Staying Ahead of the HR Content Challenge

How leading organizations can capitalize on the explosive growth of HR content and improve productivity and employee engagement.

BY TOM STARNER

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On the good side, if managed properly, content can help HR transform businesses into highly effective organizations, delivering a true competitive edge. Unfortunately, before realizing the benefits, you have to overcome the curse of being overwhelmed by today's meteoric rise of content, both the traditional paper-based kind and the ever-growing digital variety.

That employers are being inundated with content is undeniable. IDC, the Framingham, Mass.-based global provider of market intelligence and advisory services, reports that by the end of this year, "the amount of digital information produced should equal nearly 2,500 exabytes [equivalent to 2,500 billion gigabytes], or five times that produced in 2008." Of course, that doesn't even include physical (paper) documents.

While the massive amounts of content being generated touch all business areas, HR is certainly one of the most affected areas when it comes to today's content avalanche—which, apart from paper, includes video, recruiting materials, employee communications, total rewards, email, social media, portals and other formats.

HR has done an excellent job automating data and driving out inefficiencies (through HRIS, employer/ manager self-service, talent management suites, and other systems), but burgeoning content is creating an entirely new inefficiency challenge.

Among other challenges, HR faces the burden of creating, versioning, updating, accessing and recording every piece of content throughout an employee's lifecycle. Plus, HR must accomplish that all by navigating and utilizing these intertwined bits of content, both paper and digital.

"HR's approach and processes to managing content and information can make or break an HR team's agility in responding to the overall business strategy," says Angela Morrow, who leads the HR Center of Excellence effort at OpenText, the global enterprise information management company based in Waterloo, Ontario. "HR has to ask, 'At what point does a business lose its competitive edge because of the uncontrolled content growth rate?' "

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Unfortunately, in most HR environments, content— in the form of emails, instant messages, tweets, feeds, blogs, images, portal content, videos and traditional office documents—is generated within an organization without any business context, she adds. "It is becoming a serious issue for many employers," Morrow says.

Apart from a sizable quantity of complicated, dense paperwork (a traditional although diminishing HR challenge), content management arenas for HR extend beyond paper and play a key role in talent management initiatives that must also be managed.

On the compliance front, Morrow notes that, across the HR spectrum, organizations need to deliver engaging communication offerings, all the while ensuring that content is managed to satisfy legal demands.

The stakes go even higher as younger, more plugged-in employees bring their expectations as consumers into the workforce. As a result, employees and managers expect agility, transparency and quick turnaround time to their inquiries and other HR-facing experiences. How HR handles content throughout the employee lifecycle is critical for service delivery model success.

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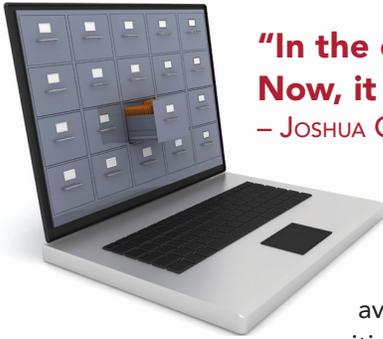
"In the old days, HR literally managed a massive collection of file cabinets. Now, it has evolved into the digital version of filing cabinets."
– Joshua Greenbaum, a principal at Enterprise Applications Consulting

To get content under control, HR can use available tools to have a positive impact on several HR-managed processes, including brand identity connected to recruiting and retention, portals for existing employees and the onboarding of new ones, employee communications, and shared services collaboration.

According to Joshua Greenbaum, a principal at Enterprise Applications Consulting in Berkeley, Calif., there are several reasons why effective content management is critical today, but at the top of the list is the fact HR software goes beyond talent management to touch other critical internal processes—supply chain applications, for example. To Greenbaum, who has more than 30 years' experience as a computer programmer, systems analyst, author and consultant, strategic employee management requires tight, concise control of the entire employee content trail.

"In the old days, HR literally managed a massive collection of file cabinets," he says. "Now, it has evolved into the digital version of filing cabinets. But the ability to centralize and utilize that vast quantity of content data makes it increasingly imperative to maintain that process as a core competency. Like it or not, HR is becoming a data steward."

Morrow adds: "Smart HR leaders realize that today's content extends far beyond plain vanilla management of paper or digitized documents."

Brand Identity for Recruiting and Retention

Brand is the identity and power of a company, its people and products, and, ultimately, how it is perceived in the market. Morrow explains that it can take years to build a quality brand and yet it is easy to harm or destroy a brand over the web and other means without a proper plan and capability to execute it. When it comes to branding, HR needs to become an internal marketing agency, giving existing or potential employees a chance to experience the company through content. Employers often create and/or use this content to make job candidates initially aware of a company, draw them to a company, keep their attention and keep them engaged before making an offer.

