



Andy Stokes Consulting

SharePoint as a Legal DMS? It's not the Parrots fault!

Is SharePoint as Legal DMS a 'Dead Parrot'?



In terms of adoption, then quite possibly ... Yes.

But the interesting question is why?

Does SharePoint not work then?

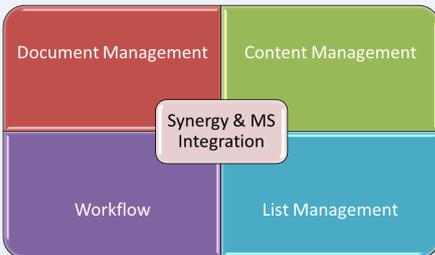
It's a 4th generation MS product and as such been vastly improved over time and has had one of the fastest shipping growths in Microsoft's history. It's also in highly strategic use in some of the worlds largest corporations .

So I think we can dismiss this argument. Instead we need to get to the root of what SharePoint actually is ...

So, what is SharePoint?

It is not a DMS; actually it's truer to say it can be used as so much more than a DMS. It is a collaboration platform, of which document management is only a part.

Think about some of the key features of it:



There is a lot more than just Document Management, certainly more than in the diagram, and it can deliver a lot of synergy if it is used to the full

extent of its integrated capability. Plus of course it has huge amounts of other Microsoft integration.

A main issue however is that in Legal it is not used to the full extent of its capability. Instead we just look at one aspect of what it can offer (typically DMS) and compare that against , often incumbent, specific DMS products—at which point we realise that it's features need additional work to make it work in legal, because it was never designed purely for legal.

Unfortunately in doing this we end up losing of all the very real opportunities for synergy that SharePoint has to offer.

And the same things apply when we compare it against other specifically designed and possibly incumbent systems, be they Content Management or Workflow systems.

Of course, things aren't helped when the incumbent suppliers of systems which compete with a sub-set of SharePoint functionality do actually focus on legal marketing and delivery, whereas Microsoft have pulled away from legal as a vertical in recent years. Though, to be honest, with SharePoint doing as well as it does for MS in non-legal corporates, why bother?

One other problem ... People

Quite frankly, many people in legal just don't get it. They focus too much on their own specific areas and have no interest in the bigger picture of how SharePoint can be of benefit. And too often that parochial narrow field of view is allowed to prevail...

So can SharePoint ever succeed in the Legal DMS area?

In truth it can; some firms (both legal and software) have made it work, though there has been a lot of effort and cash required to make it work. Neither of which is easily reproduced or recovered.

So given that, the real question is not "can it", but, "will it succeed?" And my answer is that in specific circumstances it will.

I believe that for 'greenfield' sites who have no incumbent systems then SharePoint is a highly viable alternative to a 'best of breed approach' and that the savings made in investing in a single system can be re-purposed into providing the legal specific functional areas which may be required.

I also believe that given that many of 'Big Laws' blue chip client base are already using SharePoint so successfully in the corporate world, then the need for more closely integrating work will encourage the use of SharePoint between law firms and their clients.

And finally, given that the size of law firms is on the increase, then I think that a more holistic view of IT systems in legal will start to take place, whereby law firm will be forced to manage themselves in a much more corporate manner. This will lead to longer term planning and more strategic investment, which in turn will allow the synergy of SharePoint to be more fully planned for, realised and integrated into the organisation—as opposed to one off decisions being made based purely on a sub-set of SharePoint features with too many vested interests getting in the way.

So... Is SharePoint a Dead Parrot for legal DMS?

I don't necessarily think so.

After all, it's not the parrots fault it was supplied dead, it was the pet shop owners. Perhaps with better planning, care and consideration then legal can get the live and licking parrot that the big corporates are already using ...

Andy

Andy Stokes

