The 4 Critical Steps for a Successful ECM Migration

Step 1: Pre-Migration Planning

⦿ SeeUnity™

"Master of Migration"
Series, Part 1

Preface

In a moment of frustration, what user or admin hasn't imagined saying goodbye to their Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system and starting over with a new system? Maybe you've felt a strong desire to apply a forceful karate chop to the ECM system. Hey, we get it.

Despite how you may feel, you should proceed with caution when consolidating or moving to a new ECM system. These are extensive and complex systems, and they host vital corporate information — arguably the most valuable asset a company possesses. These systems have been deeply integrated into your business and oftentimes are highly customized to meet your specific needs. Nevertheless, some organizations tighten the karate belt, brace themselves, and attack the situation.

These reasons are many. Sometimes a migration is born out of necessity: for example, an ECM vendor may be consolidating its offerings or ending support for an outdated system. Perhaps your organization is consolidating content from two or more systems in different departments. A corporate merger could drive content consolidation as well. The costs of maintenance can be a driver for switching systems, or you may have grown weary of a current vendor because of its lack of support, lack of innovation, or lack of a cloud offering. Whatever the reason, when you are ready to move to a new system it is vital that you take a best-practices approach to your ECM migration.

The importance of migration best practices

A mishandled migration can postpone or eliminate ROI, divert valuable resources from other IT priorities, and leave users frustrated and confused — in short, undermining the benefits of migration. A poorly managed migration can also result in data corruption, lost documents or lost versions of documents, missing metadata, and other problems with the content itself. In the worst-case scenarios, companies lose months of

The Road To Migration Success

- Early Pre-Migration Planning
- Evaluate Migration Planning
- Migration Planning
- Testing

Migrate Integrate Synchronize

productivity and hundreds of thousands of dollars, only to abandon the project and return to the original source system which they wanted to leave in the first place.

What's important to take away is that success is in the details of proper planning and adherence to best practices. While no one can guarantee success, a clear set of recommendations based on past experience can certainly increase your odds of a successful migration. **SeeUnity** has successfully managed numerous ECM migrations for companies large and small, making us **masters of migration**. Through our direct experiences we have developed a set of best practices that can help organizations like yours improve your chances of a successful migration. Allow us to be your sensei and impart our wisdom to help you become a **master of migration**.
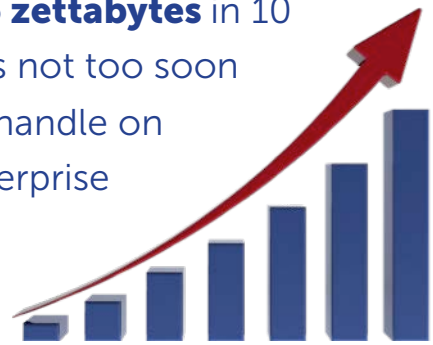
How we're defining migration

Migration is the moving of enterprise content, usually from one or more ECM or file storage systems to one unified ECM system. The types of migrations discussed in this guide are from one ECM system to another. This includes migrating not just content, but all data – for example, metadata, properties, structures, versions, history, related items, file plans, records management settings, objects, and security.

Worldwide, content and data will reach **35 zettabytes** in 10 years. It's not too soon to get a handle on your enterprise content.

Who this best-practices guide is for

This white paper has been created for the stakeholders who are responsible for migrating from one ECM system to another, including management, source, and target system experts, and any third-party contractors. The guide is especially relevant to individuals who are unsure how to undertake a migration and those who are having difficulty obtaining executive buy-in to conduct appropriate and thorough planning. This document should also be helpful for individuals who are trying to evaluate the potential risks, benefits, and requirements of undertaking an ECM migration.

What this white paper covers

This white paper is the first of a series on migration best practices, SeeUnity's "Master of Migration Series." Specifically, this white paper will provide a detailed best practices guide to the first step in a four-step process of planning and executing an ECM migration.

