

# Coming soon to an Office near You

## Office 2007, Records Management, and ECM – Part 2.

By Mike Alsup

Microsoft is consolidating a number of traditional front-office and back-office productivity products into the “Office 2007” product suite. One of the key components in Office 2007 is Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS), which might be the key to getting Microsoft out of the desktop misery that they have been in for many years. We initially reviewed the introduction of this family of products in the September 2006 issue of this magazine (*Quick Link 32019*). The second part of this article examines the architectural alternatives and decisions that large organizations face in the deployment of MOSS.

### ECM Architectural Issues and Challenges

In most organizations, there are already multiple enterprise content management (ECM) solutions in place. Should there be a single enterprise ECM standard or should there be multiple ECM islands? If integration is required, What are the roles of each ECM product in the overall ECM solution architecture? How should these ECM products be integrated? How do the ECM solutions relate to the records management solutions that are al-

ready in place? What should be the strategy for moving towards the ECM solution architecture of the future? It is clear that there is not yet one answer to all ECM requirements, and even if there was, the level of effort to convert legacy ECM applications could outweigh the benefits of migrating to a single standard in many companies. Therefore, these organizations will probably be managing multiple ECM solutions for the foreseeable future.

There are four fundamental options for the cohabitation of traditional ECM vendors and MOSS in large organizations moving forward. These options are illustrated in Figure 1, below.

With the significant functional and architectural enhancements found in MOSS, the prior distinctions between the roles of an ECM product and SharePoint 2003 have become quite blurred. The four fundamental alternatives for a cohabitation of MOSS and an ECM system in an enterprise architecture are discussed below. MOSS can be used on a standalone basis, it can be used as a portal into an ECM system, it can be used as a peer repository with another ECM system, and it doesn't need to be used at all.

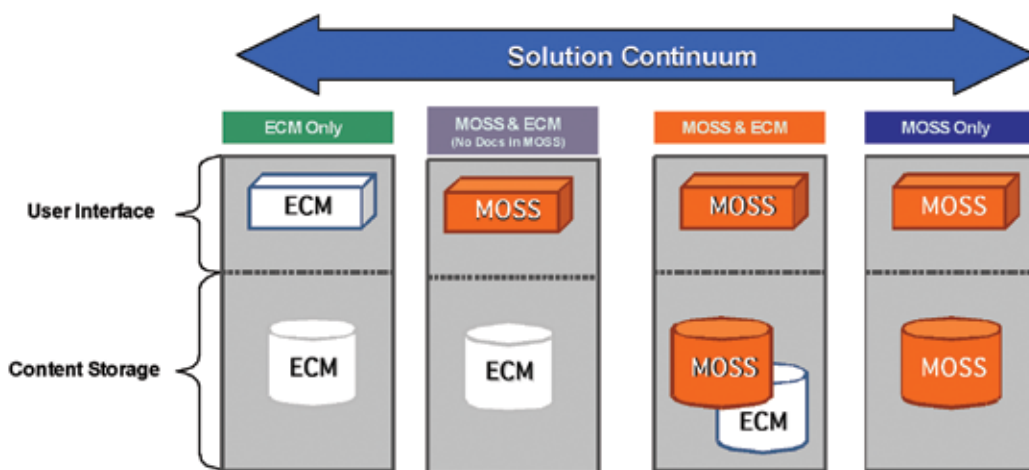


Figure 1. Strategic Options for ECM

### ECM Only

The first option is to continue with the traditional ECM vendors, such as EMC, OpenText, and IBM (including FileNet). These vendors are proven, scalable, and widely implemented. Most organizations have at least one ECM vendor implemented and many have selected an overall ECM standard. The ECM vendors have traditionally been implemented departmentally, and have frequently been difficult and expensive to implement on an enterprise-wide basis. Additionally, it is not clear that they solve all of

the ECM requirements of many organizations. In an “ECM Only” solution, the ECM system is the repository of record. MOSS, if implemented, would be a secondary, casual environment where there is no integration or linkages between the two systems.

### **MOSS Only**

Another option is to implement the Office 2007 product suite as the sole ECM application platform. This is a single vendor strategy that offers tight integration with primary user productivity tools and has the potential to solve important ECM problems, especially the archival of email messages as business records and file share consolidation. This puts the organization on a path to follow Microsoft as it enhances its family of ECM products. This option also assumes that Microsoft is “enterprise ready” to solve all ECM problems.

