

PRODUCT FLASH

Oracle Ratchets Up Its Content Management Initiative with New Strategy

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IN THIS PRODUCT FLASH

This IDC Flash looks at Oracle's June 14, 2006, announcement of Oracle Content DB and Oracle Records DB. Previous versions of these products have been shipping as components of Oracle Collaboration Suite (OCS), but their new positioning as Oracle Database options represents a very significant development for the content management marketplace:

- ☒ As options to the Oracle database, Oracle Content DB and Oracle Records DB will undoubtedly attract greater attention from DBAs, architects, and other information management professionals within large enterprises who seek to align their company's data management strategy with Oracle's strategic product direction.
- ☒ The announcement signals Oracle's intent to compete more aggressively in the content management arena, and it should raise Oracle's visibility. Oracle has a lot to leverage as a content management provider: In addition to its database and application deployment stack and its large partner ecosystem, it is ideally positioned to integrate content and records management services with its broad application portfolio.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Oracle has provided database support (via features and add-on products) for a wide variety of data types for a very long time. Oracle supports XML (which it can store natively), binaries (via LOBs), free text, and spatial data. And it provides various integration and access capabilities for dealing with semistructured and unstructured content — for example, interMedia provides management and access capabilities for database- and file-based rich media objects. These solutions address the need to support extended data types in the context of relational database applications, where they are treated as "columns" in relational rows.

Although extended data types work well for content that makes sense as "fielded data," there's an ocean of content that's stored on local or shared drives — word processing documents, spreadsheets, presentations, PDFs, graphics files, photos, and so on — all of the files that information workers and creative people author every day using office suites and creative tools. This is content that's created externally to the transactional processes that relational databases so capably sustain, and it's typically stored in a folder or folder hierarchy on a local or shared drive.

Recognizing the opportunity to provide a secure, reliable, and scalable back-end storage management solution for these business documents, Oracle has brought out a series of products, beginning with Oracle Internet Files System (iFS), a database feature first delivered as part of Oracle 8i in 1998. Oracle Files, a network-enhanced facility for iFS, shipped in 2002. Oracle further enhanced its content management capabilities with Oracle Content Services and Oracle Records Management in August 2005, making both available as part of Oracle Collaboration Suite.

With Oracle Content Services, the Oracle database looks just like a virtual drive to the user — users just drag/drop, save as, and so forth to create, edit, or delete files in a folder hierarchy, and no integration effort is required to make it work. Oracle's solution offers a few nice features that most operating systems lack, such as file versioning and the ability to map files into multiple folder hierarchies (without making copies of them). The latter feature not only enables end users to optimize their storage infrastructure, but also facilitates enforcement of corporate retention policies. This capability addresses corporate information governance needs, including regulatory compliance requirements. For example, in an electronic discovery scenario, the benefit comes from having a smaller volume of content to collect and send to litigation support services vendors for redaction and parsing.

Oracle Content Services provides metadata extraction and management for documents stored in the Oracle database, enabling rich search capabilities via Oracle Enterprise Search and also via SQL queries; Oracle Records Manager lets customers establish records management policies, establish file plans, declare records, and manage the disposition and retention of content that has been declared as records — critical functions for ensuring compliance and managing risk. Together with Oracle Secure Enterprise Search and Oracle's workflow products, Oracle Content Services and Oracle Records Manager give Oracle the core set of content management capabilities. Oracle Content DB and Oracle Records DB represent the next generation of these products.

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Content Management and Retrieval Solutions: Product Flash

FUTURE OUTLOOK

One of Oracle's content management strengths is its ability to tag and index content and store content in its component parts. This capability will become increasingly valuable as more of the documents that information workers create are exportable as XML documents (as is the case with documents created using Office 2003). Decomposing documents into XML components enables a higher level of reuse and repurposing of the content. Unlike some other DBMS approaches to XML management, Oracle does not require a schematic definition of the document type in order to perform this function. The XML content can also be more easily combined with structured data via joins, with the integrity of such structures being enforced by the database.

IDC believes that unified access to structured and unstructured information will become increasingly important as organizations endeavor to leverage content in the context of business processes and transactions, to content enable their applications, and to mine the information that is hidden today in their unstructured information. Content management and data management have been separate disciplines up until now. They are beginning to come together in a more comprehensive information architecture, one that will make the development and deployment of content-enabled applications much simpler. Oracle is well positioned to play a leading role in this market evolution — both as a platform provider and as an enterprise applications vendor.

Oracle's move to offer Content DB and Records DB as add-ons to its database products also changes the dynamics in the overall information infrastructure market:

- ☒ We can expect to see the major platform providers (such as Oracle) begin to play the central role in regard to basic content services — including access control and security, library services (check-in and check-out), policy management, and workflow. Enterprises are struggling to get their documents under control — content today is scattered across file shares and portals, and the problem is proliferating. Bringing database management services to bear on this problem is an attractive solution that lets enterprises leverage existing investments.
- ☒ By making these capabilities options to the Oracle database, Oracle is encouraging ISVs and enterprise developers to think of Oracle Content DB and Oracle Records DB as part of the stack for application development. Content management vendors will need to assess the pros and cons of replacing some of their proprietary code with Oracle's add-on offerings; Open Text announced that it will do just that in future releases of its products. We can expect to see other content management vendors follow suit, at least those that are moving up the application stack to deliver value (those that market themselves as platforms will increasingly compete with Oracle and other major platform vendors that offer content management services).
- ☒ Together with its large ecosystem of partners, Oracle is well positioned to help enterprise customers manage content throughout the life cycle. Its recently announced partnership with Kofax gives Oracle a well-integrated capture solution — another important component of an enterprise content management solution.
- ☒ Unified archiving (for structured and unstructured content) has lately been an area of interest for storage systems vendors; Oracle provides end-user organizations an alternative approach.
- ☒ From a compliance and risk management perspective, companies are grappling with the implications of the upcoming amendments to the Federal Rules on Civil Procedure for Electronic Discovery, which are expected to take effect on December 1, 2006. Oracle provides an opportunity for its existing database users to leverage their current database infrastructure to meet evolving regulatory requirements.

Although this technology has been available before through Oracle Collaboration Suite, this repackaging elevates it to the level of distinct database platform functionality. From a compliance and risk management standpoint, this technology extends Oracle's capabilities in providing the secure information infrastructure, which includes a uniform security scheme for both structured and unstructured data, and extends Oracle's transparent encryption approach to unstructured data.