

Implementing ECM as a Shared Service in Higher Education

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Contents

Introduction	1
What is a Shared Service?.....	2
A Paradigm Shift for the IT Department.....	3
Pricing.....	3
Service.....	3
Implementation.....	4
The ECM Shared Services Model.....	5
Change Management	6
Conclusion	7
Next Steps	8

Introduction

In the past, many colleges and universities viewed their central IT department as little more than the department that kept the lights on, the network running and the systems humming.

All of this, of course, is important work—as anyone who has suffered through a network outage will realize. However, many departments failed to understand why their pet projects weren't Central IT's first concern, and pockets of shadow IT cropped up all over campus. Departments with money were able to execute projects on their own terms, but the cost was often high.

Today, though, the White House has put colleges and universities across the country “on notice.” The President has stressed that tuition rates cannot continue to rise, emphasizing that “higher education... is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford.” Many industries have reaped cost savings and productivity improvements through their use of technology, and higher education is no exception. Most colleges and universities recognize that the IT department can play a pivotal role in achieving even higher cost savings by standardizing systems and centralizing support.

In other words, Central IT can have a real and measurable impact on the bottom line by providing shared services.

What Is a Shared Service?

A shared service is one that is used by multiple parts of an organization but purchased and supported by one. For example, rather than having different departments select and support their own enterprise content management (ECM) systems, the central IT department purchases, implements and maintains one ECM system that all departments use.

According to Deloitte's 2011 Global Shared Services Survey, shared services are "now viewed as a demonstrated platform for improving delivery and reducing costs." In fact, Deloitte reports that "respondents reported average initial savings primarily ranging from 10% to 20% and annual savings ranging primarily from 5% to 10%."

These findings certainly reflect what we're seeing among our customers. When colleges and universities implement ECM as a shared service, they minimize support and maintenance costs while also gaining the opportunity to leverage economies of scale. The shared services model also allows the IT department to develop business processes that can be repeated across the enterprise, enabling optimal resource efficiency, cost and service performance.

Benefits of Offering ECM as a Shared Service

The Texas A&M University System notes* that the benefits of offering a "centrally supported, enterprise-level document management system provides many benefits," including:

- ▶ **Save costs** through shared central support and eliminating the need for individual departments to maintain their own systems.
- ▶ **Facilitate document sharing** with colleagues while protecting confidential information.
- ▶ **Enhance overall office efficiency** by eliminating paper-based processes, improving information accessibility and decreasing the need to store paper documents.
- ▶ **Ensure continuity of operations** by securing records and providing Web access to critical documents during emergencies.
- ▶ **Streamline life-cycle management** of business records with automatic enforcement of consistent, organization-wide records policies.
- ▶ **Support compliance** requirements for document retention.

* <http://laserfiche.tamu.edu/Benefits/index.php>

A Paradigm Shift for the IT Department

By implementing shared services, colleges and universities are able to consolidate IT functions to one location, reducing costs across the board. However, in order to do this effectively, the IT department must first convince autonomous schools, business units and departments that the shared service is the most competitive solution available. To do this, they need to change their pricing model, service model and implementation model.

Pricing

Many college and university IT departments use a cost recovery method when providing solutions. In other words, they are looking to recover the exact costs of the system each year. This method is confusing for the customers they serve for two reasons:

- ▶ A preponderance of line items (server costs, licensing costs, maintenance costs, etc.) that makes it difficult to discern the final price.
- ▶ Pricing that shifts over time (i.e. upfront implementation costs drive up costs in year one, and it's often unclear to customers that pricing will ever come down).

Adopting a simplified pricing model alleviates customer confusion. To achieve this, the IT department must:

- ▶ Move away from line-based pricing to a model that bills by user or by the number of documents contained in the repository.
- ▶ Work with the purchasing department to amortize pricing over a three- to five-year period so that costs to customers are stable, predictable and competitive. (Amortized pricing reduced the first-year cost per user from \$450 to \$75 for one university that offers ECM as a shared service.)

Taking these two steps results in a simplified budgeting structure that allows customers to accurately compare the price of the shared service offering with other systems that could meet their needs—and accurately reflects the economies of scale that can be achieved when deploying software such as ECM across campus.

According to Judith Lewis, Senior IT Manager of IT Solutions and Support at Texas A&M University, “By providing a feature-rich implementation at an affordable price point, Texas A&M is able to make available economies of scale and document sharing that individual departments could not approach by themselves. This is value delivery at its best.”

Service

For a shared service to deliver maximum value, autonomous schools, business units and departments must buy into it. Beyond pricing, the best way to generate buy-in is to create a collection of standard tools and templates from which everyone can benefit.

By taking a shared-service approach, the central IT department can develop a tool or process once, and with a few small changes, many different areas of the institution can take advantage of it. When deploying ECM as a shared service, many IT departments have found it useful to offer:

- ▶ **A shared file plan** (records retention plan) according to state records management compliance requirements, so that business units can be assured that their stored documents are compliant with state requirements.
- ▶ **A library of metadata templates** that business units can customize according to their needs (rather than starting from scratch), thus accelerating implementation timelines. And, although different departments may use different forms, standardized metadata (i.e. common template fields) links disparate record sets together, facilitating cross-departmental collaboration.