We consider these the four critical steps, or phases, of planning and executing a successful ECM migration:

- Early pre-migration planning
- Evaluation of migration products and solutions
- Migration planning
- Testing

Each of these phases includes multiple best practices and strategies. The guide you are reading focuses on the first phase, which we consider the most important part of any migration effort: early pre-migration planning. Following the best practices outlined in the first phase will increase the odds of a successful project by ensuring you've done the proper planning upfront.

Early pre-migration planning

Here is a summary of the best practices that should be considered during the *early pre-migration planning* phase. Each of these best practices is discussed in more detail below.

1. Assemble a cross-functional team
2. Conduct a migration assessment
3. Involve experienced migration experts
4. Find out what you don't know
5. Understand your historical source environment and data
6. Secure a true data expert
7. Understand the target environment
8. Understand the target user experience
9. Create a user adoption plan
10. Evaluate use of other silos such as file shares and other ECM systems

1. Assemble a cross-functional team

The importance of a cross-functional team when performing early pre-migration planning activities cannot be overstated. Having this team will give you a full picture of the reality of the current ECM system and the needs of the future ECM system as well as shed light on any hurdles expected in the process. These insights into requirements and possible future difficulties will help you form a more successful migration plan from the start.

Typically this team includes:

- A project manager, responsible for the team
- Technical expert for target system
- Interface expert for target system
- Business process expert (power user)
- Technical expert on source environment, including older data structures
- Expert with migration software and migration processes

Planning sessions on average will involve several hours together. Not having these experts together results in functional blind spots. Cross-functional teams are, by definition, staffed by members with divergent priorities. A migration team can be difficult to manage; it is important that the team is committed to success and benefits from good leadership with the experience and authority to keep the team together throughout the planning process.

2. Conduct a migration assessment

A migration assessment helps you understand the ultimate needs of your migration and gives the migration planners a sense of the scope and variety of what needs to be quantified before the migration. The migration assessment should cover on a high level an evaluation of both your source and target systems, as well as overarching migration requirements.

We recommend starting with these overarching themes and then, after selecting a migration partner, assessing the solution in greater detail.

Evaluate source system

- Create an inventory of software packages, versions, and customizations
- Understand data hierarchy
- Quantify the number and types of documents

- Understand metadata profiles used for documents to be migrated

Evaluate target system

- Create an inventory of software packages and versions
- Evaluate deployment customizations
- Understand data and system hierarchy
- Evaluate metadata fields and architecture

Migration requirements

- Identify how source data will be selected
- Document and create mapping plans for location and metadata
- Understand how migrated data will be assigned versions in the target system
- Define a records management and taxonomy plan based on incorporating a current records management plan or creating a new one
- Decide how will you handle peripheral documents and items such as attachments, access history, and related links
- Consider whether you are migrating or creating security profiles or groups
- Evaluate whether metadata will be converted, changed, or added as a part of the migration
- Define or review records management retention policy
- Explain the retention policies defined and how records management is used
- Determine if there is a hard cutoff date for the source system as well as the reasons for a hard cutoff date if one exists
- Set target date for completed migration based on business-driven time constraints (while realizing this may need to change to accommodate technical timelines)

To reiterate, the type of discovery that goes on during a migration assessment can be used to vet potential target repositories before a commitment to migration has been made. Clearly a target system that introduces too many significant limitations is cause for concern, and alternatives should also be explored. In the event that the specific target repository is not up for debate, understanding data and usability limitations can determine when a migration should happen and how to prepare users.

3. Involve experienced migration experts

Whether you rely on an out-of-the-box migration tool or engage in migration through a services provider, it's important to find somebody with specific and deep experience with migration. Many system integrators and consulting firms have solid ECM experience, with expertise in one single ECM system but not much background specific to migration or multiple systems. Make sure you obtain case studies or references to back up claims. It's also advisable to find experts who have performed migrations involving the source and target systems matching your own. We have observed that migrations delivered by inexperienced providers take up to three times longer to complete than those delivered by experienced providers. Inexperienced providers often do not know all of the costs associated with a migration and this can lead to the project being over budget and past the estimated timeline.

