

# Paperless government: why it's failing and how to fix it

By Craig Broadbent

Thursday, December 10, 2015 - 17:00



<https://idm.net.au/article/0010841-paperless-government-why-it-s-failing-and-how-fix-it>

I read an **article** recently about how the paperless push in the Victorian Government was apparently failing. My immediate thought was “not surprised” given the way most organisations (including government agencies) approach the transition to a paperless office.

Many people blame technology and there is more than a fair chance that the limitations in some of the technology deployed by government departments has been a factor. But technology itself isn't entirely to blame.

Most agencies implement an Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution to achieve the shift to paperless. In my experience most ECM implementations and paperless initiatives don't think enough about who will be using these systems.

The RFP usually demands role-based rules for the security matrix. So if we know that we have different “roles” accessing our ECM solution, why do we assume that the same interface is the best way for them all to use the system?

Here is what typically happens:

- The ECM projects get traction because of the records manager, who generally performs a critical but under-valued role. The records manager, who understands the importance of governance around electronic records, develops a business case to buy and implement a new solution.
- The records manager usually becomes the main person driving the implementation. They spend a lot of time looking at things like retention strategies, taxonomies, security, etc. These are all very important aspects of the implementation and the transition to paperless.

Unfortunately, at the end of this process, end users are presented with a complex interface where they need to decide which folder to load the document they have just scanned (because paperless has now become mandatory) and how it should be classified.

This user may be so “occasional” that they only ever load one or two documents a week/month/year, yet they have to go through the whole library structure to work out where

this document should go and how it should be classified. Sure, they were shown this in training, but they have now forgotten.

### **Think HOW, not WHO**

If we had put some work into understanding end user roles and exactly how they would be interfacing with the system, then we could have made it a whole lot easier for them to use this solution.

To further expand on our example, maybe this person is a field worker: all their work is done in a mobile environment and their previously-hardcopy “paperwork” is now all done on a tablet/laptop.

Imagine if, at the end of their task, they could take some photos, fill in an online form, push a button, and have all that information saved into the ECM system in the right folders with the right classification; all without any paper required. If you made it that easy, then records would be saved correctly and paperless would start to get some traction.

### **Eliminating the workaround scourge**

People are constantly looking for ways to become more efficient in their jobs. If your IT department doesn’t think about the way your staff use their systems then your staff will just find an easier way to do it. Dropbox has become one of the best examples of this.

I know of a number of public sector agencies that have received emails from Dropbox telling them they had thousands of employees (based on their email addresses) using this service. Dropbox was looking for an upsell. But the records manager or CIO of these agencies had a heart attack. The reason this happens is pretty straightforward: Dropbox is easy to use.

### **Make your ECM easy to use**

We have heard an awful lot about customer experience when thinking of our digital interaction with customers, but who’s thinking about the experience of our internal customers when they interact with their ECM or other IT solutions?

Not many organisations take the time to consider that their internal customers should be treated just the same as their external customers. They prefer to deliver solutions “out of the box” even if it’s a terrible user experience, because it’s faster and cheaper. But the result is that people look for an easier way to do something. And in this new world of cloud software, purchased on a company credit card, they absolutely will find it.

So when thinking about replacing those ageing ECM solutions and trying to get traction with a paperless initiative, make sure you choose a solution where you can modify the interface to suit the user and their role in your organisation.

Consider mobility, ensuring that your approvals and workflows can be accessed via any device at any time. Sure, it still needs to be a robust ECM that addresses all those very important compliance issues, but the real value comes from getting the information in, storing it

appropriately, and then being able to access it easily via any device, when and where you need it, no matter what your role is in the organisation.

That's customer experience for the enterprise, and that's how our government agencies will get success with any paperless initiative.

And while you're pondering this new initiative think about this: research from Marketo has found that customising mobile and web experiences can lead to a 270% increase in content consumption. If it's good enough for your website, then it's good enough for your staff.

*Craig Broadbent is co-founder and Director of Stonebridge Systems, a Konica Minolta company. As part of Konica Minolta's Content Services division, Stonebridge Systems specialises in enterprise information management and digital solutions.*

<http://www.stonebridgesystems.com.au/>

*Submitted by Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council*