



ECM Drives Government Efficiency

Strapped with budget cuts and resource limitations, government agencies can turn to ECM as a means to reduce costs, increase visibility, and improve productivity.

by Ken Congdon

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As regulations continue to increase their hold on government and agency watchdogs monitor spending, it is important for government agencies to cut costs and optimize efficiencies. As a result, many government institutions seek to digitize public records to provide constituents with convenient access to the information they require, while easing the burden on government administrators. ECM solutions are crucial to helping government agencies achieve these goals. However, the agency must clearly identify business goals to ensure the solution can fulfill these objectives. Recently, *ECM Connection* interviewed a few key vendor executives to provide government agencies with tips on how the right ECM platform can help them overcome their toughest challenges.

Q: WHAT UNIQUE CONTENT CHALLENGES DO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES FACE?

Thumma: Government projects suf-

fer from many of the same challenges as the private sector, including budget cuts, insufficient executive project support, lack of change management programs, and information overload. Some government projects are compounded by extremely high volumes, in-depth standards and security requirements, and the red tape often associated with 'good old politics.'

Fages: State and local governments are primarily document-based operations, and oftentimes these documents contain handwritten information. These documents can also be extremely old and of poor quality (particularly if the agency is working with civic archives or census data), written in an old-fashioned writing style or presented in an unstructured or non-uniform format. These factors limit the ways that these documents can be digitized and archived, hindering the government's ability to meet high

demands for timely record retrieval.

Schrage: Government agencies vary in size and each has its own strict budgeting and approval procedure. Once a budget has been appropriated, the review and purchase process can be long and drawn out — especially for a large investment such as an ECM solution. Another issue for government agencies at the state and local level is that they often must work with an integrator based on a contract the state has signed. When that integrator cannot fully support the agency's individual needs, they are often forced to change their business processes to adjust to the new ECM solution rather than have the ECM solution fit their existing processes.

Q: WHAT ECM APPLICATIONS SHOULD GOVERNMENTS CONSIDER TO OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

Thumma: Business Process Management (BPM)/workflow solutions have become imperative for departments that are not only downsizing but also losing budgets while workloads are simultaneously increasing. BPM allows government agencies to automate and control the flow of work and gives them the ability to process higher volumes with fewer employees.

Increased usage of e-forms has also been evident at the government level. However, effectively leveraging e-



For an insider's view on why government needs ECM, visit <http://bit.ly/dopUaz>.



forms and the valuable data they contain requires a BPM/workflow solution to distribute forms and information to the right people and destinations in an automated, regulated, and auditable fashion.

Schrage: Government is still very paper-based and deals with many different document types and even different versions of the same document type. Examples include license

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Jim Thumma, Optical Image Technology

applications and renewals, or court documents that may need to be available in an online archive. Therefore, government agencies need a robust processing solution that can handle a variety of documents, including structured and unstructured documents. They then require the ability to quickly and easily post this data into their back-end systems for both internal and public retrieval.

Accurate indexing also plays a major role in overcoming ECM challenges in government. Documents that are accurately indexed are available at workers' fingertips with minimal keystrokes, and can be viewed by multiple users at the same time.

Q: WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE ECM SOLUTIONS?

Fages: Governments operate on tight budgets and often need to stretch funding wherever possible. The challenge is to find an ECM solution that will be conscious of

the government's budget, yet still provide document automation and an increase in efficiencies.

Additionally, as with any organization in the private sector, silos can make it difficult to implement an effective ECM solution because there can be a limited exchange of ideas and even different systems/operations in place between various departments or agencies. Education for both management and employees is critical so that they are aware of new, better processes available.

Schrage: A main roadblock for government ECM implementations is the long, drawn-out implementation process. Selecting a solution that can easily be deployed is a main focus for a government agency that operates on a tight schedule in addition to a tight budget. The solution (and solution provider) needs to meet the projected timeline and key objectives — including data accuracy rates — without requiring additional time or coding expenses.

Q: HOW ARE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CURRENTLY LEVERAGING ECM SUCCESSFULLY?

Thumma: The most common and powerful solutions you see today are where agencies are integrating their ECM solutions with their portal solutions. This allows both internal and external users to access and submit critical information quickly and easily. It also allows the government to audit the usage of information so it can make critical decisions about how to better serve its constituents. The offices of Medicaid and Medicare have leveraged ECM solutions for years with great success, enabling them to better serve both the payer and provider sides of the business by automating, expediting, and simplifying the claim adjudication process.

Schrage: By leveraging ECM technologies, government agencies can make decisions more quickly and reduce labor costs and storage. For example, the Allegheny County

Controller's Office in Pennsylvania leveraged its ECM solution to process payments for poll workers after their elections. They were able to save 800 hours of labor, meeting strict turnaround deadlines without needing additional workers or overtime. Many other agencies are able to quickly retrieve documents thanks to accurate and automatic indexing. This ability aids in eliminating lost or misplaced documents, a commonplace occurrence with paper records, and allows documents to be available immediately for public requests, court subpoenas, and employee requirements.

Q: WHAT ROI DOES AN ECM SOLUTION PROVIDE GOVERNMENT ENTITIES?

Schrage: ECM solutions allow government agencies operating on tight budgets to cut back on labor costs, reallocate staff to more business-critical tasks, and increase productivity with data capture, often achieving an ROI within six to nine months. ECM solutions also help to reduce expenses on overhead, such as paper, storage, and filing cabinets, and to operate with greater efficiency. Workers are able to dedicate more time to knowledge-based tasks rather than being bogged down spending their time sorting or scanning documents and manually entering data. They can also see an ROI in document turnaround, by quickly processing incoming documents and making the records immediately available in their online retrieval systems, eliminating the delays associated with physically routing or dealing with paper. This provides an increasingly important benefit for the public who need access to records and data. ROI is also visible in areas such as accounting and purchasing, where an automated ECM solution provides for better cash flow management, increases visibility of the document workflow, speeds processing time, and reduces costs. ■