What does Information Management "Modernization" *Really* Mean?...

…Why Should You Care? How Should You Go About It?

One of the most frequently quoted data points from AIIM surveys in 2018 is this one:[1]

Our information management strategy needs to be modernized to meet modern problems.

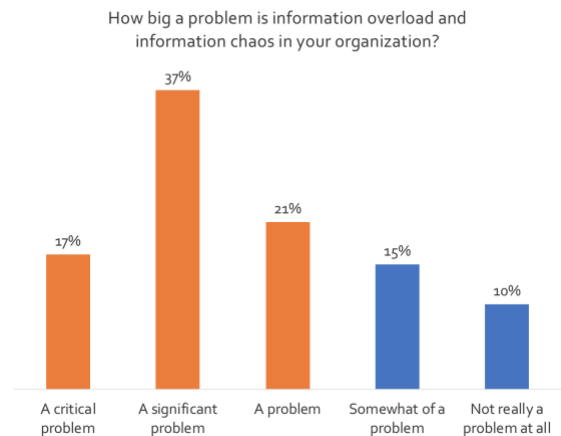|	
Completely disagree	1%
Somewhat disagree	5%
No opinion	2%
Somewhat agree	28%
Completely agree	64%

Yes, organizations are seeking "something" to be different in how they manage the information assets that are, after all, the future of their business. After two decades of implementing content management products and a lot of customization bucks, organizations find themselves with, frankly, an information management mess.

Mission critical document-intensive process problems were indeed solved along the way, and that in itself was a major accomplishment. But those problems tended to be solved one at a time, product by product, department by department in the hopes that all of the information silos that were created would somehow migrate into a single magical archive or that one single product would somehow manage to someday "federate" everything else. And as cloud, mobile, and consumer technologies swept through organizations and the demand for content capabilities spread to everyday knowledge workers, the magnitude of the problem became exponentially more challenging.[2]

How big a problem is information overload and information chaos in your organization?

A critical problem	A significant problem	A problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not really a problem at all
17%	37%	21%	15%	10%

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[1] AIIM, 2018, *Getting Ahead of the Digital Transformation Curve*

[2] AIIM, 2018, *Automating Governance and Compliance*

Hence the need for "modernization."

- But why is information management modernization particularly important *right now*?
- What does modernization *really* mean?
- How should you approach modernization?

1 Why is information management modernization particularly important *right now*?

The combination of cloud technologies plus mobile is a volatile one when it comes to the sustainability of existing organizations. We've never before been in a disruptive environment quite like this one, and it demands much more agile approaches to IT. Established incumbents are being challenged on every front. Consider the following:

- In the **banking** industry, Better Mortgage can qualify a mortgage loan in 3-minutes and approve it within 24-hours.
- In the **transportation** industry, who could have predicted that Uber and Lyft could disrupt a protected and regulated industry like taxis.
- Apple's the combination of the iPod and the iStore completely redefined the **music industry**.
- Netflix built an entirely new **movie creation and delivery industry**, originally around the frustrations of renting videos from Blockbuster.
- Advertising-driven search and social platforms like Google and Facebook continue to revolutionize the **news and media industries**.

Even in **government**, the "Amazon-ing" of customer experiences in the consumer realm revolutionizes what constituents expect from government services and how long they are willing to wait for it.

Conventional wisdom usually holds that traditional organizations face inevitable "incumbent disruption" when faced with these kinds of new competitors. And because of the inability of many organizations to modernize their information infrastructures to create new customer experiences, the conventional wisdom often proves true.

But there is another way of looking at incumbent disruption. "Incumbents" have a host of untapped advantages -- established customer relationships, large scale, and massive amounts of customer data. IF established organizations can figure out ways to tap these enormous advantages -- admittedly not an easy task -- they can "disrupt" themselves. And the first step is a more modern and agile information infrastructure.

2 What does modernization *really* mean?

There is a tendency when organizations talk about technology "modernization" to get distracted by the latest bright and shiny object, and there are certainly more now than ever before. In thinking about how and what to "modernize" -- in thinking through how to rethink information infrastructures from the outside-in (from a customer *experience* perspective) -- organizations need to focus three major objectives:

1. Organizations need to be able to tap into the wealth of information that today is trapped in information silos scattered across the enterprise.
2. Simply ripping everything out and starting again is not an option for established organizations, which need to selectively identify which specific legacy process engines are truly dragging down the business and keeping it from innovating.
3. They need flexible ways to integrate the information liberated in #1 with the future facing process engines in #2.

3 How should you approach modernization?

In the first wave of enterprise technology, it was not unusual for organizations to spend huge sums on complex customization and integration projects. These projects were often "big bang" initiatives that required lots of time and IT resources.

The net-net of this is a legacy of systems and technologies that are difficult to connect, and the information management products that support them are no exception. In terms of building products for children, most information infrastructures resemble a collection of Duplos, Legos, Tinker Toys, and Lincoln Logs. Each "system" works fine on its own, but connecting them requires a lot of customization and effort.

The cloud changed all that. A modern platform approach means that organizations can quickly deploy solutions and integrate with business applications, and do so easily as business needs and demands evolve over time.

But the Duplo, Lego, Tinker Toys and Lincoln Log systems in our organizations -- and the information repositories that support them -- cannot just be ripped out. For organizations at scale, the end result would simply be chaos. Rather, organizations must first focus on building *connections* between these systems. Identifying a common platform to manage the information that drives them is a good place to start.

Only then can organization begin process by process to replace outdated pieces and the repositories that support them. In *Modernizing Information Systems: Product vs.Platforms*, Frank Rocha describes the challenge as follows: "It's kind of like LEGO's, where LEGO Group is the platform, the individual pieces are the services, and the little round thingies that connect them are the API's."

Digital information is the future of business. Effective utilization of digital assets -- marrying your digital strategy to your business strategy -- is the primary vehicle by which organizations can meet the challenge of "incumbent disruption." But modernizing your information infrastructure is a prerequisite to this journey of creating new value, enhancing customer experiences, and delivering solutions more quickly.

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