

# How to save money with Document Control software

*A guide for getting the most out of your investment in a  
document control software package and some tips on  
what to look out for*

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This guide has been created as a reference for professionals who are looking at document control software solutions. So if you are a Quality, Environmental or Health & Safety professional looking for a solution to control your relevant ISO documentation, this guide will help you with your decision making process. Similarly, if you are looking to control some key documents that are part of a more general compliance system then this guide will also help you. Contained in this document are issues that need to be considered when choosing an appropriate document control solution. We also provide suggestions as to how to make the implementation process as easy as possible. Finally, as compliance is an ever increasing requirement we try to demonstrate that a document control solution is affordable to organisations of any size.

## ***Choosing between a Hosted or a Non-Hosted solution***

Hosted software is a software delivery model whereby a software vendor develops, controls and operates a software application for use by its customers over the Internet. It is also referred to as Software as a Service (SaaS) and On Demand software but for the purpose of this document we will only use the term of Hosted software.

Several years ago we were not presented with such a choice between Hosted and Non-Hosted application as we now know it. With most businesses connected to the World Wide Web and broadband speeds increasing, the Internet has grown massively and is now used on a daily basis by an ever increasing amount of business and private users around the world. As a consequence software applications now being built are mostly web-based, that is they are accessible over a browser, and then they are either Hosted on their own proprietary platforms (Hosted application) and/or able to be hosted on the customer's platform (Non-Hosted).

This choice between Hosted and Non-Hosted software presents different benefits to various types of organisations. We will look at what type of organisation is more suited to either alternative and for what reasons? Also, what other issues should be taken into account when making the choice between the two alternatives?

### **I need to be sure that my Information and Documents are secure?**

Because a Hosted application is not under the "control" of the customer a commonly used excuse for not choosing a Hosted solution is that it "does not offer the same levels of security as traditional software".

In order to put things in perspective, most people now use on-line banking and also allow e-commerce organisations, such as Amazon, to hold their personal banking and credit card details. All of these are Hosted applications that hold our confidential information on their public platforms and make it available over a

public network. Of course they have security measures to protect the confidentiality of this information.

Security is of course an important issue and professionals operating Hosted applications take this very seriously and have the same tools available to them to secure the integrity of their customer's content and information.

So before turning down out of hand a Hosted application a number of questions should be asked to ensure that it has the sufficient security procedures to protect the integrity of the content as well as the platform from by unwanted parties. Some of these questions are:

What are the password protections? What happens when the wrong password is used several times? Who reinstates passwords? Are passwords encrypted when they are communicated to the host? Can the content access be restricted to a sub-set of users with access to the application? What are the protections during content upload and download? What intrusion detection measures are present on the Hosted platform? What are the back-up procedures?

As a matter of principle, the same questions should also be asked about a Non-Hosted solution as almost every company's network is open to the outside world and is therefore potentially under the threat of intrusion.

### **What can I do without IT resources to call upon?**

Using a Hosted application means that there is no installation or maintenance of the product as that role is performed by the vendor of the software. This is particularly useful if you are a small company and that you do not have an IT department or IT professional skills that you can call upon to perform such specialist tasks. This is also relevant if you are a department, division or operating subsidiary within a larger organisation and are given autonomy to make software purchases that help to resolve your specific problems.

On the other hand if you have an IT department they will need to be involved in the decision making process for a number of obvious reasons. First, a new software product needs to fit in with the products that are already in house as it is possible that a similar application is already available with the software products that you are using. Second, you may not be the only one in the company with a "need" and it is best that a full specification is produced to identify the various needs and include them in the requirements. Third, your IT department will have developed and implemented IT standards, policies and procedures and the new software clearly needs to comply with them and ultimately fit into the overall company structure and standards.

In summary, if you are a small company without an IT department a Hosted product is well suited for you as all the implementation and maintenance responsibilities remain in the hands of the vendor releasing you from a potentially big headache. And if you have an IT department, it does not mean that Hosted

software is not suitable for you, but that they need to be involved in the decision making process to ensure that any new software complies with your policies.