- ▶ **A library of workflow templates** to automate common business processes such as accounts payable, contract management and grant management, enhancing consistency, accelerating processing time and saving staff time.
- ▶ **Central processing** to automate the indexing and filing of common document forms, eliminating the need for manual data entry and filing.
- ▶ **Pre-defined roles** to speed the implementation of security policies, ensuring that business units get up and running quickly without compromising the safety of their information.

When the IT department takes ownership of developing tools and processes that are useable across the institution, it adds value by offering customized solutions at the cost and speed of a generic, off-the-shelf solution. According to Jerrold Grochow, MIT's Vice President of Information Services and Technology, "If you standardize processes, you actually gain agility because you're able to react more quickly."

It is therefore no wonder that more and more colleges and universities are opting to take a shared-service approach to IT.

Implementation

Every department and business unit on campus has its own unique content management needs. Some are looking for simple search-and-retrieval, some need to access information through their SIS or ERP system, and some want to enable repeatable processes such as contract management, AP processing or grant management. Finding a system that's flexible enough to accommodate these divergent goals and objectives is essential when implementing ECM as a shared service.

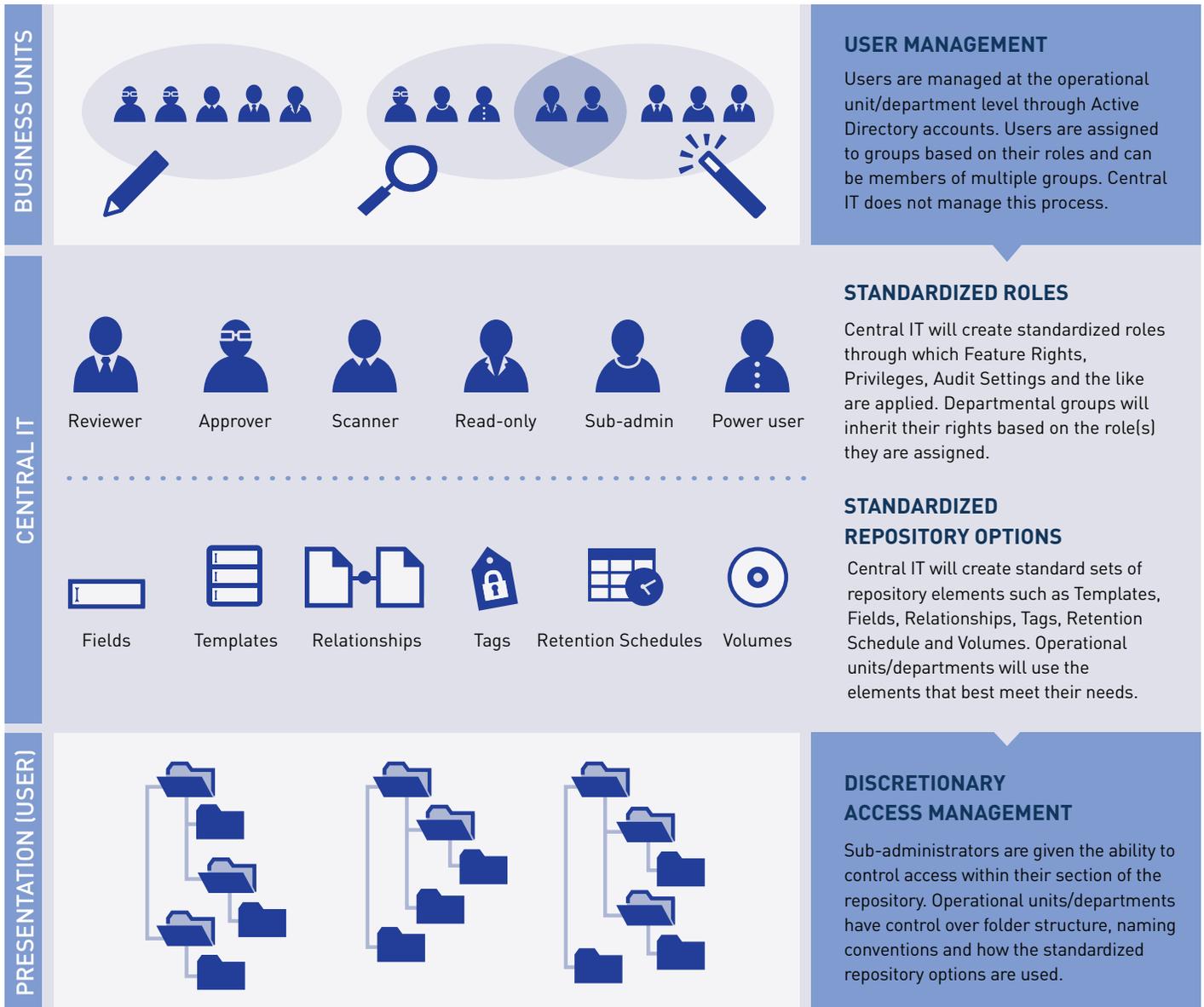
Adopting a flexible ECM system—along with agreed-upon standards for information sharing and other business processes—can help ensure proper

governance while also preserving autonomy at the business unit and department level. According to John Hermes, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Technology Officer at Oklahoma Christian University, a flexible system has been essential to his school's success with ECM. "By distributing IT leadership among administrators, we could provide the overall IT cost savings required by business units along with the sensitivity to individual departmental needs."

