SMEAD Soft®

"What about the paper?"

Electronic and Physical Records—Unified Records Management

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SmeadSoft—the only government records management system designed to integrate both paper and digital records.

A Disconnect Between Visionaries and Those Who Actually Do the Work?

The "paperless" enterprise—a vision advanced decades ago and still perpetuated today by enterprise content management (ECM) vendors—has never really arrived. And for reasons outlined below, it will probably never arrive for state, municipal and local government units.

Simply put, for government agencies, the paperless enterprise is an impossible dream. Trouble is, thought leaders and visionaries may not understand this or may be confused by the messages they are hearing from the industry and vendors. One of those messages is that today's enterprise content management (ECM) products provide the complete answer to greater efficiency and better constituent services. To many in government, something just doesn't "feel" right about this notion. Attractive as it is, something is missing.

What's missing? Just ask employees on the front lines, those in the file rooms of the city and county clerk and clerk of courts offices, human services agencies, law enforcement departments, and other government agencies. They'll give you a fast and easy answer: "What about the paper we have to keep? We need to manage that, too." Many will tell you that this requirement is more challenging than ever. While this is the case, visionaries may be disconnected from the realities of the front line, not fully understanding some of the front-line needs:

- **Growing legal and regulatory initiatives** that pressure government agencies to rethink how they manage their information and create new policies and procedures to meet compliance mandates. Critical to compliance is ensuring that all physical records are consistently managed throughout their lifecycle—from creation to active use, to inactive or historical storage, to destruction. At every stage, a consistent lifecycle management policy has to be documented, maintained, audited and enforced. Rules, policies, laws and best practices have to be observed. And while many records can be scanned into electronic systems for establishing and maintaining workflow processes and promoting collaboration, the underlying physical items must be retained, preserved and destroyed according to government retention and disposition mandates, which include a growing list of legislative initiatives—from U.S. DoD 5015.2 to HIPAA to Sarbanes-Oxley.
- **The explosive growth in the volume and type of records** that agencies must simultaneously manage, share, retain and preserve in their original forms. Content used to mean paper, but now it means paper as well as dozens of electronic formats (emails, spreadsheets, word processing files and the like), transactional data, multimedia and more. Most ECM vendors manage hundreds of data type formats. For many organizations, however, paper records still represent the bulk of the information handled—and they must be maintained as records in their original paper form. And for some, especially fast-growing cities, counties and states, the volume of paper records they are required to keep is growing exponentially.
- **The need for new approaches to both electronic and physical document and records management.** What these organizations need most of all is a way to both isolate and integrate the two—a seemingly contradictory objective, but not an impossible one when you understand the differences between document lifecycle management in the electronic realm and records management in the physical world.

Documents and Records

ECM products manage documents in all types of media and allow employees to collaborate on the process of document creation. This process can involve many different people working together, pulling content from other documents or databases, electronically making changes or iterations to documents, asking questions or seeking input, suggesting ideas, etc. In fact, the beauty of today's ECM products is the astonishing efficiency and flexibility they provide electronic collaborators working with any type of content in producing a final version of a document, ready to be "published" in a variety of ways to any number of audiences.

Once that final version is published, however, it becomes a record.

That's the crucial point of distinction between documents and records. Documents can exist in multiple types of content at multiple stages of completion and be subject to an intensive process of collaboration, which the ECM environment streamlines and makes more efficient. Once documents are finalized and released, however, they become the "official" version of history—a record, in other words. And once a document becomes a record, it has to follow different lifecycle processes and meet a completely different set of lifecycle management policies and procedures than those contained in the ECM environment. In other words, a document that has become a record through ECM now needs a records management system (RMS) for both its electronic and physical form. ECM systems can be set to give documents a lifespan and destroy electronic documents at the end of the specified period, but these systems cannot manage retention and disposition policies (or any other lifecycle management need) of records if they also exist in paper form.

Front-Line Realities

When city clerks, property and evidence room managers, managers in health and human services agencies and other government units hear about the benefits of ECM solutions, they immediately recognize the value to their departments and overall organization. They may also recognize the fundamental flaw in an all-ECM approach. By its very nature, many of the records they manage and maintain are required by law to be kept in their original state and stored, tracked, audited and then disposed of according to strict regulations and policies. None of which can be accomplished by a purely ECM approach.

