

Use CEVAs to Generate Value From Your Content

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Content-enabled vertical applications enable companies to use their documents and other content more effectively in business processes. However, CEVAs are technically complex and difficult to evaluate.

ANALYSIS

Many companies realize that they aren't getting enough value from their content, even though they've invested enormous sums of money to create and manage it. Documents, presentations, rich media and other forms of unstructured data remain locked inside the applications that created them and the repositories that are storing them. Workers outside the department that created the content either don't know it exists or can't access it.

Companies may have taken one step toward making content more widely available by consolidating departmental content management systems into a single enterprise content management (ECM) suite, or by federating several repositories toward becoming a "virtual" unstructured content pool. However, questions remain: What should companies do with content as soon as they're able to manage it enterprise-wide? How can they use content services to optimize their businesses?

Smart companies have begun linking more of their content to industry-specific, human-centric processes, such as insurance claims handling, or supporting research on new drug development. This approach usually means building or modifying the content-enabled vertical applications (CEVAs) on top of ECM environments. CEVAs typically help to automate complex processes that previously required workers to manually sort through paper documents and other forms of content (in effect, a way to manage down costs of exception handling) and optimize the remainder of the work.

Evaluating CEVAs can be difficult because they're available from several different classes of vendors, including ECM, business process management (BPM), systems integration and stand-alone CEVA vendors. In addition, CEVAs are technically complex. They work because they have deep roots in a company's IT infrastructure, and because they express deep knowledge about the particular industry in which they're deployed. Companies that want to implement CEVAs must evaluate them on six levels (see "Evaluate Content-Enabled Vertical Applications on Six Levels"). Not every provider has the competence to deliver effective CEVAs, so companies must scrutinize CEVAs before committing to an implementation.

Many banks have cut costs and improved customer service by implementing electronic statement presentment in their contact centers (see "Banks Can Use IDARS to Improve Customer Service and Cut Costs"). This CEVA gives service representatives complete information about a customer's dealings with the bank, and displays that information in the same format in which the customer sees it (for example, on the bill).

Companies should pay particular attention to what ECM vendors are doing with CEVAs. ECM vendors have advanced the furthest in assembling a complete package of capabilities needed for CEVAs. Whether through partnerships, acquisitions or internal development, ECM vendors have begun incorporating BPM functions. They offer integration services and have started specializing in certain industries (see "Enterprise Content Management Vendors Increase Availability of CEVA Offerings"). You may be surprised by the wide range of industries represented by CEVAs, but different ECM vendors have expertise in different industries. Make sure you know the industries in which your ECM vendor is competent to offer CEVAs.

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