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Use ECM to Align Institutional Strategy + Departmental Goals

† Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences   ‡ The Texas A&M University System

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Summary Notes from the Chronicle of Higher Education Webinar:

Align ECM with Institutional Goals and Departmental Needs

September 29, 2011   **Speakers:**

- **John Parker**
  Chief Technology Officer, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences

- **Don Barwick**
  Manager, HUB & Procurement, Texas A&M University System

John Parker – CTO, USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences

Summary:

The College initiated a Laserfiche ECM project in 2007 with the goal of automating business processes and making information more accessible for faculty and staff. Through a high-volume and automated scanning process, 1.5 million College documents have been digitized, indexed, and archived securely in a Laserfiche repository. Laserfiche is now implemented in multiple capacities, from managing faculty records and research proposals at the Dean's Office and staff documents at the Business Office, to integrating with the College's main business application – MyUscCollege T-Log. Moving forward, Parker will implement more seamless user authentication among the applications, automated records retention, and the Laserfiche Mobile iPhone/iPad application for more mobile access to the College information.

Don Barwick – Manager, HUB & Procurement, Texas A&M University System (TAMUS)

Summary:

Being one of the largest systems of higher education in the nation, TAMUS faces unique challenges in terms of cutting down the amount of paperwork and sharing information more efficiently across the constituents. Laserfiche was first implemented in 2007 to eliminate printing monthly accounting reports from a legacy system, to streamline records retention and to improve processing time. Today, many University System members are able to customize Laserfiche to meet their unique operational requirements.

From a TAMUS IT perspective, Laserfiche creates a platform for managing institutional data in a safe and secure manner. It also promotes flexibility for agency-wide commonality of business processes. From the perspective of an end user, Laserfiche allows the sharing of data among departments, and makes records retention cost effective. Other notable benefits include easy access to electronic documents both internally and externally through a web-based application; simplified procedures for adhering to the records retention requirements of state agency records; and the transformation of legacy system reports into a more accessible format for storage and retrieval through automated workflow.

Moving forward, Barwick shared that more legacy software outputs will be sent directly to the Laserfiche ECM repository for easier information access and reduced processing cost. In addition, University System members will be encouraged to move to Laserfiche ECM so TAMUS take full advantage of economies of scale on licensing. Laserfiche will continue to be the core method by which the University System achieves compliance.

Q&A:

How do you go about implementing an institution-wide ECM solution?

Barwick – Most importantly, it needs to begin with executive and senior administrative buy-in and directives on institutional information management strategy. We also put in a lot of work in communicating the strategy throughout the process with end users and administration. We established protocols and best practices early in implementation, including types of folders and workflows. It's also recommended to begin implementation with one or two departments to "fine-tune" training.

During the implementation of Laserfiche, how do you deal with training for both IT staff and end users?

Parker – We worked very closely with Laserfiche and developed online and in-person training sessions. Laserfiche is really easy to use, so training the users doesn't take much time. For the IT staff, the training is focused on how Laserfiche works within our existing architecture for security and upgrades.

Barwick – We only have a small training team at TAMUS, and they were able to use the existing Laserfiche training manuals to provide lab-based training from department to department.

Do you need to create new positions to manage administer and future expansion of Laserfiche?

Parker – No, we worked with Laserfiche on a temporary consulting basis for the initial implementation. But for an ongoing basis, we don't need to hire new people. My IT staff handles responsibilities like the repository backup, security and updates. From both an IT and administrative perspective, Laserfiche runs on its own, and there's minimal burden to IT.

What is the process of integrating Laserfiche with legacy systems?

Barwick – Most of the staff understood the benefits of Laserfiche ECM pretty quickly, and they were also able to come up with ideas on how to streamline the business processes by integrating Laserfiche with the existing legacy systems. The IT then developed the integration internally. Now I can retrieve the legacy reports directly from the Laserfiche repository.

Parker – Prior to Laserfiche, we had developed an internal web application, T-Log, that tracks all college business transactions. Once we implemented Laserfiche, we thought "why don't we integrate the two systems, so that the staff members can not only see the core data of each transaction, they can also have the direct access to the documents associated with the transaction." So we created a simple "document" link in the T-Log, which, when clicked on, conducts an automatic search in the Laserfiche repository to retrieve all the documents that are tied to the transaction. For incoming documents, staff members can simply create a bar-coded cover sheet for all transactions logged in the T-Log, and then hand the documents to the scan station for automated indexing and archiving in Laserfiche.

Can Laserfiche ECM allow each individual service unit to customize the solution according to their own needs?

Parker – Yes, every department has its own business processes and its own indexing requirements; Laserfiche ECM is customized according to each department's needs. Because there are usually many departments involved, an ECM implementation requires one to go through this needs analysis process. This ensures that many if not all departmental needs can be met by the ECM solution. Laserfiche's flexibility makes implementation of such a cross-departmental solution very straight-forward. But I would still recommend that IT maintain any behind-the-scenes customization to ensure standardization.

Barwick – I concur. That's why we provided training department by department. One of the benefits of Laserfiche is the ability to easily customize the application to each department's needs. The critical part is to figure out what specifically each department wants, even down to the folder structure and metadata information.

How does Laserfiche help you achieve security within the existing environment?

Barwick – Laserfiche allows for stringent user authentication. For example, I can access everything within my department, but I can't access the general counsel's folder without prior approval.

How do you see Laserfiche helping to achieve compliance requirements?

Parker – Having all the documents in a central and secure location definitely helps for faster searching and retrieving of important information, and makes meeting compliance requirements easier.

How has your ECM use evolved over time?

Parker – We definitely have evolved from our first project of simply scanning faculty documents into an integrated solution between T-Log and Laserfiche. The Laserfiche implementation has even evolved beyond that core functionality. For example, we now allow faculty members to create their own sub-folders and store their own documents.

Barwick – Our legacy system doesn't allow us to conduct keyword searches, and now the auditors can just conduct keyword searches themselves and find anything they would need. Laserfiche definitely makes the auditing process much easier. As more processes are identified for an automated solution, we will gradually implement Laserfiche for these processes, too. Eventually, we would like to encourage the rest of the University System to adopt Laserfiche, because it is easier to maintain one system than multiple systems. Also, we have already determined the optimum platform for compliant records retention, which other institutions could replicate and avoid the costly process of trial and error in developing their own systems.

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