

Government Lays Down the Law on Document Management

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— Richard Spratt, Senior Consultant, CGI

Business Profile

Industry

Government

Organization

Government of Canada

The Challenge

- > Information stored and duplicated across ministries, departments and agencies
- > 80 percent of electronic data remained unmanaged and stored in unstructured systems
- > Legal and policy objectives were not consistently being met
- > Relevant information was not available in a timely fashion

Hummingbird Solution

- > Hummingbird contributed Document Management, Records Management, Imaging, and Workflow

Key Benefits

- > Cost-efficiently captures, manages and shares information in many formats
- > User interface is available in both official languages
- > Supports document life-cycle from creation to distribution, storage and archival
- > Adheres to evolving legal and policy requirements
- > Integrates with legacy systems without record or document management capabilities

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, government bodies, like their private-sector counterparts, developed PC and server-based information architectures. Though these systems successfully served particular functions, there was also a need to communicate with other departments within or between ministries. In addition, as much as 80 percent of documents resided in unstructured systems such as e-mail and on individual PC hard drives. This often resulted in the unnecessary duplication of documentation and labour and at times limited access to valuable information.

To improve the flexibility, responsiveness and efficiency of federal ministries and agencies, the Government of Canada recognized the need for a document management system that could liberate information stored and duplicated in multiple ministries, departments and agencies. In the late 1990s, it tasked an interdepartmental committee to investigate the requirements of such a system.

Access to Documents Regardless of Ministerial, Departmental, or Geographic Origin

CGI Group Inc., the fourth largest independent information technology consulting firm in North America, was chosen to design, build and implement the Records, Documents, Information Management System (RDIMS). Based on Hummingbird Enterprise™ DM document management solution, RDIMS provides federal records employees with the ability to capture, manage, and access valuable document-based information, regardless of ministerial, departmental, or geographic origin.

“RDIMS allows users to classify their own records, search for records, and submit retrieval requests from their desktops,” said Richard Spratt, Senior Consultant, CGI. “Putting records into the hands of users extends benefits to people who formerly had no experience with record management.”

Through RDIMS, word-processing documents, spreadsheets, presentations, photos, forms, images, and e-mail messages can all be created, archived, and searched. The Hummingbird open architecture incorporates virtually any computing environment to manage and control network-based information across a variety of applications, platforms, databases, networks, and geographic locations.

To make the system available on as many desktops as possible and to support on-line government service evolution, RDIMS uses the Web client of Hummingbird Enterprise DM, as its interface to provide users with full document management functionality over the government’s intranet.

System Allows Departments to Respond to Policy and Regulatory Requirements

RDIMS manages the entire lifecycle of documents — from collection and creation to organization, use, storage and protection, to disposition through document management, as well as the archival and disposition through records management. The routing capabilities of Hummingbird Enterprise DM tracks documents through ad hoc or established processes. The solution is adaptable to particular department workflow systems and allows documents to be routed in sequential, parallel or broadcast modes. By bringing information management into a single ubiquitous system, RDIMS enables the widest possible use of information, stops the unnecessary collection of information, cross-references between hard copy and soft copy information, and improves support for decision-makers. It also helps departments respond to policy and regulatory requirements, including access to information and privacy requests.

While RDIMS improves access to documents regardless of type or location, it also ensures that access is constrained by particular rules that correspond to public policy objectives and legal constraints such as the Canada Evidence Act, National Archives of Canada Act, Privacy Act, and Access to Information Act. Because the system is powerful enough to give users access to information that is not in the public's interest, RDIMS is adaptable to meet rigorous and evolving regulatory public policy requirements.

"Many legal rules assume the existence of paper records, of signed records, of original records. The law of evidence traditionally relies on paper records," said Spratt. "As more activities are carried out by electronic means, it becomes increasingly important that evidence of these activities is available to demonstrate the legal rights that flow from them."

Adaptability Without Disruptions in Day-to-Day Operations

As a user's responsibilities or the legislative regime governing information use change, the system can adapt without interrupting day-to-day operations. By using the power of the browser, access privileges can be granted or constrained without the need to visit each individual desktop.

While it is expected that by 2010, 80 percent of the government's information will be in electronic format, paper currently remains the standard, particularly for externally facing services and systems. To compensate for the continued reliance on paper-based documentation and record keeping, CGI incorporated the distributed imaging capabilities of Hummingbird. Users can index and retrieve these documents from a content-based search using the built-in optical character recognition (OCR) technology within the Hummingbird solution. The system can also integrate with legacy systems that do not have their own built-in record or document management capabilities.

While the system is built to integrate with existing and historical document management systems, its open architecture allows for rapid evolution as new processes, agencies and ministries are added.

One long-term goal set by the Government of Canada is the movement towards the complete electronic delivery of services (EDS). RDIMS is a core technology that will allow this to happen, as most public business processes involve the construction and evaluation of document-based information. RDIMS' open architecture allows new functionality necessary for EDS, such as Public Key Encryption, to be added gradually as it becomes more cost effective to embrace.

Future Plans

- > Integrate solution with public key infrastructure
- > Create framework for electronic service delivery
- > Expand in publishing
- > Evolve Web offering with application integration, routing and imaging
- > Move toward a three-tiered document management solution

How Can Hummingbird Help You?

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