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The Value of Collaborative Manufacturing

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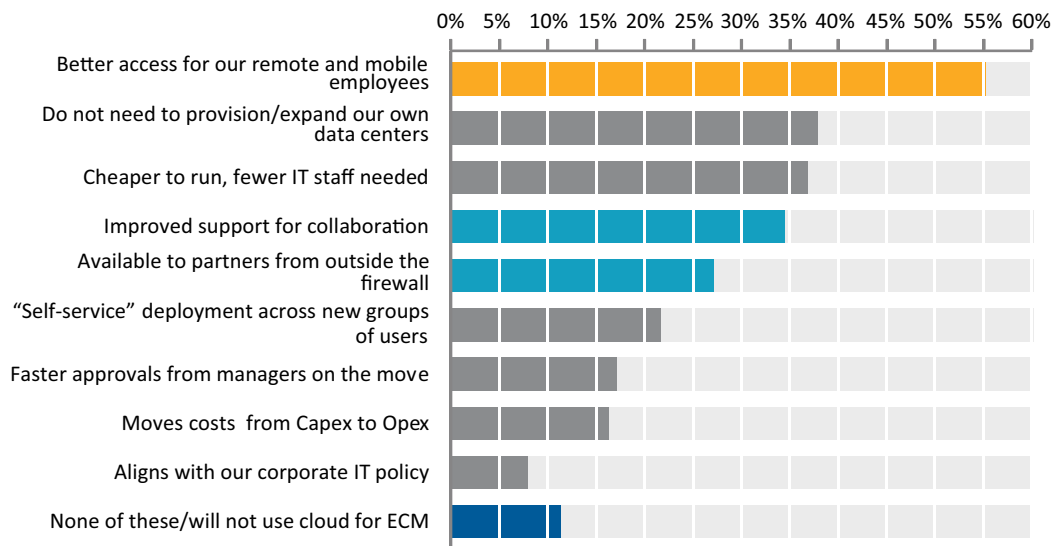DRIVING THE DIGITAL BUSINESS

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Introduction

To meet the demands of today's dynamic markets, many organizations are realizing that it is no longer good enough to collaborate exclusively in-house; businesses today must make every effort to work seamlessly alongside external organizations and third parties, or risk falling behind their more social, collectively minded competitors. This is no truer than when we consider the manufacturing industry, which benefits greatly from heightened connection between internal workforce, partners, and customers. In this article, we will take a deep dive into collaborative strategies and technologies as they apply to the manufacturing sector, and discover what opportunities exist for organizations that embrace cooperative efforts, both within their own organizations, as well as beyond the firewall.

A Strong Connection

Today, manufacturers are attempting to substantively leverage collaboration through various means in order to take advantage of its benefits in a way that impacts the bottom line. Three commonly seen strategies have emerged. The first, cloud and mobile access to business content, ECM, and DM systems regardless of location. The second, bring your own device (BYOD), policies permitting and regulating the free or limited use of personal technology to access privileged information. And the last, the transition from paper documents to electronic forms and other digital file formats such as PDF. These strategies combine both technology and methodology to increase collaboration in and out of the organization.

Figure 1. What do you think would be the key benefits for your organization of running ECM/DM as a cloud application?[1]

Access Anywhere, Anytime

As seen in a recent AIIM survey, the two largest operational benefits reported for cloud based content management systems are more effective collaboration, and more modern and flexible applications, both tallying 58% of respondents. Extending access to partners and customers follows at 47%, and teleworking for staff at 42% (Figure 1). A similar picture is seen for mobile access where the two biggest benefits reported by respondents are staff mobility and speed of data availability. Both cloud services and mobile device access provide flexible platforms for collaboration that can occur whenever, wherever, without needing collaborators to share the same space. Enterprise content can be conveniently transferred, uploaded, and downloaded from anywhere, all while maintaining version history and proper author and viewer permissions. This translates into faster customer turnaround, more transparent and open channels of communication both internally and across the fire wall, and often results in an immediate ROI.