When applied to a common business function such as talent acquisition, "content" can refer to web pages/portals, videos, text chats, social media functions, marketing materials and employee branding assets—all of which need to be better managed and streamlined in a strategic way to boost productivity. Additionally, as noted, improved management of these materials and data/ information bits can help provide defenses for legal issues such as EEO, affirmative action and other compliance hiring practices.

A digital asset management solution can help global recruiting efforts by providing centralized access to all recruiting marketing assets and collateral. Also, because many large-scale recruiting organizations are decentralized, or HR teams have taken an RPO approach, a digital asset management solution can help recruiting teams achieve the following:

- Asset creation and use—Create content once and then reuse and repurpose it, access creative desktop tools, and facilitate creation and repurposing,
- Media management—Connect media creation, management, and distribution processes to streamline content workflows; and facilitate review and approval processes,
- Intellectual property—Enable rights management and compliance, and
- Distribution—Manage and automate fulfillment and syndication processes, reuse digital media in different channels, leverage metadata, and automate delivery to distribution channels.

In addition, a digital management strategy can benefit businesses by:

- Optimizing recruiting digital asset creation and management enterprise-wide with a flexible, automated environment,
- Reducing operating costs with improved efficiency across a content value chain,
- Optimizing HR recruiting workflows through integration with design applications, and
- Preparing for growth and emerging into new markets with a scalable solution.

"Particularly with social networks and the growth of social recruiting today, there are new types of communication methods being leveraged to get the word out about being an employer of choice," Morrow says. "This content can be highly unstructured and the recruiting process can get costly without content management."

Depending on the position, in fact, companies can easily spend several thousand dollars in the process of a new hire. But, by using a content management strategy, recruiting costs can be greatly reduced. Using content management tools, HR could establish recruiting campaigns with the ability to select the right branding assets and communication strategies from a library of pre-approved talent recruiting communication mediums, Morrow says.

Katherine Jones, director, Human Capital Management Technology Research at Bersin & Associates in Oakland, Calif., recently completed a study that looked at international recruiting, including the difference between recruiting and branding across cultures.

"Content is big in recruiting and retention," Jones says. "One of the most interesting things directly related to content is that it's not just about posting the job, but also about advertising the company."

That effort becomes especially tricky when trying to attract talent on a global level, as specialized content must be readily available for recruiters facing different cultures, languages and legal issues, including job candidate privacy that can differ from country to country.

Jones says, for example, a company needing a new marketing manager is one piece of information—the job requisition—but quickly, the recruiter will have three pieces of content related to that single job requisition and the number of content items will spiral.

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— Katherine Jones, director, Human Capital Management Technology Research at Bersin & Associates

"The amount of new content that recruiting generates is phenomenal, so to be successful, it needs to be managed," she says.

Jones explains that HR needs the right tools for managing content for the right places. For example, in the European Union, there are tougher privacy laws that you must be aware of. Then you have all the branding content in different languages.

"You may have to post a job requisition in fourteen languages," she says. "Think about the multiplication of data on the global level."

Used with Content Management, Portals Deliver Results

The role of the portal is changing within the HR landscape. Facilitated in part by improved user interfaces (UIs), portals are becoming effective application deployment vehicles and full-featured collaboration hubs that can help improve productivity and increase the return on investment. Using a web-based portal, employees have centralized, personalized access to reports and a real-time view of what's happening across their part of the enterprise.

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As a result, a portal content management solution can be leveraged in processes such as onboarding, talent sourcing and acquisition, and rewards. It improves the efficiency of content creation, management and storage, while supporting user collaboration and communication. Centralized access minimizes inconsistent, erroneous data, while document audit trails and permission management features enhance content security.

Role-based access technologies built into the portal help ensure that individual users see only what's appropriate for them. The portal also allows people to create and share content socially, using built-in wiki and discussion forum features.

These tools can be very valuable for information intensive processes such as decision making, team building and employee communications.

Portal content management offers employers the following:

- Unified interfaces—Create a single point of access to all information while offering familiarity that helps users quickly access the right resources,
- Personalization—Meet the needs of each user,
- Flexibility—Adapt functionality and customize portals as your business changes,
- Enhanced usability—Reduce user learning time and develop custom interfaces, and

OpenText Offers HR Content Management Solutions via SAP

For more than 25 years, OpenText has been a leader in Enterprise Content and Information Management and is especially proud of its heritage and expertise.

