism that can be completely transparent to the user. It can be integrated into the operations of the accounting or ERP application itself, often seamlessly and nonintrusively via the application's printer configuration interface.

What this means is that in the above case, no separate handling is required to file an archive copy of a document. Note that solutions that are completely scanner-capture-based cannot provide the same level of hands-off integration with an application's print-data stream.

A non-trade designation would include documents such as word processing documents, spreadsheets, and other supporting paper documents. These are examples of documents which typically are not processed by an accounting or ERP application. The processes for archiving non-trade types of documents like these should logically include a scanning workstation interface for supporting paper documents and a network filesystem browsing utility for importing word processing, spreadsheet and other format documents. Both processes should include indexing and metadata property assignment capabilities.

An accounting-centric document management solution which can be integrated easily with a host accounting or ERP application has the benefit of intimacy with the application's data print stream. That data print stream, besides being the document itself, also contains the indexing and identification property metadata necessary to create truly custom archive retrieval scenarios which match the way organizations function and do business.

Why leads to How

Asking why is the usual precursor to innovation. Moving from why to how happens *after* the answer to why has resulted in a compelling enough argument for action. To be intellectually honest here, sometimes the how scares us away from fully tackling and addressing the why—especially when it seems like the logical prospective solution induces sticker shock. But that's where some accounting-centric integrated solutions differ from others.

Whether in the field of science, technology, business, the arts, or education, at the root of all human progress is the concept of moving forward in a way that maximizes efficiency. Every organization has key players tasked with

guiding the organization forward with simultaneous views of short, medium, and long-term strategies for success and improvement. Many of those strategies revolve around eliminating waste and increasing productivity and efficiency. And many of those strategies involve IT.

Technology has brought us to a place where the document, the central vehicle for communication between organizations and entities, can be managed electronically to provide efficiencies that can allow organizations to devote more resources to the truly productive, non-administrative activities they engage in.

I invite you to visit www.unform.com for information about the UnForm Document Management Solution and SDSI's other products. While you're there, see the News Pages link www.unform.com/newspages and take a look at the article on document management in the *2007 2nd Quarter* issue. There are links to related articles and resources there. And, watch for our next article in this series. The story of the evolution from laser forms to document management is an interesting technology story.

Now may be the time for your organization to consider the why's and how's of implementing a document management solution—especially one designed for a transparent and seamless integration with your main vertical application, where the potential for synergy is high. IS