Consider the tasks of city and county clerks. They are required to accumulate and catalog a vast number of records and apply highly specific access and distribution policies to these records based on their type and purpose. In addition, they have to administer record-specific retention and disposition policies that must be retained for weeks or decades, depending on the record.

Some of these records can be scanned and stored or scanned and burned, but others cannot due to legislative and policy requirements. Some records can be put into ECM systems for sharing and collaboration, but in order to ensure that the lifecycle of physical documents isn't broken, many can't. As a result, virtually all government jurisdictions still require these fundamental records management system capabilities:

- Isolation and control over records, not collaboration in an ECM sense.
- Preservation of records, not their continuing development.
- Unbroken lifecycle management of records, regardless of form.
- The ability to physically control and visually identify stored records.
- The ability to segregate and track records by different retention and disposition requirements.

These needs are growing, too, leading to a new level of interest in records management systems. What's driving this new interest is a growing realization that a "paperless" future is an impossible dream for government jurisdictions with strict electronic and paper records management policies and requirements. Another is the greater burden on records lifecycle management practices resulting from initiatives such as Sarbanes-Oxley, HIPAA, FDA Part 11, DOD 5015.2, The Patriot and Public Information Acts and numerous initiatives at state and local levels. These are requiring tighter control over records in ways that play to the traditional strengths of comprehensive and proven electronic and paper records management systems. These strengths include:

- The ability to create secure information repositories that ensure privacy of data at the system, user, file and document level. Only the people and systems that should have access to electronic and paper records will.
- Complete system, file and document user access control with audit trails. These controls are implemented based on specific jurisdictional or customer policies, and all activities are tracked and audited within the system for both paper and electronic records. Capabilities such as viewing, annotation and redaction are also controlled and tracked with audit trails.
- Retention management with destruction reporting and auditing. Both electronic and physical record disposition for retention is managed according to jurisdictional and agency policy and criteria with audit functions and destruction reporting.
- Image redaction capabilities, which protect portions of information from inappropriate disclosure and ensure privacy of information.
- For electronic records, the use of SSL and encryption for web access to records with audit trail capability.

Unified Records Management

The need for unified records management is easily illustrated by a few examples.

Example 1. Consider the records of a juvenile in a municipal court system in which the attorney has filed for a two-month extension. The extension request is a physical document filed with the clerk of courts. The request is scanned into an electronic system, possibly flagged in workflow systems and placed on a judge's docket. But now the clerk's office faces the challenge of physically storing and tracking the paper extension. This is typically done with some sort of system that converts information about the contents into barcodes, which are placed on documents when first filed and scanned whenever the files are accessed. (Barcoding allows you to locate, monitor and control file usage by scanning codes on file folders. It basically allows you to track people, places and things by scanning the associated barcodes with a handheld scanner into a central tracking and management application.)

At some point over the next two months, the clerk will be required to accommodate requests to view documents related to the case online. Other authorized users will need to check out physical case files from the clerk of court's file room, requiring the clerk to have authorized access security, file tracking and system usage reporting. When the case is heard, case file documents will need to be delivered to the court. When a decision is reached, case file documents will be archived. When the juvenile turns 18, physical case file documents will have to be destroyed and electronic documents purged.

Example 2. The records management challenges of city and county clerks are even more daunting. In most jurisdictions, these departments are responsible for all public documents and information recorded, indexed and filed within their jurisdictions. Job descriptions may include:

- Store and provide information on departmental, county and state policies and procedures.
- Research, prepare and provide detailed information on certified documents, such as land records, court documents (death, divorce, trusts, repossession, foreclosures), for the public and other entities.
- Maintain hundreds of thousands of files and records.
- Receive, process and prepare documents from dealerships, financial organizations, lawyers, courts and other entities for recording, and perform final evaluation of legal documents for completeness and compliance with general court rules and procedures.
- Contact and work with internal (County Treasurer, County Assessor, County Attorney and other County agencies) and external (various departments at the county and/or state government level, car dealerships, abstract companies, financial institutions and the public in large numbers) entities to resolve a variety of issues.
- Administer applicable state and federal statutes concerning filing process of titles, financial papers, deeds, oil and gas documents, marriage licenses and other legal documents.
- Maintain confidentiality of department information at all times.

