

Oracle's New Perspective Brings It to the Forefront of ECM Consideration

by Jim Murphy

Oracle's 10-year push into content management was, until recently, an uphill battle. When the company initially declared its content management intentions, its purpose was to extend its role in managing information, while differentiating its database proposition against arch-competitor **IBM** and emerging open source options.

Most organizations viewed Oracle's database-centric approach as too difficult. The company, at first, evangelized the idea that all content should be managed in a relational database, which was impracticable for most organizations. It meant that the way to handle their unstructured content was to structure it—a difficult, if not futile, effort.

But Oracle's enterprise content management (ECM) proposition and potential has changed drastically, as evidenced in conversations with its customers and executives at this year's Oracle OpenWorld conference. Nearly two years ago, the company acquired **Stellent**, a whisper amid the clamor of the **Siebel**, **PeopleSoft**, **JD Edwards**, **BEA**, and **Sun** acquisitions. **Stellent** was a second-tier and relatively unknown vendor in the ECM space, substantially behind leaders **IBM**, **Open Text**, and **EMC Documentum** at the time.

But **Stellent** brought Oracle a complete set of ECM products, including document management, records management, imaging, digital asset management, and web content management, as well as enabling technology for content transformation and digital rights management. It's a portfolio of content technologies that rivals any in the market.

From uphill battle to downhill coast

What Oracle lacks, relative to the ECM leaders, is the customer share. But that's changing rapidly as the company uses its strategic relationship with enterprise cus-

tomers to cross-sell its Universal Content Management (UCM) platform. And it's no longer an uphill battle. That is, the compelling approach for Oracle's enterprise customers isn't only a database- and infrastructure-up proposition.

Rather, the entire portfolio of Oracle Applications, including E-Business Suite, **Siebel**, **PeopleSoft**, and the others, invariably require content management capability, whether to capture paper-based information, enable document sharing and collaboration, extend and optimize business processes, or provide for compliance, records retention, and archiving.

UCM, along with **WebCenter Suite**, **Oracle BPM Suite**, and **Oracle Secure Enterprise Search**, constitutes the knowledge management framework for **Oracle Fusion Middleware**, and thus will eventually serve as the content infrastructure for **Oracle Fusion Applications**. In the meantime, Oracle is providing "connectors" to E-Business Suite, **Siebel**, and **PeopleSoft** to start, along with content repositories from competitors like **IBM**, **EMC**, and **Microsoft**. These will allow Oracle Content Management's array of services, such as imaging, capture, document management, digital asset management, web content management, information rights management, and records management, to be available in the context of those applications.

In tough economic times, as we've noted in "2009 Enterprise Content Management Market Outlook:

And Now for Something Completely Different,” companies seek tangible and quick ROI by extending existing investments. Oracle’s new perspective on content management fits the bill.

In the spotlight, but with something to show

Expect Oracle to come to the forefront of ECM discussions, but the company must still prove its worth. Enterprises will undoubtedly put UCM to challenging tests. IBM, Open Text, and EMC will continue to compete, as will integrated document management specialists like **Hyland Software**, **170 Systems**, and **Perceptive Software**. In the meantime, every ECM vendor must contend with Microsoft’s SharePoint, which is largely regarded as an informal content management system at its outset. But its widespread use will inevitably urge companies to use it for formal, business-critical processes.