Migrations attempted by inexperienced migration providers can take up to **3 times** longer!

4. Find out what you don't know

Just like needing to become a master of migration, you will need to become the master of your data. Nearly every migration will have idiosyncratic data and outliers that require special handling. Based on our experience with solutions assessments, most of these special circumstances and requirements are unforeseen prior to this stage. Conducting the assessment doesn't just reveal these potential problems – it informs how the project should be organized. Properly linearizing the project can prevent substantial delays.

Examples of possible outliers and idiosyncratic data:

- *Do former employees account for a large percentage of document authors?* In this situation it is important to decide how you want the author information transferred.
- *Does your target system need to support multiple languages, and will these languages leverage both single-byte and double-byte character sets such as English and Chinese?* If your organization needs to support both character sets now or in the future, you must implement a system that can accommodate both. Not all ECM systems do.

- *Are there old file types stored in your source system?* For example, WordPerfect was a widely used document type that is seldom used today. It's important to understand whether your new system can handle documents such as these and whether any of your users will need the ability to view these document types.

5. Understand your historical source environment and data

Full awareness of the source data composition and structure is one of the most overlooked areas – and one that is important in determining migration scope and degree of success.

For organizations that have years of unstructured content, the data structure can be vastly different between current content and the first generations of content. Customizations are introduced and eliminated. Mistakes are made and corrected over time. Entire security models may have been changed. Large volumes of historical content are rarely updated to reflect changes in structure, settings, and metadata types. If this older content is infrequently accessed by users, it may exist completely outside the day-to-day visibility of administrators. Research should be conducted to determine if previous migrations have brought older or obsolete data into the current system. If previous migrations have occurred, the data should be analyzed, as there will likely be discrepancies from the newer data.

6. Secure a true data expert

The internal support team of administrators is probably well versed in the data structure of the source ECM repository. One of the reasons that older data could be unfamiliar – and hidden beneath the surface – is the fact that the administrators who first implemented the system may have moved onto a new position, or no longer work for the company.

If the original administrators aren't available, we highly recommend you secure a contractor or services team who specializes in profiling this type of data. With all the moving parts in a migration, this is an investment in planning that will pay dividends during the migration process and outcome.

7. Understand the target environment

The new system will differ significantly from the source system, including functionality, the user experience, default security, and how data is structured. Products from different vendors are based on different visions of ECM capabilities, what applications are critical, and the business processes a system is optimized to support. It's important to have a stakeholder in the planning process who is

highly familiar with the target environment. This will help create a planning dialog that bridges the gap between the data and environments of the source and target systems.

8. Understand the target user experience

All the preparation and careful work of migration will be in vain if users reject the new system. If the "bring your own device" revolution has taught us anything, it's that users know what they want and they won't settle on a subpar experience. It's important therefore that a business process representative is involved in the planning phase of a migration; in fact, there's value in consulting one earlier – during the vetting process for a new target system. Interviewing users about the source interface is important; it will help confirm assumptions or replace them with accurate assessments of reality.

Ultimately, migration isn't just about moving content; it's about looking beyond the migration and seizing the opportunity to make broad operational improvements. This applies to user processes; certain processes remain in practice without any clear benefit and may be as outdated as the legacy ECM system. You may want to take advantage of this opportunity to implement new processes to promote user satisfaction and foster adoption and advocacy of the new system.

9. Create a user adoption plan

One of the most consistently cited challenges of implementing a new ECM is user adoption. In the previous best practice you should have understood and created the optimal user experience. While this will this will go a long way in user adoption, it won't get you all the way. A great user experience is the first half of the battle, the second half comes with getting your users to accept the change.