To achieve the right balance between central control and local flexibility, the IT department must:

- ▶ **Provide business units with their own systems**—not merely a separate folder in a system that is managed by the central IT department. (When a document is shared across the units, that process can be managed by Central IT.) Selecting a system that allows for the deployment of unlimited content servers and repositories simplifies this task.
- ▶ **Give business units the freedom to manage their own users, configure their own workflows and customize their own filing structure**, among other things. This helps to ensure user acceptance, because the people configuring the system are enmeshed in the day-to-day reality of the group's working requirements, and they know how to ensure that the right work gets done the right way at the right time. (Central IT can step in when asked to optimize the performance of these localized solutions.)
- ▶ **Offer continuous training opportunities to maximize system usage**, allowing users to leverage the combined experience of their colleagues and the central IT department. According to Texas A&M's Lewis, "We are dedicated to incorporating best practices, lessons learned and training resources from many sources in order to provide the best support for our customers."

The ECM Shared Services Model



Change Management

For the IT department at a college or university to successfully offer ECM as a shared service, it must be willing to solicit input from multiple sources and then share that feedback through a variety of channels. This ensures that it is both aware of what its customers need and is educating customers on best practices and agreed-upon standards for managing content.

One great way to gather feedback right off the bat—after you’ve selected an ECM system but before implementation begins—is to convene key stakeholders from across campus and conduct a workshop around how the shared service can help solve campus-wide problems. (A great place to start is the accounts payable process, which touches every department and can cost a great deal of money when it’s not optimized.)

According to Bob Larrivee, Director and Industry Advisor with the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM), “You have to get [stakeholders] involved in understanding the pain points of any process. They may complain about having to do something differently, but if they’re involved from the beginning, then they’re more likely to support it.”

MIT’s Grochow adds, “There are key users across campus who work with us and have a lot of input into what we’re doing. We manage those relationships.” A kick-off workshop allows you to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders and gain their support for process changes by involving them in shaping the shared service offering from the start.

Other ways to create buzz and promote the implementation across campus include:

- ▶ Creating user communities to share best practices, tips and tricks so that users can piggyback on each other’s efforts.
- ▶ Building a Website that includes FAQs, training resources (including videos) and system benefits.
- ▶ Inviting different department and business units to develop and share case studies about their use of the shared service on the Website, at user meetings and at higher education conferences.

When you put a successful change management methodology in place, users begin to see the true value of the ECM shared service. Ralph Stephens, Executive Director of Strategic Sourcing & General Services at Texas A&M University – Kingsville, explains that ECM “has been a business-process change agent—it showed us solutions to problems we hadn’t even considered before” and advises other institutions to view ECM as “an initiative, not just an application.”

Conclusion

By implementing ECM as a shared service, colleges and universities are able to consolidate IT functions from multiple schools, business units and departments to one location, reducing costs across the board by:

- ▶ Eliminating redundant systems.
- ▶ Leveraging economies of scale rather than purchasing hardware and software at the department level.
- ▶ Making it easier to share documents and workflows between schools and departments.

Rowan Miranda, Associate Vice President for Finance at the University of Michigan, notes that, when done well, the “shared services [model] isn’t a simple and militant consolidation. It’s a model that recognizes differences among the customers and tries to develop processes that are responsive to them.”

By offering an ECM system that is flexible enough to meet the needs of multiple departments but strong enough to centralize control and security as a campus-wide shared service, college and university IT departments demonstrate added value and help their institutions reduce IT costs to keep tuition costs down and free up resources for the academic and research mission of the institution.

Next Steps

For personalized guidance on how to implement ECM as a shared service at your institution, schedule your 40-minute Best Practice Phone Briefing by e-mailing your request to **HigherEd@laserfiche.com**.

The Best Practice Phone Briefing gives you the opportunity to speak with one of our senior solution architects (not a sales person!). His goal will be to get a feel for your organization and the challenges you're facing and use his experience with institutions like Texas A&M and the University of Southern California to focus in on core problems and provide direction for solutions that can quickly show measurable results, proving the value of ECM and smoothing the way for enterprise adoption as a shared service.

Here is the typical agenda for a Best Practice Phone Briefing:

- ▶ **4-5 minutes:** Discuss the size and structure of your environment.
- ▶ **8-10 minutes:** Discuss the biggest challenge you encounter in this environment.
- ▶ **15 minutes:** Explore approaches to the resolution of the core problems.
- ▶ **10-12 minutes:** Agree on 2-3 quick-wins that can be achieved right away.

Best Practice Phone Briefings are free of charge, and you are free to do whatever you want with the recommendations provided.

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