"Our goal is to deliver business value solutions integrated within the SAP landscape," says Angela Morrow, who leads the HR Center of Excellence for SAP Solutions at OpenText. "By doing so, our solution enables HR to unify content, accelerate collaboration, enhance employee communications, protect the company brand, mitigate risk and, of course, drive out inefficiencies and cost."

Morrow explains that through seamless integration with SAP ERP, OpenText helps HR executives and their departments achieve successes across the value chain of their HR ecosystem.

Working within the SAP framework, OpenText can help organizations:

- Define HR content management inefficiencies and correlate value metrics,
- Explore key business processes, from "hire-to-retire,"
- Establish the importance of scalability, sustainability and compliance frameworks,
- Evaluate an HR content management maturity grid matrix and how it aligns to a company's HRIT roadmap,
- Review business case and ROI examples to justify content management initiatives, and
- Explore "best practices" for implementing a comprehensive HR content management strategy.

Morrow notes that, for employers who are striving to streamline HR service delivery, improving talent sourcing and acquisition cycle time, or looking to enhance communications as part of a reward-and-retain process, OpenText delivers the collaborative tools to ensure they have quick, easy access to the appropriate content when they need it. Also, the OpenText SAP solution greatly reduces duplication so HR can publish content efficiently with necessary security provisions, ensuring that those who should have data access on either side of the company firewall get exactly what they need.

"We demonstrate the value of putting HR content into context," Morrow says, adding that OpenText solutions for SAP, along with services and ecosystem partners, helps execute on strategies.

"By tying the content to SAP business context, HR can begin to master the uncontrolled growth of content, giving it the ability to preserve what is required and eliminate what's not," Morrow says.

For more information, contact Morrow at amorrow@opentext.com or follow on twitter @amo_hr.

- Extensibility—Span systems through business packages to support cross-enterprise applications.

Portal business benefits include:

- Increased employee productivity, especially for infrequent users and users needing access to multiple applications,
- Improved security for corporate resources and applications,
- Reduced costs associated with finding information and enabling users to work with multiple enterprise applications, and
- Increased competitiveness because users outside the corporate firewall, such as partners and customers, don't need to learn complicated software.

Of course, once an employer has landed great talent, the challenge is to keep the "wow" factor fresh, engage the new employee and demonstrate how he or she is valued. A successful onboarding process can unite the employee and company—contributing positively to retention metrics. It can all go wrong if new employees don't have the information they need to successfully hit the ground running.

"Frustration sets in and they wonder if they made the right choice," Morrow says, noting that a successful onboarding program is more than just a "beefed-up" orientation. By leveraging a portal content management solution, HR can push out customized experiences for specific employee groups (executives, sales, college recruits, interns, administrative) or even specific employees. Information needs are different within each of these employee groups. This tailored view helps HR create an engaging employee experience. How a portal content management solution brings efficiencies to HR is through easy access to updating, versioning and refreshing of the content without over-cumbersome IT processes.

Morrow explains that effective onboarding enables new employees to be more productive from their first day on the job by streamlining new-hire paperwork, ensuring their equipment is ready on time, and

immediately aligning them to corporate goals. Streamlined new-employee onboarding processes reduce cycle time from days to minutes and, in turn, will reduce costs and shorten time to productivity. They also give employees the ability to sign and scan all documents and upload them through mobile technology, fax to the cloud and other self-service devices, thereby optimizing the new hire's time.

EAC's Greenbaum adds that effectively presenting and managing content can go a long way to streamlining the onboarding process as well as new-hire deployment activities within the enterprise, a critical talent management goal for today's businesses.

"You have to make sure you are deploying new employees in the right place with a record of documentation that follows them throughout their entire careers with the company," he says. "This is becoming very strategic and is at the core of employee engagement, as well as legal and regulatory compliance. It is a foundational element of managing an employee's career, but there are major upsides for the company as well."

According to Bersin's Jones, an onboarding portal must track the employee, not the job.

"Content management as it relates to onboarding has to be much more logically done than it is today," she says. "Employees [typically] have two different profiles [residing in different systems], so the situation is disjointed and creates a disparate content problem."

Collaborate and Retain Talent

As for company portals accessible to the entire workforce, Morrow explains that a content-driven collaborative employee portal allows employees and companies to stay in-the-know about changes pertaining to life and work, in as close to real time as possible. When employees are engaged and communication is fluid, she adds, HR processes are more efficient.

"An easy-to-use employee portal engages the workforce with dynamic, branded content and social network integration," Morrow explains.

