

Case study: System integration

Background

Great care is required during the lifecycle of a hard-copy document to manage and retain the information it contains. When a document is created, its details need referencing into an index. Traditionally, this information is typed into a database (varying dramatically, from giant, customized software systems to a simple spreadsheet), and is required to easily locate the file at a later date. Eventually the record will be archived, which commonly leads to the duplication of information, and effort is required to 'clean' records information.

Many large organizations operate 'file room' software to manage files around their buildings. Such systems will accommodate structured data entry and online ordering. Similarly, Crown offers an online web portal (RMweb) for clients to manage their off-site information in real-time. This system also allows for structured data entry and online orders. Although files are well organized, retrievals and management more efficient, there remains the inconvenience of maintaining two systems with the same information.

Recent developments under the heading "cloud computing" offer possible improvements to the process of records management. In cloud computing hardware and software resources are shared via the Internet. Businesses are able to rely less on their IT infrastructure for applications, which are instead managed in data centers by third parties. Businesses simply 'plug-in.' The benefits are in reduced need for data storage, management, backup and disaster recovery.

Problems

Crown recently engaged in a cloud project for a global financial organization, using a product developed by our software partners O'Neil Software, with the aim of creating a global portal to manage companies' on-site and off-site information.

The records management challenge for global organizations is proportionately large. It is also more complex, as they often have several records management partners across the world accumulating vast quantities of data in a variety of different systems. Cloud computing has enabled the client a global view of this information, no matter where the actual original hard-copy documentation resides.

The Solution

Blue sky thinking

Using RMBridge, O'Neil Software's cloud-based software solution, the global records team can now find and order records all from one website. Their information was 'bridged' between themselves and records management partners, all integrated into one database.

Their internal file room software package is now in direct communication with our records management databases allowing real-time inventory updates and online orders. The need for maintaining any kind of separate systems or procedures to manage off-site material has been removed.

When staff members are required to request archived material to be delivered, they simply find their item and hit the 'request' button; their order flows through the RMBridge cloud, into the correct off-site records management database, triggering automatic progress updates along the way.

The concept of system integration with records management suppliers is not new. But introducing cloud computing to the integration process has created more opportunities in particular to manage much information from various sources. At the moment, the product is in its infancy, but its potential impact is considerable, with much potential for future development.

The system was launched in May 2012, and the product is available to all clients. Software developers can also work with O'Neil to produce live interfaces.