The risks in this strategy include the potential loss of control as end user organizations allow their collaboration sites to proliferate without common standards or integration to a business records repository. Additionally, there are a wide variety of legacy document management systems that need to have a well-defined relationship to the MOSS implementations.

### **MOSS as User Experience**

Another option that will be popular with many organizations will be to leverage the native MOSS user experience as the primary client into the ECM repository. In this scenario, all content and documents are stored in an ECM repository. The ECM platform is a main repository of unstructured content. This option facilitates the ability to provide other clients, both purpose-built and generic, that use the ECM repository. This approach enables the expansion of existing ECM deployment to a new class of “casual users” who want to use MOSS, and enables common security, administration, information architecture, and enterprise-class scalability for those applications that use the ECM repository. Users can access the ECM repository using the new MOSS user interface. Not only is the integration configurable and extensible, but it will expose basic content management, workflow, and search services from the ECM repository through the MOSS user interface “out-of-the-box”. Native Web parts provided by the ECM vendors expose basic content management capabilities (navigation, search, properties, and check-in/out) while customized Web parts expose advanced ECM capabilities (workflow, document lifecycles, virtual documents, and rendition management).

The benefits of this approach include providing a tailored client experience for each job: MOSS for the casual user and the ECM platform or a custom client for purpose-built applications, such as technical publications, workflow, or engineering change management. This includes a single security model that is applied regardless of application. There is an “official” copy of all business content that is in a single, well-understood location. The ECM platform is available to support advanced content management, digital asset management, Web content management, and records management applications.

There are disadvantages to this approach, including “integra-

tion holes” where the user experience becomes inconsistent between the MOSS environment and the ECM repository, reliance on the ECM vendor to provide Web parts or the cost of creating them internally, and the inability to fully support some native MOSS features such as cross-linking, aggregation, and business data connections. Another disadvantage of this approach is that Microsoft is strongly promoting an alternative approach that establishes MOSS as the primary ECM repository.

### **MOSS as an ECM Repository**

The final alternative is the establishment of MOSS as a peer ECM repository. Microsoft will make this alternative compelling as a replacement for network file servers and to manage the declaration of email messages as records. In this scenario, MOSS sites are well established and growing rapidly, and most organizations would use MOSS client and server functions normally. The business-critical content could be migrated between MOSS and an ECM repository. MOSS will also contain a significant amount of content that resides outside of an ECM repository.

The benefits of this approach include allowing more users to access a global ECM repository, and it does not limit the user community, which can mix-and-match applications with the use of MOSS as either an ECM repository or a portal to another ECM repository.

Disadvantages of this approach include the implementation of yet another repository, the additional operational management requirements, and the inability to exchange governance and standards between MOSS and other ECM systems.

At a minimum, most organizations will need to establish co-existence between ECM repositories. The real question in this alternative is: What is the proper role of MOSS vs. the alternative ECM platforms in a large organization?

### **Working Documents and Business Records**

Another scenario exists that drives demand for MOSS integration that is different from the above scenarios. User organizations have a desire to establish some level of control around the “business-critical” documents residing in MOSS. They want to either integrate with an existing records management system or create a new records management solution that includes MOSS, and they want to have an archival strategy around MOSS content. In these organizations, MOSS would be predominantly a work-in-process (WIP) repository that provides limited retention management services. Most of the content stored in MOSS would be transitional and have a short life span. Most WIP files would only exist in a MOSS repository and the documents that are not declared and classified as records within the ECM system would be maintained for a much shorter lifecycle in MOSS. The controlled and approved repository would still be the ECM platform (which could be another MOSS site).

Some organizations have adopted a working document and business record distinction to delineate the content that is to be maintained in MOSS versus an ECM records management system. The MOSS platform supports this scenario in two ways, through

manual or automatic migration of content from MOSS into the ECM repository.

Manual migration provides the ability for users to select content to copy or move from MOSS to an ECM Repository. This manual migration provides a level of user interaction and control over the resulting ECM information.

Automatic migration supports a set of pre-configured business rules that move, copy, or link content from MOSS to an ECM repository that meet a given set of criteria. These criteria may include elapsed time, the age of a document, metadata (index) values, or content status.