Bring Your Own Device

Permission to bring your own device (BYOD) is gaining steam in the manufacturing enterprise, and changing how employees interface with their co-workers and customers. Employees now have the freedom to work on whatever device they so choose, and collaborate organically with others also using their preferred devices. While BYOD does little in the ways of directly creating channels for collaboration, the convenience and quality of life improvements it provides should not be dismissed. Collaboration in BYOD environment sets the precedent for a more authentic means of communication. Imagine if a customer had the capability to connect with product experts and information at their leisure through the smart phone in their pocket. While it is difficult to quantify possibilities such as these into revenue, BYOD could go a long way to enhancing collaboration in the manufacturing industry.

Electronic Forms and PDF

Collaboration hosted by the cloud, mobile devices, and whatever in between (BYOD) needs to be able to access critical business content regardless of file formats, operating systems, or device. Electronic forms, and specifically PDF, provide reliable access to critical information natively on most popular devices, browsers, and systems. In addition PDF, in particular, provides numerous benefits to enhance collaboration in the manufacturing industry. For example, some PDF products are able to convert diagrams into PDF files, along with a high fidelity picture representation, while maintaining support for layers (commonly found in more advanced diagrams and drawings). Other PDF products are replete with extensive form fill databases to create reusable shipping documentation and invoicing, which can be distributed to internal staff and to customers. Finally, easily shared, PDF provides a standardized, digital envelope, which permits secure, efficient transfer between organizations, regardless of cross-platform concerns. PDF technology empowers collaboration and offers countless benefits for teamwork in a manner that is transparent to the user.

Conclusion

Cross enterprise document sharing, collaborative content authoring, electronic forms and formats such as PDF technologies, and cloud and mobile device support are all effective ways to streamline tasks in the enterprise and facilitate collaboration. By establishing these types of systems, important data and information can be easily shared between two different organizations—whether it's a third party vendor or a client—as though they were just another arm of the same enterprise body. To best integrate collaborative efforts into our organization and take fullest advantage of their benefits, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Map channels of collaboration in your organization, and assess what's working well and what is underperforming.

- Seek out employee feedback and discuss collaboration trends in your organization. Find out what their preferred methods of cooperation are, their pain points, what strategies, culture shifts, or technologies they believe would cultivate a better collaborative network.

- Review strategies such as mobile device access or BYOD. Consider possible technology acquisitions to increase collaboration.

- Remove barriers of separation where possible between your organization and customers, vendors, and third parties outside the firewall. This benefits all organizations by possibly shortening time to market, lowering overhead, and increasing efficiency.

References

[1]AIIM Industry Watch Mobile and Cloud - accessing, capturing and processing content www.aiim.org/research

About the author

Thomas LaMonte is an AIIM Market Intelligence Researcher well versed and credentialed in the fields of ECM, ERM, and BPM with a heightened focus on solving the operational problems of today's businesses.

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About ActivePDF

ActivePDF delivers a comprehensive suite of PDF tools to enable companies to dynamically generate and manipulate PDF files from within server-based Enterprise Content Management (ECM), Document Management and Workflow applications. The PDF product suite is designed to streamline the process to render and assemble content into secure PDF documents. ActivePDF serves organizations from numerous industries, including Financial, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Utilities, Engineering, Legal and Government. The company has a substantial market presence of over 23,000 customers and distribution of more than 300,000 server licenses within 90 countries.

When our developers at ActivePDF think about content management, they think about things such as processing performance, document fidelity and reliability. Other items include:

- High-volume PDF functionality
- Centralizing and simplifying licensing
- Easy retrieval and archiving
- Batch file processing and automation

- Tracking documents and their status
- Compliancy within industry standards
- Security of sensitive digital documents
- Communication between businesses, employees and clients

ActivePDF enables enterprise businesses to deliver, share and manage content anytime and anywhere in a high-volume, low-cost and reliable manner. ActivePDF encourages companies to do things differently when it comes to content management – to digitalize workflow and move closer toward a complete digital transformation.

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