## **I am looking for a cost effective solution**

A key element of Hosted software is that there is no software or hardware to purchase, install, maintain and upgrade. This is all included in the subscription pricing concept that Hosted software follows. This means that for the number of modules that you want to use, for a defined number of users and for a specific subscription period you will be charged a fixed price for the period of the subscription.

Note that there may be some extra usage charges that will need to be added on but these will tend to be storage and/or bandwidth usage related. In other words the base subscription price will include a fixed amount of storage space and/or bandwidth and in some cases this will not be sufficient for your needs so you will need to purchase additional storage space and/or bandwidth. The additional storage space that you purchase can be used for your normal requirements as well as to provide the dedicated space on which to back-up your data.

A key benefit of Hosted software is that you know exactly what your costs will be during the period of your subscription as there are no hidden costs. Your subscription price will include all software and hardware rental, maintenance, upgrades and support, which are all performed by the vendor. So you do not need to worry about any of these. In addition, as costs are spread over a greater amount of customers per server Hosted subscriptions costs are lower than the costs of holding similar Non-Hosted software.

The pricing of Non-Hosted software conversely is more complex although it may appear to be simpler at the beginning. Non-Hosted software generally requires an upfront cost and then an annual maintenance payment for help and support. It may also require some heavy customisation, additional hardware and additional software to install and maintain so that the original piece of software can operate effectively. There may also be some upgrade costs several years in the future which at a certain stage are forced on the end user because support for the older version ceases to be provided. So what initially was considered to be, say, a one off \$5,000 investment turns out to require a \$15,000 initial investment and then annual outgoings of \$2,000 for the life of the current version. Also, this would be before taking into account any extra personnel costs which even on a temporary basis are an important cost element. This also raises the issues of what to do when the specialist personnel leave your employ. So clearly there is the potential for enormous uncertainty with traditional Non-Hosted software applications particular for organisations without the experience of software implementations.

Do not therefore turn down the concept of a recurring subscription for a Hosted software application because you may feel that it may mean higher ultimate costs than for a Non-Hosted application. Look into the visible as well as

the hidden cost elements of a traditional Non-Hosted application and you will find that in many instances you will be saving money by going the Hosted route.

## **I want to be able to access documents from anywhere**

An obvious benefit of a Hosted application is that it can be accessed from anywhere that has an Internet connection. This is particularly relevant if you regularly travel out of the country, are field based, work from different offices, work from home or as a company you operate from separate locations. Wherever you are, you will still be able have access to the same information and be able to complete your work within the deadlines.

Non-Hosted applications do not provide this benefit unless as an organization you have a VPN (Virtual Private Network) linking all your locations together and providing access to your software applications from all of the locations.

Therefore, when considering what type of software you will need, consider your accessibility requirements and whether a Hosted or a Non-Hosted application is necessary for those requirements.

## **I need a system that will help with my Business Continuity Program**

Any business faces minor downtimes and major unknowns. It is important therefore that contingencies are built into the business processes to ensure that important information is protected in the event of an unplanned interruption of the business. This may either be as part of a formal Business Continuity Program (BCP) or simply for common sense reasons.

The definition of a Hosted arrangement is one that is held as a guest by a third party. In the specific case of a software application the third party not only holds the hardware and software on behalf of its clients but also takes care of maintaining them as well. The hosting location is always remote from the business locations of the clients and the software product is accessible over an Internet connection. This provides a dual benefit of operating from a remote location that is protected from any event that could happen to a client's business location while at the same time being able to be accessed from any PC and from any location, whether primary or alternative, using a generic Internet connection and not a dedicated telephone line.

Therefore, a company using a Hosted Document Control software application would be able to reduce downtime in the event of an unexpected event that forced operations to close down due to the fact that it had systems and procedures in place to enable it to recover key information far quicker than had it opted for a Non-Hosted Document Control solution. Clearly, a Hosted software product held at a remote location supplemented with premium back-up services and combined with Internet connectivity has an important role to play in any company's business interruption contingency.