This scenario takes advantage of the multiple modes and transfer behaviors to provide ultimate flexibility. This includes “automatic” rules in place for content wherever possible, and manual rules to allow for “manual” publishing for items rules can’t catch. This scenario takes advantage of the strengths of an ECM repository for business-critical documents. There is still an “official” copy of critical business content that is in a single, well-understood location. Since most organizations will not be able to define a comprehensive set of business rules to support automatic migration of content, a typical scenario would include both automatic and manual migration of content between the MOSS repository and the ECM repository. This scenario would ensure that automated rules are established to create standard governance policies and that the organization is provided with the added flexibility to handle the exceptions that inevitably arise.

Figure 2 below illustrates how the working document/business records scenario might occur in practice. This is representative of


how many large organizations will integrate MOSS and an ECM platform.

## Summary

The larger ECM vendors have traditionally believed that SharePoint is a portal and that real documents need to live in a real ECM repository. But this isn’t what many companies want to do. Maybe 10 percent of users need the robustness of a full ECM client (integrated with AutoCAD, for example). A very large percentage of the documents that are created should live a short life in an ECM working document repository and never be introduced into an ECM records management environment. Many companies prefer the Microsoft approach and the native integration of Office 2007 and MOSS will likely be something that the ECM vendors can’t duplicate.

However, critical requirements exist for a true ECM repository supporting MOSS to be the “single source of truth” across the enterprise. The ECM vendors offer a potentially ideal back-end solution component for this story. The ECM vendors need to produce an integrated MOSS interface to a robust records management and archiving back-end for the enterprise. This includes a robust “working documents in MOSS and business records in ECM” metaphor that supports the full range of alternatives in a large corporation. This also includes recognizing the legitimacy of MOSS as a repository instead of just as a portal, and that a document could be checked out of the ECM repository into a MOSS repository.

Similarly, user organizations need to define the impact of MOSS on their ECM strategy. For most organizations, MOSS will be a significant new element in their plans. MOSS is the first product with the potential to become a default ECM strategy. If you don’t do anything else but implement the Office 2007 product suite, you will have many of the capabilities that have traditionally defined ECM. However, there are important steps to be taken, including understanding your enterprise document, email, and records requirements, thorough ECM planning, establishing an ECM solution architecture, and managing change during the migration to Office 2007 instead of having it manage you. This will enable organizations to capture the full benefits of both the Office 2007 product suite as well as the best tools from the rest of the ECM industry.

The fundamental decision in the implementation of MOSS is whether it has an integrated relationship with another ECM product. This involves an assessment of the legacy ECM implementations and the degree of risk that the organization is willing to take with a MOSS implementation. All of the scenarios indicated in this article will be broadly implemented. 

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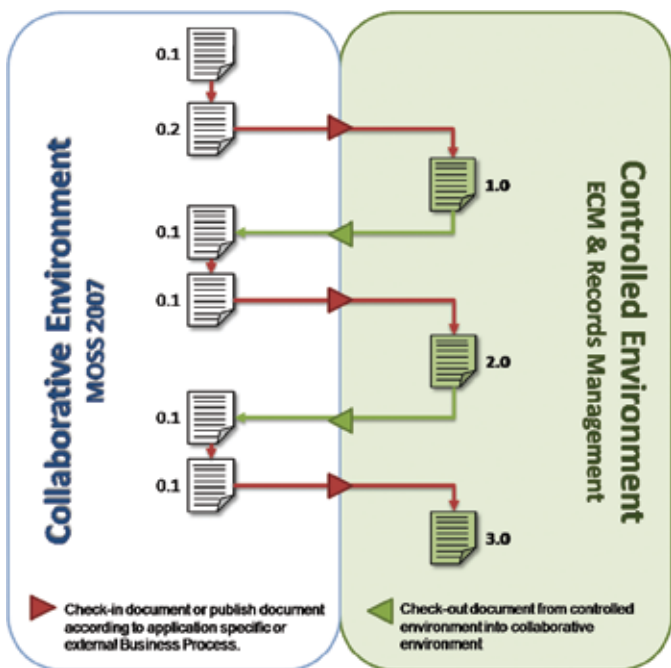


Figure 2. Working Documents and Business Records