

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the iECM Committee and what are its objectives?

A: The iECM Committee is an AIIM Standards Committee. The iECM Committee will inform and assist stakeholder communities in the challenges of managing content over disparate systems and possible solutions for creating an interoperable ECM environment. The iECM consortium will be responsible for developing and maintaining a framework that promotes the interoperability of content management systems to enable content sharing over organizational, system and geographical boundaries. To accomplish this, the iECM will endorse existing applicable standards, work collaboratively with standards organizations to enhance applicable existing standards to improve interoperability, develop best practices for interoperability and potentially develop standards where no standards exist.

Q: What does iECM stand for?

A: iECM stands for "Interoperable Enterprise Content Management". The iECM is an AIIM Standards Committee that will inform and assist stakeholder communities in the challenges of managing content over disparate systems and possible solutions for creating an interoperable ECM environment.

Q: Why is iECM and interoperability needed?

A: The Enterprise Content Management community has seen a change in the way organizations view content management. Historically, organizations have thought in terms of departmental, point solutions which caused a proliferation of content silos to be developed within organizations. Today's content rich applications require access across these cross-organizational and cross-corporate silos. These content silos make it impossible to be able to find, access, retrieve manipulate and report on information. Not only are there numerous content silos, but the silos are implemented on a variety of platforms that are controlled by a variety of applications and need to be accessed by numerous means. The iECM, Interoperable Enterprise Content Management Committee is focused on standardizing enterprise content management components and capabilities so that applications can utilize the components regardless of the content silo in which it is contained. Interoperability standards can provide the means to share information both within an organization and across organizational boundaries.

Q: What will the committee deliver or produce?

A: The committee is planning on defining and delivering three major items:

- An iECM Standards Roadmap

- A series of Best Practices linked to the reference model, and
- A metadata registry.

Q: What types of organizations will benefit from this?

A: Any organization will be able to benefit from this initiative, but it is specifically focused on those organizations that need to access, manage, search or use content that maintained in multiple ECM environments. This includes content that needs to cross organizational boundaries as well as content that needs to be shared by departments within an organization. Examples of the types of organizations that can benefit include extended communities such as Health Care, Justice, Defense and Intelligence, Financial & Insurance and Manufacturing. iECM is intended to help smooth the flow of documents and content between parts of an organization and between organizations.

Q: What is the benefit to these organizations?

A: iECM will provide organizations with the ability to respond quickly and effectively to changing needs relating to the accessing, managing and sharing of information across different ECM environments. Vendors that support the standards identified by iECM will increase the value of their applications by making it easier for customers to dynamically incorporate them into content rich applications and work processes. iECM will help to reduce the cost and effort required to create and sustain cross organizational information sharing processes for organizations.

Q: What is the benefit to participation in the iECM Consortium?

A: Participation in this activity allows participants to shape the iECM outcome and to exchange ideas, best practices and experience with other organizations trying to solve similar information sharing challenges. This will give members valuable insights and understanding of how best to apply the concept of iECM to their particular situation.

Q: What problem is iECM addressing?

A: Enterprises face multiple problems with respect to information management. Enterprises are drowning in information: business documents exchanged with partners, order, invoices, quotations, catalogues, manuals, service schedules, service records, personnel records, marketing collateral... just about every aspect of the life of a business generates information in some tangible form. Information forms the corporate memory of the organization. However, across a typical enterprise different parts of the organization have addressed their information management needs in a localized way. Information, often mission critical information, is dispersed across multiple systems typically built on different platforms. At some high level it could be said that "an organization no longer knows what it knows". There is no "one-stop-shop" that can find

and act on information within an enterprise, across the multiple disparate systems in which it is stored. Increasingly regulation and legal discovery processes obligate an enterprise to be able to produce and act upon requested information in a timely fashion with severe business penalties for failure.

iECM is focused on addressing the problems of managing information at an enterprise scale, across multiple disparate systems, enabling enterprise search, retrieval and management of information held within an organization and the exchange of information with partner organizations.

Q: What are the benefits of iECM?

A: The standardization driven by the iECM initiative will provide the end user community with pervasive access to all relevant content without customized connectors or one-off applications. IT departments will be able to redirect funds from these expensive and time-consuming tasks onto projects that enhance the core business of the enterprise. The ECM vendor will benefit from the expansion of the content management market. Once sufficient standardization has been achieved, application developers will be able to include content management as an integral part of virtually any type of application, much in the same manner they do with databases today. Solutions integrators will be able to deliver high value business applications faster with lower maintenance costs, once they are no longer required to create and maintain expensive ECM connections. ECM interoperability will result in new sales and services income to vendors and integrators and in increased profits, savings, and enhanced business efficiencies for the consumers of these products. Within the next 10 years businesses and governments will be judged based on their ability to work with organizational, national and global information. iECM will enable that.

Q: Isn't this just for vendors to connect to other vendors systems?

A: While iECM will provide substantial benefits to ECM vendors it is not intended for just vendors. It is expected that ECM vendors will use the standards identified in the Standards Roadmap to provide other applications access to the content retained in their specific environments.

Q: Isn't this just for system integrators to use to connect multiple content repositories together?

A: While iECM will allow system integrators to build and deploy applications that share content across multiple ECM systems, iECM will also help any group that needs to do that. For example, iECM will help an organization's information technology group to build interoperable applications quicker, allowing them to focus on the higher value activities inside the organization.

Q: Isn't this just for big companies or government agencies?

A: No. The benefits of iECM extend to organizations of all sizes and in all industries. For many large organizations the value and importance of the iECM is already obvious. They have many different content management systems and have the immediate need to have these systems connect with each other and share content. The same is true of many government departments and agencies. They have immediate, sometimes mandated, needs to share content across organizational boundaries. But the value of iECM extends to smaller organizations, which may only have a single content management system. These organizations can benefit from interoperability because they are part of a supply chain. They have customers, partners and suppliers, each of whom has their content management systems. Today, these organizations exchange content using email, and create multiple copies of critical documents, such as contracts. By using an interoperable enterprise content management system, they would be able to link their systems to those of their customers and partners. This linkage would permit easier interactions and would reduce costs, while increasing effectiveness. For many organizations, this level of interaction and service will become a critical competitive advantage.

Q: Where can I get more information about ECM and ECM systems?

A: AIIM (www.aiim.org) provides a range of supporting documents and best practices for users of ECM systems and those considering the purchase and deployment of an ECM system.

Q: How can I get involved with iECM?

A: If you want to work on any of the above deliverables or attend meetings, you should join the committee by registering for the wiki at <http://iecm.editme.com> and signing up for the listservs.

For more information on iECM, please visit <http://www.aiim.org/standards.asp?ID=29284> and or contact Ebony Dowtin at 301.755.2664 or edowtin@aiim.org.