

Moving Document Management to the cloud

‘Building Digital Capacity’ resources series

 

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| **Resource type:** | **Strategic area:** | **Use it to:** |
| Guidelines + templates |  | * Learn about migrating your documents out of local file servers and into the cloud.
* Learn about what a cloud-based document management project involves and how to prepare for a successful migration.
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Other relevant resources in our **Building Digital Capacity resources series:**

* *Budgeting for technology spend*
* *Selecting technology vendors and solutions*

1 - OVERVIEW

**What is document management?**

**What effective document management means for your centre:**

* You spend less time trying to ‘find stuff’
* You don’t reinvent the wheel every time you need to produce a document
* You tap into your centre’s existing knowledge and continuously build your knowledge base
* You promote a collaborative, sharing culture

Document management designates an organisational capability to:

* manage information residing in documents (as opposed to structured data sitting in databases);
* create, store, access and share documentation across the organisation;
* collaborate internally and externally on documents;
* leverage existing documentation and sharing knowledge;
* leverage modern, up-to-date technology to enable the above.

As a process, document management involves more than just creating a file and storing it ‘somewhere’, and technology solutions offer a wide range of functionalities that allow you to manage those business processes end-to-end:



**Key benefits of moving your documents to the cloud**

Traditionally, organisations used to store documents on-premise on file servers, with shared internal network drives to control access to specific folders and documents. In addition, it’s always been commonplace for staff members to also store documents on their own computers and/or email systems.

In the last few years, there has been a massive move to cloud-based document storage solutions enabled by the increased access to internet, the growing need for accessing documents from anywhere, and the development of user-friendly modern technology solutions.

The main benefits of moving away from on-premise file storage to cloud-based are:

* **Cost savings:** storing documents and files in the cloud lowers the total cost of ownership of the supporting technology: no need for purchasing expensive servers and networking equipment, maintaining and replacing those, updating operating systems, performing backups, keeping end-users devices compatible, providing redundant storage, etc. Cloud storage offers predictable costs (via set monthly subscription fees) vs the risk of costs overrun when on-premise technology fails or becomes outdated.
* **Access from anywhere:** access from any location (office, home, on-the-road) and any device including mobile devices and any operating system (Mac or Windows).
* **Scalable storage space:** the cloud is virtually unlimited, and storage solutions are highly scalable and purchasing additional space is usually cost-effective (especially compared to having to buy or upgrade a file server).
* **Risk mitigation:** by effectively outsourcing storage to an organisation that is specialised in providing document storage solutions in the cloud, you transfer the risks associated with data loss, security and the constant need to keep up with technology updates.
* **Greater collaboration:** as digital solutions offer many features beyond simple file storage, they promote greater collaboration between teams, replacing local storage or emails with dedicated purpose-built online working spaces.
* **Reduced carbon footprint:** moving documents to the cloud and providing access from anywhere reduces the need to print files.

**Key considerations: mitigating risks**

It’s important to bear in mind that no solution is risk-free, understand what risks are involved in storing documents in the cloud, and how to mitigate those risks:

| **Risk / consideration** | **Mitigation** |
| --- | --- |
| **Internet connection** | Working with documents in the cloud is dependent on having a good internet connection. A slow internet or network access will impact performance and frustrate users. In addition, you may be limited in accessing your documents if you’re offline. | Assess your internet access and whether you need greater bandwidth / network performance before undertaking a migration to the cloud.Note that regarding offline access, many solutions offer syncing capabilities that allow you to access files offline (and automatically synchronise those once you’re back online). |
| **Costs** | Whilst cloud storage for documents is cheaper than on-premise, the costs of migrating are not negligible, and there may be unexpected costs associated to increasing your storage space, performing back-ups and restores, or increases in license / subscription fees. | Make sure you establish your total cost of ownership upfront and clarify what’s included and what’s excluded by the vendor.Clarify user license costs and eligibility for non-profit pricing, including for your volunteers.[[1]](#footnote-1)For help on estimating total cost of ownership, refer to the *Budgeting for technology spend* document in our **Building Digital Capacity resources series.**  |
| **Support** | As you are relying on an external provider, often without a dedicated account manager or IT support person, support may be slower or less effective than on-premise support (if you have this in place at the moment). | Make sure you are clear about support level agreements offered by the provider under the subscription you have, including the procedure for raising a support request, turnaround time, access to support via email / phone / website, disaster recovery plans, etc. |
| **Security and privacy** | When you store your documents in the cloud, the data is physically stored on your provider’s servers and you access it via an internet connection. It’s important to know where your provider’s data centres are located as you could end up having confidential information stored in foreign jurisdictions. Levels of data protection and compliance with evolving security standards and privacy laws may also vary between providers. | Assess levels of confidentiality / privacy of information you hold in documents and compliance requirements. Verify with your prospective technology vendors where your documents will be stored, including backups / redundancy storage, and what security measures are put in place to protect your data.Reputable providers offer advanced and up-to-date data security features, which you would be unable to match with on-premise solutions without significant investment. |
| **Change management** | Moving from working in the traditional on-premise way to working in the cloud may trigger resistance amongst end-users who may be concerned with security or not have the skills to use the new technology. Good change management and communications are critical to ensure the technology is used the way it should, and people don’t revert to ‘old ways’ or store their documents only on their personal devices.  | Work with your teams to identify benefits to them and address their concerns. Ensure you have a good training approach in place and involve your users throughout the project. |

2 - UNDERTAKING A DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT PROJECT

 **Setting your project objectives**

If your centre is considering undertaking a document management project and moving documents to the cloud, it’s important to be clear about your objectives so that you can plan and prioritise accordingly.