When making a list of the pros and cons for a Hosted application versus a Non-Hosted application the subject of being a business continuity facilitator needs to be included as a strong plus for going down the Hosted route. While contingencies can be built around a Non-Hosted solution, these will be at an additional cost, while they will be part of the standard package for a Hosted application.

## ***Keeping it Simple***

Workflow automation is the reason that you are looking at document control software. You may be finding that keeping on top of all the different versions of your documents and their whereabouts is taking too much of your time or you may want to have a method of ensuring that your staff is always seeing the latest approved version of a document.

Document control requires that some very prescriptive steps are taken with each document as it is updated to reflect the changes or improvements in your processes. Each organisation has its own specific way of going through the entire document control process from initiation of document through to approval, publishing and archiving. There is no best way or worse way but there is a standard which has to be followed and ultimately that is what must be complied with.

So when choosing a document control software you need to balance the cost of replicating your process with the cost of implementing and maintaining it. This may mean a very complex system with a great deal of flexibility to replicate your processes but which will require an enormous amount of management time to implement, which ultimately will put a great deal of burden on any company's limited resources. This could also mean a system that would not be able to replicate 100% of your processes because it does not go for a great deal of flexibility or customisability but would provide you with the automation and security that you are looking for plus meets the prescriptive requirements of document control that you effectively need.

Be prepared to adapt your processes in order to come up with a simpler, more efficient and more cost effective solution. This requires going through your processes and identifying the ones that you cannot do without and the ones that you can do without. If, however, extensive customisability is important to you then a Hosted application may not immediately meet your needs.

## ***Invest time in designing the system structure***

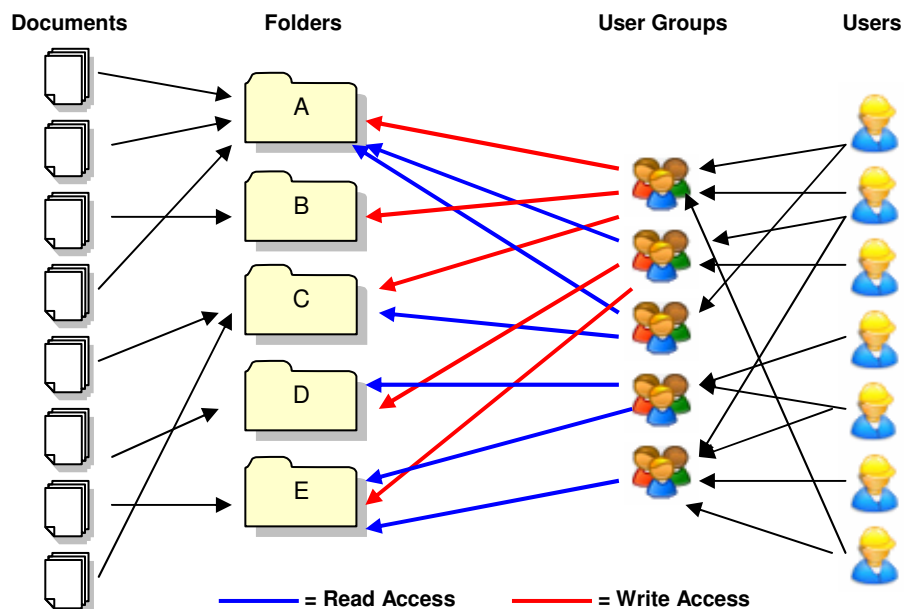
Imagine using a paper based filing system where all documents are in the wrong files or picture my teen age son's filing system which is really just a covering for his desk to hide unfinished sandwiches. In either case finding anything can be such a frustrating process that it completely negates the concept of a "filing system".

A paper based filing system must be simple, consistent and logical and effectively replicate a combination of the tasks that are taking place in the organisation and the responsibilities of the individuals. This means that documents should be easily matched to a file (task and/or responsibility based) so that when that document is searched for it can be retrieved with ease every time.

