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EMAIL AS A SINGLE POINT OF ACCESS FOR YOUR DATA

April 09, 2015

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Email as a Single Point of Access for Your Data

I read a great editorialⁱ recently. It points out that email is a tool that every office worker uses every day, is comfortable with, serves as the employee's main form of communication, and is their primary information repository. It asks the question, *"Can an Email Client Become the Single Point of Access to Your Information?"* The article was written recently by Bob Larrivee, Director of Custom Research at IIM (Association for Information and Image Management). In this article Larrivee refers to an AIIM research report which concludes that *"it is important/ vital that employees are able to easily search for and find information residing in their email systems, file shares, line-of-business systems and so on"*.

That research reportⁱⁱ sampled a subset of the 80,000 member AIIM community, and Larrivee's article reproduced a graph from the report showing that nearly 100% of the respondents said that being able to find and use information collected/sent/stored in their email was vital or important. The study showed that of all the systems available to the employee, email was the most important and most used method of retrieving information!

The age-old inherent problem with email is that the data is unstructured. It is great for expressing ideas, giving directions, and providing updates, however the data is difficult to extract in any real useable format. Attachments to email are not any better. The data held in attachments can't be accessed, collected, sorted, etc., so that data is pretty much "dead".

Real value is added to email when the data inside those messages can be structure in a way that makes it easy to collect into databases, and other enterprise applications. Adding that structure to email brings it to a new level of usability. When the data from emails can be stored in say an SQL database, it can be sorted, calculated and integrated with other enterprise systems like SharePoint, SAP, Salesforce, etc. I had this functionality described to me once as the "Holy Grail". A process engineer at a large defense contractor said, *"My customer service people have to go to five different systems to enter a single order (SAP, Pivotal, SharePoint, etc.)"*. The "Holy Grail" is being able to *"enter that data into a single email" (where office workers spend over 50% of their day), and have it flow into those other systems"*.

Larrivee concludes his article by saying:

"Single point of access has been on the wish list for many users and organizations for many years. For some, the use of portals has been an approach and for others, a web interface of some sort. The reality is that users continue to bounce from one application to the next in search of vital information stored in their file share, enterprise content management (ECM) repositories, SharePoint and in-boxes."

Bob continues, "Most users have become proficient in the use of their email tool and like the simplicity of the interface. What if the tool most users spend the bulk of their day working in—their email—became



the single point of access for the rest of the information they need? Not only that, what if they could also capture and store through that same mechanism?"

Email is used by every office worker, in every department, everyday! In fact, studies show that the average employee spends nearly half of their workday in email. Email is the obvious tool to leverage as a user interface to other enterprise systems.

So, can you make email this utopia of search functionality and the single point of access to your information? In his article Larrivee states: *"The decision to do this is not mine to make; it is up to you to explore the options and decide for yourself."*

ⁱ Can an Email Client Become the Single Point of Access to Your Information? Posted Thursday, January 8th, 2015
By: Bob Larrivee, Document Strategy, www.documentmedia.com

ⁱⁱ Search and Discovery – exploiting knowledge, minimizing risk- AIIM, research completed August, 2014