



Four Ways ECM Technology Can Support Your Disaster Recovery Strategy



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If the man-made and natural disasters of the last 10 years have taught business planners anything, it's this: *stuff happens*. And it's likely to happen in ways never imagined and at the most unexpected times.

Disaster recovery plans put equipment and procedures in place to protect data and re-establish critical processes as quickly as possible in the event of a business disruption. However, many companies and organizations focus almost exclusively on a backup site to recover key information, such as financial data, should the primary data center fail. And even in organizations with broader plans that include back-up of ERP, e-mail and supply chain management applications, there still can be gaps in the plan that can spell a long delay in getting back to "business as usual." These gaps are often found in unstructured content and paper documents that aren't on the radar for inclusion in a disaster recovery plan, but nonetheless play a significant role in a company's day-to-day operations.

Enterprise content management (ECM) is generally promoted as a way to optimize business processes and increase productivity. But it also can serve as a safety net if disaster strikes, helping your company restore normal operations quickly and smoothly.

Here's how.



1

Number 1:

By reducing your reliance on paper documents, ECM can significantly increase the amount of information that can be saved.

The “paperless office” has been part of the business lexicon since the 1970s. But the goal of eliminating or even reducing dependence on paper documents has been elusive. According to RISI, an organization that provides independent economic analysis for the global forest products industry, the amount of paper used by the average U.S. office worker has dropped from 130 lbs in 2006 to 106 lbs in 2009. But many companies still rely on paper documentation for key business processes. And in a fire or flood, paper is the most vulnerable means of information storage.

ECM technology and robust workflow tools allow your company to convert paper-based processes to electronic form. Coupled with a data back-up strategy for disaster recovery, this means a quantum leap forward in preserving key data in the event of a disaster.

The University of Missouri System has more than 63,000 students and 24,000 faculty and staff across campuses in Columbia, Kansas City, St. Louis and Rolla. The university implemented ImageNow enterprise document management, imaging and workflow from Perceptive Software in more than 30 departments across all four campuses, as well as the university hospital and clinics. With more than 2,500 active user accounts and more than 5.3 million imaged pages in the system, ImageNow has made a significant impact on the daily business of University of Missouri, streamlining processes and improving service to students and alumni.

But according to Linda Valentine, systems administrator, protection of records from flood, fire and other natural disasters has been among the biggest benefits of the implementation.

“As soon as the image hits the ImageNow server, we have a copy in the production warehouse and off-site data center,” Valentine explained. “So if something should happen to one or the other, we still have the data. That is a huge relief for the managers.”

2

Number 2:

The database and search index of your ECM solution can be a key factor in getting core business functions up and running again.

The key functionality of ECM technology — creating centralized repositories for key data and documents that can be accessed by the people who use them — is a natural fit for your disaster recovery plan. Documents and information captured via your ECM solution can be accessed by the tools designed for high availability and disaster recovery. In addition, the data can be exported to several departments for recovery needs.

With ECM and proper back up provisions, day-to-day functions in areas such accounts payable and human resources can continue almost without disruption, despite a catastrophe.

Cedar Falls Utility’s in Cedar Falls, Iowa, incorporated ECM into its business continuity strategy in January 2007. Eighteen months later, the Cedar River burst its banks, flooding the ground floors of the utilities’ power plants and offices with six feet of water.

CFU’s disaster recovery solution included a 4GB fiber connection to their disaster recovery off-site facility. This connection enabled 40 staff members to continue accessing accounts payable, purchasing and other financial records from temporary workstations.

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3

Number 3: ECM helps you continue serving your customers and constituents.

Key information is a valuable asset in both the public and private sectors. In the event of a disaster, ECM technology can help you get up and running quickly, with all records and data available. For government and public agencies, this means constituents can get their lives back together sooner and the local economy recovers more quickly.

For companies in the private sector, less downtime means fewer consequences for your bottom line and fewer lost customers.

Bankers Insurance Group of St. Petersburg, Fla., was concerned about how a hurricane would impact its ability to continue operating the business. With disaster recovery in mind, executives chose ImageNow enterprise document management, imaging and workflow. The selection was based on ImageNow's universal integration capabilities and ease of administration. These two factors were important because they would allow the company to extend the solution quickly and easily across all key functions and departments, such as claims, commercial operations, and personal operations.

ImageNow supports Bankers' disaster recovery plan by securely storing all documentation related to any claim or policy on the ImageNow server. WebNow™, the browser-based complement to ImageNow, extends ImageNow functionality to any location and ensures documents are accessible to authorized users at any time.

"If we're not able to get to the office, WebNow gives us the means to communicate and continue doing business," said William Montefusco, project manager.



4

Number 4: Without ECM, a disaster could put your company's survival at risk, or damage your agency's reputation and credibility.

When records and data are lost, the damage is long lasting. Records management trade group ARMA International points out that more than 60 percent of businesses confronted by a major disaster close within two years. It recommends backing up records and maintaining off-site storage, and tactics as basic as having a record of all employee names and telephone numbers kept someplace completely safe.

When a government entity experiences a significant data loss due to a disaster, it is frustrating for both constituents and the employees who are trying to help them. Rebuilding the data and the trust that have been lost can take years.

Kevin Joerling, the former records manager for ARMA and now senior records and information manager for Perceptive Software, said while many organizations back up some information every day, that is not a disaster recovery plan. They are not capturing all of their critical data.

"A lot of important stuff is on desktops and laptops and IT departments often aren't making sure that kind of information is part of the server environment so it is being backed up and stored off-site," Joerling said. "They are backing up that same information day after day, but there is lot of data and information outside of that daily plan that may not be identified."

Organizations using an ECM system are much further ahead, he said, because a majority of their unstructured data is stored in a central location. If it is backed up correctly then they have a central repository where records can be stored safely.

"Those without ECM have data on different systems, and it is more difficult to keep track of where your data is and get it backed up correctly," Joerling said. "Those IT departments that don't protect all of their key information are putting their companies at risk."

For more information about Perceptive Software and ImageNow, go to www.perceptivesoftware.com.



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