A software system is no different from a paper based system except that searching for documents can be made much easier and you can overlay an access permission right over every file and in some instances over every document. There are, of course, some technical aspects that will make the searching of the document easier but that will be restricted by how public you want to make the documents and their content.

When you built your paper based filing system you probably started by making a list of the projects that you were working on, making files out each item in that list and then adding the documents gradually as you generated them or as they were given to you.

When implementing a document control system you need to follow the same process. If documents are held in folders to which Read and Write access is assigned, you will need to go through the processing of grouping your documents on the basis of their commonality, on who needs to use them (Read access) and who needs to author them (Write access).



The above diagram explains graphically the process that you should go through. It looks a lot worse than it in fact is. It just requires time. By going through this exercise you will have made a list of the people in your organisation, as well as outside your organisation, who should have access to the system (i.e. on a need to basis) which will determine the size of the software user licence you

should subscribe to or purchase. Once you have the list of users that have access to the system you can then start the process of grouping them on the basis of the commonality of their roles within the projects and their associated documents. Most document control software will permit users to belong to multiple groupings, but it is worth checking that this feature is available while you are evaluating the product as the ability to group users simplifies the process of matching users to documents.

As a separate but parallel process you need to also plan out who needs to approve the documents. It is highly probable that the approval responsibilities will follow a different logic than the Read and Write access responsibilities for the documents and as a result so will the Approval groupings. It is important that this is not overcomplicated and for simplicities sake some users are assigned to an Approving grouping even though they would only likely have responsibility for approving a selection of the documents that their Approval grouping has been assigned to.

It is of extreme importance that you spend the time to plan and lay out the entire structure well before hand outside of the document control software application. Time and effort invested at this stage will ensure that less time is spent implementing the document control system and also less time correcting and modifying it in the future. This means that with a well thought out structure the system will be easier to operate and will cost less.

### ***Bring in other people into the construction process***

Don't make the common mistake of hoisting a solution on the eventual users of the system without getting their input. You will have spent a lot of your valuable time evaluating the different document control options, recommending a solution and then designing the structure of the system. Do not throw everything out by excluding key people from the process.

A good idea would be to bring them in after you have completed the first draft of the proposed structure. Use them to question your logic and validate your proposed structure by having them ask the question "Does the structure make sense, does it meet our needs and is it flexible enough to allow for future changes?". They also need to ask "Have we done the necessary to simplify and streamline our processes in order to get the most out of document control software".

This is not an exercise in criticism, although sometimes it may feel as such, but rather an exercise in making sure that you have the best structure and have provided ownership to the key users of the system by bringing them in before the implementation stage. This will ensure that there will be less obstruction to a change in working practices, immediate acceptance and use of the system and an improved return on your investment.

Once the validation of your structure has been completed then, and only then, do you start the actual process of creating the user groupings and approval

groupings, importing your users, creating the folders, assigning access rights to each of them, creating your approval rules and, finally, importing your documents.

## ***Next Steps***

I know that most companies go through a similar thought process when evaluating document control solutions. They also start off with the intention of keeping the project simple and straight forward. But the temptation when they then try to map out their process onto the software solution is to replicate the complexity of their process into the document control software system. It is a perfectly normal reaction do so and not to question ones processes that have been developed over a number of years. But however unappealing the thought of reviewing and justifying every process as something that is still necessary, this is the perfect time to go through a "house cleaning". So when transitioning to a document control software solution you want to be able to start off with a clean structure and process that is not overly burdensome and complicated.

I have tried to put across that a document control software application does not need to be expensive. That it is affordable to organisations of all sizes. That it does not require a heavy infrastructure and that it does not need to be complex.

We can help to review and simplify these processes and ensure that you get the most out of the use of the document control software. We will set up a unique account for you on our servers and then allow you the time to experiment with different structures or we can review your current structure and make recommendations as to how it could be streamlined

To find out how our systems can help you improve the efficiency of your process and save you money please contact us:

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