In both examples, these departments require systems that maintain the integrity of paper and electronic records lifecycles; track both electronically and physically through the use of barcoding and possibly color-coded labeling for easy visual identification; extend appropriate access to them electronically and physically; and ensure that both physical and electronic documents are retained and disposed of according to legal mandates. Paper-based records management systems alone cannot deliver these capabilities. ECM systems alone cannot deliver these capabilities, nor were they designed to, as retention and disposition applies to electronic formats only. The greater challenge is ensuring that physical records are compliant with retention and disposition requirements.

The ideal system maintains the connection between paper documents and files and their electronic counterparts. Such a system allows agencies to:

- Define document types and their retention and disposition requirements and determine if they have to be managed physically or electronically or both. This enables a paperless system to some level, while ensuring compliance with laws and regulations.
- Co-exist with ECM systems so that documents and records can be made available for online workflow processes and collaboration, while still maintaining the lifecycle management requirements of the official record.
- Integrate established and well-designed physical records management technology that makes it easy to maintain order in file rooms and document repositories, while filing and accessing documents quickly and efficiently. In addition to barcode tracking, this also involves visual identifiers placed on files and boxes in document repositories and archives that allow you to “see” if documents are filed correctly and if lifecycle management requirements are being followed. This technology forms the basis of records management and cannot be ignored today.
- Integrate both electronic and physical records management in one system with a common user interface (as opposed to relying on ECM products or separate imaging products to scan paper records and store them electronically).

Evaluating Vendors

Dozens of vendors provide products in the physical and electronic records and content management market space. In reality, most vendors fall into either the physical side or electronic side of the category and, with the exception of SmeadSoft, do not completely meet the needs of government organizations who need both.

Organizations must carefully consider whether products meet both physical and electronic records management needs in an integrated fashion (see the list of required features below). An important consideration is the service and support provided by a vendor in the initial assessment and discovery phase of an implementation, throughout implementation itself, and after the system goes live. That's important because many businesses and government agencies need a vendor that understands their unique records management requirements, and a "backfile" conversion roadmap that allows them to convert archived and inactive records at their own pace and according to their priorities and available resources.

Conclusion

Government agencies need better ways to manage and integrate paper and electronic documents, files and records. Whatever changes they ultimately decide to make, agency decision-makers should understand the bottom-line requirement for any proposed solution. That requirement? In addition to electronic recordkeeping and electronic records access for constituencies, any solution must also meet government mandates for physical paper recordkeeping and conform to the everyday work requirements of government agencies. After all, those agencies deal primarily with paper and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

In other words, records management systems must be sensible, easy-to-implement and easy-to-use. They need to cover the basics—storage, accessibility, security, tracking, retention and disposition for hundreds of thousands of paper records—and also provide the built-in electronic records management features that are growing in importance for many government agencies.

SMEAD Soft®

Checklist: Does the system provide?		
Features	**Yes**	**No**
Document imaging and electronic tracking		
Paper file tracking		
PC file management		
Property and evidence room management		
Document routing and reporting workflows		
Paper and electronic versioning		
Paper and electronic audit trail		
Web access to information		
Multiple retention schedule management		
Automatic generation of barcodes for tracking		
Barcode tracking		
Processing history report		
Pipeline report		
Retention reports		
Missing documents report		
Productivity report		
File history report		
Compliance report		
Requestor exceptions report		
Audit reports		
Instant locatation of hard copy records		
Remote scanning capability		
Chain of custody capability		
Applies barcodes and color-codes on one easy-to-apply label strip		
Creates of alphabetic, numeric, or custom index filing systems		
Integrates color-labeled folders with existing files with a perfect color match		
Generate new labels automatically with information from host database or keyboard		
Vendor can create conversion plans		
Vendor can provide file strategy consultation		
Vendor can provide file-to-file conversions and data input into physical and electronic records management system		
Vendor supports unique requirements for physical and electronic records management		
Vendor has a long history and large install RMS user base among government organizations		