Proper user training is key to ensuring users are not frustrated by changes in the target system, and empowering users to get the most out of new features. A user training course is an effective model for managing perceptions about the new target system and helping users understand the reasoning behind changes. Have this plan prepared and a training schedule in place before the transition to the target system.

No matter how many benefits and improvements the new system will create, expect resistance to change. Lower the barriers to adoption by being transparent about the roll-out plan, setting expectations for users, and sharing useful information to aid in their transition. It is a good idea to open a communication channel so employees can ask questions or share concerns so frustration does not become a reason for non-adoption.

10. Evaluate use of other silos such as file shares and other ECM systems

It is very uncommon for any company to provide only one way for employees to share documents. Employees often share files through a main ECM while also using file shares or other ECM systems that were acquired during changes in the company or to accommodate specific situations. Knowing where all the data resides is key to a successful migration.

Once you have evaluated other systems that your organization is openly aware of, it is also wise to poll employees to determine if any other systems have been implemented without an official sanction from IT. Often employees need to share files immediately and don't have time for due process. AIIM reports that as many as 30% of users have resorted to using unofficial cloud file-sharing tools.[1] Take the time to discover other systems where your company data might be stored. If possible, incorporate these systems into your known systems and migration plan.

30% of employees use unofficial cloud file-sharing tools to store and manage documents and other corporate assets.

30%

Conclusion & next steps

This white paper is intended as a resource, and to provide guidance based on hard-earned expertise in performing enterprise migrations. It's the first in a series of white papers from SeeUnity that lay out best practices in ECM migration. Subsequent white papers will discuss the following topics:

- Evaluation of migration products and solutions
- Migration planning
- Testing

If there is a single message that a reader should take away from this best-practices series, it is that a migration is only as successful as a migration plan. More specifically, the variables for every

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[1] "…faced with limited systems that do not provide the ability to share information outside of the firewall, a large number of users (around 30%) are resorting to using unofficial cloud file-sharing tools. This renegade approach to information sharing completely blindsides the organisation – the information now resides outside of all governance, permission and security systems, and quite literally has gone AWOL." "Cloud Access to Public Sector Content," AIIM, April 2013.

migration scenario are numerous and unique. A deep bench of stakeholders needs to be assembled; the data and content environments must be closely analyzed; and the full requirements to successfully bridge the two systems must be understood. The resulting impact on user processes and behavior must be considered, with changes being made as needed.

Large-scale enterprise migration is inherently complicated and poses potential risk to high-value information assets. For this reason many organizations resist the temptation and clear benefits of a new system. However, with proper planning, tools, and commitment to success, risks can be minimized and the resulting benefits can be optimized. No migration is free from unexpected obstacles, but the best practices in this whitepaper can help you anticipate, avoid, and overcome challenges so you can streamline and accelerate your migration as much as possible. Understand the risks, plan for success, and you will ensure a strong return on an investment in migration. Proper migration, correctly planned, will result in more productive users and a stronger content infrastructure.

> Our most important advice: The success of your ECM migration depends on the **quality of the migration plan** itself.

Stay tuned for the second installment in our Master of Migration series.

About SeeUnity

SeeUnity has decades of combined years of experience with successful integration, migration, and synchronization of ECM systems. We have helped over 300 large organizations take control of their ECM system and, as keen observers of the market, we have been at the forefront of the growing hybrid ECM trend.

While we at SeeUnity have a vested interest in marketing our software, the goal of this white paper is educate organizations on the risks, benefits, and important considerations when exploring the hybrid ECM world.

If you are reading this document because you need immediate help with a migration project, and find the recommendations sensible, please contact us regarding how we can help you achieve migration success. We can be reached at 970-776-8300 or by email at **info@seeunity.com**.

While SeeUnity stands behind the recommendations in this white paper, we do not guarantee that observing these best practices alone will deliver success. We do firmly believe that the guidance offered in these pages will improve the odds for success.