Online workspaces allow for collaboration/ideation—which, in turn, captures the knowledge and helps companies ultimately develop new solutions and products, and expand into new markets.
— ANGELA MORROW OF OPENTEXT

Jones points out that portals give employers the ability to provide role-based, personalized content for each user.

"You can constantly change or adjust what is important to you: the employee," she says. "The content is following me, not the other way around. That is really how content management can deliver positive results. A portal must be user-specific and configurable, [as well as] widget driven. It is so different than the world used to be because users can configure a portal to provide only the content they want to see and nothing else."

Also, says OpenText's Morrow, online workspaces allow for collaboration/ideation—which, in turn, captures the knowledge and helps companies ultimately develop new solutions and products, and expand into new markets.

"The organization's standards on collaborative frameworks really drives employee satisfaction," she says. "These workspaces allow employees to post content and share with others."

Content management provides a tool for building a web presence, managing projects, sharing documents and publishing information for internal or external consumption, such as the privacy and security rules of the business.

Shared Services

Every HR department wants to handle employee inquiries faster. With a content management strategy

and application, two-day turnaround, a shared services HR associate can handle a question on the first call—and probably do it under five minutes. Not only is an employee happy, managers also are pleased with the productivity savings. Also, in a shared services model using content management, there is very little, if any, chance of escalating a call to the next level.

Morrow explains that content management can empower the human resource shared services team via collaborative tools to ensure it has quick and easy access to the appropriate content when needed. It also eliminates duplicating effort or overwriting others' work. Finally, the shared services team can publish content easily and with security provisions to ensure access to only those who should have it—either internally or outside the corporate walls.

Employee Communications

Employee communications has moved past the days of mail-merge and newsletters. In an ERP environment, however, extracting the right data and information, and placing it all into an employee communications delivery platform, can be daunting. If you leverage a content management tool such as document presentment, however, it can be done effectively. Clear, concise and consistent communication not only educates employees, enabling them to appreciate the value of their organizations' programs, but it also keeps them focused and engaged.

Morrow says OpenText is seeing many organizations creating communications in a single effort, with data integrated into communications directly from the SAP ERP system. She adds that these content tools are so sophisticated that graphical charts can be included, as well as special and important messages from the company's leadership.

For example, an employer can pull together a total rewards statement extracting data or information directly from the HCM solution. It can then graphically represent the increase over the tenure of the employee and also communicate wellness plan

information—all without struggling with a third party provider or a Windows "merge."

Key content that must be part of an employee communications strategy includes:

- Corporate goals and how employees can align to make positive change,
- Annual benefit enrollment campaigns,
- Health and welfare programs,
- Compensation programs, including executive compensation, salary administration, incentive pay programs, deferred compensation and performance management programs,
- Work/life balance programs,
- Personalized total rewards statements,
- Compliance communication, including summary plan descriptions, policy handbooks, summary of material modifications and legislative changes.
- Acquisition-onboarding materials, and
- Retirement communications.

Compliance: HR Must Manage Smartly

Finally, on the compliance front, enterprise information continues to grow in volume and variety. For HR documents and data in particular, it's crucial to keep records for as long as necessary—and no longer. Retaining information for too long is costly and potentially risky, but so is destroying it too soon. Ensuring proper user authorization and access also is crucial. Optimized digital solutions for managing employee files and records enable companies to improve data compliance, increase efficiency and prepare for potential litigation should any arise, Morrow explains.

She adds that the disposal of records in violation of legal obligations to retain them can result in fines and damage the company brand, noting content management solutions simplify the management of all paper and electronic worker-related documents and files by supporting their integration, storage, retrieval and archiving. As a result, they enable employers to meet their legal obligations and reduce any risks or costs of compliance.

A New Horizon

In the end, EAC's Greenbaum says, a single solution or domain that can help HR manage the complexity of data and documents over time—content management—is "one of these basic but indispensable pieces of technology" that removes much of the mundane tasks and processes and gives human resources the chance to reach that oft-mentioned but seldom-achieved Holy Grail of being strategic.

"HR can wake up to a real glorious period if it wants to take on the challenge," Greenbaum says. "HR has never been a strategic function in most companies … [HR professionals] typically don't get the good technology, the cool stuff. HR has been necessary, but not strategic."

Greenbaum explains that, today, employers finally realize that they need to deploy the best people for the right job using a number of technology tools. Content management's time has come as a necessary step to reach that objective, he believes.

"If HR technology, such as talent management suites and similar applications, serve as the driver, content management can serve as the engine running smoothly under the hood," he says. "Content management is a facilitator and a major part of what HR needs, having data and information—content—organized and easily accessible. Without that, HR will have a hard time ever truly being strategic."