Introduction to Document Management

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The capability to do full-text searching doesn't just happen; you have to work for it.
An electronic document management system (EDMS), refers to a computerized environment that permits the creation, capture, organization, storage, retrieval, manipulation, and controlled circulation of documents in an electronic format. An EDMS enables a user to create and manage electronic documents that can be viewed, searched, and printed from virtually any computer or printer while pages retain their original look and feel, complete with text, graphics, photos, and color.

Initially, all EDMS systems contained the following basic functions:

- Storage repository where electronic documents are archived
- Way of depositing documents in the repository
- Method for locating and identifying stored documents
- Method of retrieving documents from the storage area

The need to keep track of similar documents produced by a variety of users and multiple versions of the same document has created a host of library functions, including:

- **Version control and audit trail**-methods for monitoring changes in the document and keeping track of multiple versions of it
- **Check-in/out privileges**-a locking mechanism that allows only one user to modify a document at a given time
- **Security**-controls that restrict user access according to document type and purpose
- **Collaboration**-enables simultaneous document sharing and multiple authorship of documents
- **Indexing system**-permits organizing documents into related groups, such as folders or books
- **Free-text search and retrieval**-enables rapid access to documents based on finding keywords in text
- **Metadata indexing**-enables document workflow controlled by index data such as the author, title, date created or modified
- **Electronic imaging**-permits information capture by scanning documents into the system
- **OCR, ICR**-recognition technologies that enable conversion of imaged paper documents into computer-usable data
- **Electronic publishing**-assembles and combines documents into coherent collections for selective distribution
- **ERM storage**-large volume electronic storage media for permanent archiving of documents
- **Publish to Web**-metadata such as HTTP and XML allows documents to be posted on websites and accessed in e-commerce environment

Needless to say, the benefits of efficiently managing documents are numerous. Those commonly cited by managers who implement DM systems include increased production from faster (and wider) file access, decreased staff requirement, fewer filing mistakes, reduced cost of paper storage, and offsite storage protection and disaster recovery.

Documents are managed through a document management lifecycle that involves three major stages: 1) Creation, 2) Utilization, and 3) Disposition.

1. Document Creation. EDMS can expedite document creation by minimizing the time spent in managing its content (as opposed to creating the content itself) and by facilitating efficient collaboration among authors if more than one author is involved. Version control, metadata, automated approval workflow, role-based document access, and collaborative online discussions are features that facilitate document creation.

2. Document Utilization. Because most documents are created in order to be read and acted upon, the largest percentage of staff will benefit from features that enhance document utilization. EDMS features that enhance document use include a single location to search for information stored in many different places; keyword searches that query the full text of a document and the document's properties; browsing by topic (categories) to find information; automatic categorization of documents; and best bet classification for documents that are highly relevant to a search.

All of these features will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of document utilization to some degree with minimal time imposed on document consumers. However, users must at least invest the necessary time to learn how to use the features and to some degree must be willing to abandon their personalized manual procedures.

3. Document Disposition. In this final stage, organizations impose retention rules that ensure that documents remain available for as long as they serve a useful purpose. The rules also govern the removal of documents when they have outlived their usefulness. The starting point for managing document disposition is a complete itemizing of documents and the identification of the metadata necessary to expedite proper disposition rules. The endpoint is to physically place the documents in a repository with mechanisms for additions, deletions, and backup that are subject to tight control, enforcement, and post audit until they have outlived their usefulness, after which the documents are legally destroyed.

Proper document lifecycle management recognizes the significance of cost-effective retention at different stages in the life of a document. No single storage medium can satisfy all lifecycle requirements for every document management application. Paper, micrographics, and electronic formats each have distinctive strengths and limitations that must be taken into account to ensure an optimal business solution.

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