



Digitalisation: the unavoidable key to unlocking future opportunities

By Nigel Hysom, business unit manager, enterprise information management, Western Cape at Datacentrix

With local businesses facing a 'perfect storm' of data sources, manipulations and stores, there is a growing imperative to act now based on this new paradigm. The combined forces of the Internet of Things (IoT), which brings vast and untapped data sources, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine-to-machine learning, requiring new disciplines in terms of process and governance, and blockchains, where perhaps all our asset registers will be stored, mean that organisations must consider how their businesses will be affected.

Not only will these new drivers bring unforeseen opportunities, they will also lead to different competitors; companies must adapt their existing business structures to be truly transformative.

The digitalisation of the business' existing data capture, management, work processes and insights (through analytics) is the building block necessary to ensure a business is prepared today for tomorrow's onslaught of new forces.

In the local context this is perhaps even more pertinent. South African businesses are today no longer just competing at a local level; the pressure is on to ensure that they are 'fit' from a global perspective as market forces and customer expectations mean that best products, best services and best prices are available to all. The digitisation process effectively enables businesses to remove wasted time and cost, and this in turn enables them to focus workforces on customer, service and productivity – the cornerstones of a globally competitive business.

Digitalisation + EIM = Gold

Digitisation alone results in many provable business benefits, but a solid digitalisation campaign would go nowhere without the foundation on which it must be built – enterprise information management (EIM).

EIM is supported by three core technologies – enterprise content management (ECM), business process management (BPM) and/or automation, and analytics – all of which feed the communication layers of customer experience and internal planning systems, and directly support digitisation of documents, processes and reports.

We are living in a society where the expectation is digital and there's no getting away from it. People want to transact on their phones, browse, shop, review, connect and socialise digitally. Whether you're a B2C or B2B operation, your business interactions are going to be conducted digitally, and digitalisation will enable you to future proof your business and its processes.

A view from South Africa...

Consider B-BBEE. The amended codes of good practice have resulted in increased costs for almost two thirds (65 percent) of South African businesses, according to Grant Thornton's International Business Report for 2016 (Business Tech, August 2016).

Digitalisation is one way of streamlining the regulatory requirements. Access to supplier records with a contract

management system, for example, would enable instant verification of the requirements to source from certain types of business. Furthermore, the onus on companies to deliver against PoPIA regulations, or to align with FICA requirements, is eased through digitalisation.

A case for digitalisation

There are many tangible examples of why digitisation is a positive win for businesses and proof points that show how, in the context of market and technology forces, it is an imperative that cannot be avoided.

One of these sees a financial services company that has embedded an ECM system into the heart of its client origination process to ensure the capture of documents both meets FICA processes and is effectively archived and easily updated.

This company provides credit card facilities and, as such, has to undertake limit appraisals for customers regularly and these require that documents be recaptured and updated. While this process is digitised internally, customers are still expected to submit paper documents at the branch or hub.

In order to improve this process, the business is in the process of deploying a true digital capture mechanism that will enable the customer to use a mobile device to capture the document as an image and upload to their profile.

This is one example of ensuring a robust framework is in place to take advantage of new opportunities. Were there no EIM solution in place, the second phase of adding digital capture would not have been as seamless.



Nigel Hysom, business unit manager, enterprise information management, Western Cape at Datacentrix



It is a journey that is both transformative and disruptive and a commitment to this vision is key in delivering an agile enterprise that can quickly take advantage of the opportunities that future technology presents.



On the flip side, another case study highlights an oil company, which had implemented a contract management system to digitise its supplier contacts, but had not integrated this solution with its existing business process solution to enable contract processes to be managed across the enterprise.

A major customer of this company tendered for a logistics supplier contract, but it was not recognised internally that the customer and supplier were the same entity and the relationship was therefore not leveraged. Had customer records of this company also been digitised, the deal would most likely have been signed, sealed and delivered.

So, where to from here?

Datacentrix offers a number of starting points to help customers take digital transformation from a plan to reality. While it is dependent on company size and complexity, the first steps would be to engage in a single or series of workshops to fully understand and shape the digitalisation journey. These workshops would deep dive the business drivers and priorities, the current system's landscape and the business case.

From there, a digitalisation roadmap will be presented that shows practical steps that the business needs to take to implement a new or optimise an existing framework while preparing or piloting new areas. The focus at this stage is on business impact.

The keyword here, however, is 'journey' as this is a multi-year commitment that sees digitalisation become part of the company DNA, with milestones that will deliver (and prove) value.

It is a journey that is both transformative and disruptive and a commitment to this vision is key in delivering an agile enterprise that can quickly take advantage of the opportunities that future technology presents.