

REINVENTING BUSINESS WITH CONTENT AND COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGIES

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LOWELL RAPAPORT

New Applications for Output & Report Management Software



It's a proven technology supporting fast information retrieval and delivery; now output and report management software is driving new applications, including data mining and data transformation.

IN THE WORLD of content technologies, output and report management is a proven cost saver. The category has been around since the mainframe era, yet its typical mission hasn't changed much at all. The goal is to take output data streams and convert them for intelligent distribution across the enterprise. In recent years, delivery options have expanded beyond print, fax and dedicated thick clients and now include flexible email and browser-based viewing options.

Many organizations have a well-defined and ongoing need to manage output streams. Companies routinely generate customer bills and statements as well as reports of daily, weekly and monthly performance for internal decision making. Output and report management software performs

the necessary job of parsing, organizing and, in some cases, storing these reports. The software can also provide proof of delivery, guaranteeing that the intended recipients have received the reports.

Classic output and report management tools will likely remain popular as long as legacy print streams drive mission-critical processes, but analysts recognize that the rise of XML and granular content management will present users with new options. For example, as structured reports give way to XML-tagged data, the job of reformatting and repurposing content will be greatly simplified, and enterprise content management systems will easily handle this task. This would leave almost no role for output management software — at least as a document transformation tool.

“Output management software vendors have to branch out [and embrace] enterprise resource planning [ERP] output, email, imaging archives and other output sources,”

says Charles Brett, senior program manager for Stamford, CT-based Meta Group. To remain relevant for the long haul, Brett says output and report management vendors

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have to “increase the number of types of content they can archive and transform and they must integrate with more systems, such as portals, business process management, analytics and customer relationship management [CRM].”

Archiving capabilities will also be a product differentiator, according to Garth Landers, content management analyst with Stamford, CT-based Gartner Group. “Digital output will be subsumed by the archive side,” he says, adding that archival tools will have the best prospects of supporting new types of applications.

New Applications for Data Transformation

Despite Landers’s prediction that the future lies with archive-oriented solutions, there are innovative applications for transformation capabilities of output management software. For example, invoice processing is a challenge for any enterprise that deals with more than a handful of vendors. If invoices can be received electronically, output management systems can be used to transform a cumbersome data entry task into a fast, automated procedure.

The New York City Department of Education provides a case in point. The department purchases some \$2 billion in goods and services each year. According to Richard Carlo, deputy administrator of fiscal affairs, the biggest avoidable cost in the system is processing and paying invoices.

“We needed a 120-person staff to process invoices,” Carlo explains. “Furthermore, most of our contracts offer discount terms for early payment — say 2 percent for payment within 15 days, but it took us up to a month to pay each invoice.”

The Department of Education, while upgrading its purchasing system, wanted to find a faster, less labor-intensive way to process payments, so it worked with some of its largest vendors, including Staples, Apple Computer and Dell, to create invoices that could be electronically imported. Then, the agency implemented DeliveryWare

software from Madison, WI-based Esker, and turned the output system into an input management system.

“When we started, most vendors we did business with offered electronic data interchange (EDI), but we had our own business document format,” says Carlo. “DeliveryWare was able to convert incoming electronic invoices to a form our financial software could understand. This automated much of the process of paying invoices, reducing the number of employees needed and speeding up the process.”

If invoices can be received electronically, they can be paid within minutes, says Carlo, and he adds that the most time-consuming task remaining is actually cutting the check and mailing it out.

While DeliveryWare and other output management tools are normally used to transform and deliver internal reports in a variety of customizable formats, Jim Blakeley of Mooers Strategy Group, Newport Beach, CA, says Esker has tapped a huge potential market for its transformation capabilities.

“According to our research, CFOs are trying to meticulously monitor the cash conversion cycle,” explains Blakeley, who was hired by Esker to explore opportunities for new applications. “The need is to use cash more efficiently by speeding its movement through an

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RICHARD CARLO, NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

enterprise. Esker DeliveryWare has the ability to detect keywords in a data stream to intelligently determine file type. This lets the software detect the telltale characteristics of a document like an invoice, even though invoice formats vary quite a bit.”