**Involving your teams from the beginning**

Effective document management helps both the centre in terms of overall efficiencies and risk management, and individual team members by making it easier for them to do their jobs. Involving your teams in setting the project goals will help with their buy-in and adoption of the new technology.

Typically, project goals will include all or some of the following:

* provide easy access to information that is reliable and up to date;
* promote collaboration and help staff share knowledge;
* provide secure mechanism and tools for storing and accessing documentation and mitigate the risk of data loss, theft or misuse;
* achieve cost savings and productivity gains;
* promote consistent ways of working with documents for existing and new team members, including volunteers;
* upskill your centre’s users and provide ongoing support and training to optimise technology adoption.

**Scoping out your project**

Before you start looking at solutions, it’s important to establish your current situation and define business requirements. This will help you understand the baseline you’re working form, set priorities, and communicate to vendors what you need from the solution so you can evaluate your options.

Your starting point should be an audit of your current document management system (which is likely be a combination of technology and manual processes) to address the following:

* Where are the documents currently stored (e.g. file servers, cloud-based tools, end-user computers / devices, combination of those)?
* Which systems do we currently use to create and manage documents?
* What is the approximate volume of documents (numbers / size) we need to migrate?
* How far back does the information go (and do we need to archive or destroy some of the documents vs moving them to the cloud)?
* What type of files do we need to store in the cloud (e.g. video, audio, images, etc.)?
* Do we have documents only in hard copy form, and do we need to digitise them?

As you consider which documents should be migrated to a new solution, it’s important to distinguish between organisational documents and client documents to determine where it is most appropriate to store each, and how long they should be stored for:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organisational documents** | These are all the documents related to your centre’s organisation, ranging from reference official materials to everyday working documents. Examples include:* annual reports, strategic and operational plans, financial statements, policies and procedures, marketing materials, employee documentation;
* legal information sheets, legal resources and toolkits;
* law reform submissions, research and papers;
* ad hoc operational documents, etc.

Note that the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) and The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) require organisations to keep their company and employee records for **7 years**.  |
| **Client and case documents** | These are all the documents that pertain to a client of the centre and their cases. Examples include: * case files;
* letters and correspondence;
* court documents, etc.

Specific consideration must be given to the confidential and private nature of these documents, where they are stored, and who can access them.Note that the *Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules* require law firms to keep client documents for 7 years after the completion or termination of the matter. **It is the responsibility of each centre to ensure it is complying with national and state legislation requirements regarding the storage and archival of legal files, and to ensure its staff act in accordance with those requirements.**  |

Once you have a good handle on what is currently used in your centre, you will need to define your business requirements. Because document management solutions offer so much more than simple file storage, it’s important to spend some time working out which functionalities and features you will need from a cloud solution.

* *See section 3 of this document for a checklist of possible requirements to help you identify what you need from your document management system.*

**Selecting a solution**

**Using CLASS to store documents**

* CLASS provides functionality to store documents as attachments to a client or service, however it is not a fully-fledged document management system and will not meet needs your centre may have around document collaboration, workflows and version control.
* CLASS can be used as a repository to store documents associated to a client or case and should only be used to store client/service related documentation, not organisational documents.
* For information on using CLASS’ document management features, refer to CLASS training documentation [here](https://naclc.info/class/document_management).
* Note that Community Legal Centres Australia is working on developing CLASS so that it can integrate in the future with other systems such as ActionStep (which has advanced legal document management features) and MS SharePoint.

There is a myriad of document storage and management solutions available in the market, and selecting the one that is right for your centre may seem like a daunting task. Whilst it is not possible here to review all available options and identify the solution that will be right for your centre, the table overleaf provides examples of the most popular solutions and what to consider.

When considering smaller providers, you may find they have more bespoke features, but you need to take into account the risk of those solutions not evolving as fast as the ‘big techs’ and having more limitations in terms of integration and support.

It is important to identify for your centre:

* what you already use to create documents (e.g. Microsoft Office, Google Suite) as the document management system you introduce should easily integrate with it;
* whether you have a practice management software in place in addition to CLASS, as that software may have document management features suitable specifically for client documents.

All providers listed overleaf have a strong reputation and are widely used by millions of users. They all have data centres in Australia; however, you should always check the terms and conditions of the vendor contract to verify where your data will be physically held.

**Note that in addition to selecting a solution, you will also need to source an implementation partner to help with the migration and set up, unless you have skilled in-house resources to do so.**

For more information on selecting a solution and vendor, refer to the *Selecting technology vendors and solutions* document in our **Building digital capacity resources series**.

|  | Benefits | Considerations |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Microsoft SharePoint** | * Fully integrated in the Microsoft suite including MS Teams and MS Office for online document creation and collaboration.
* Syncing and offline access.
* Can be used as an intranet.
* Good privileges management features.
* Technology is built to integrate with a lot of external tools.
* Workflow capabilities.
* Included in the MS365 license.
 | * Whilst there is no need to purchase additional MS SharePoint licenses if you are already on MS365, there is a cost associated with setting up SharePoint, especially to set up file structure and configure workflows.
* Online collaboration features are getting better with time, but arguably not (yet) as good as those provided in the Google Suite.
* It’s important to consider training and that it may take some time for your users to get used to working in MS SharePoint.
 |
| **Google Drive** | * Fully integrated with Google Suite (Google docs, sheets, slides, etc.) and compatible also with MS Office documents.
* Excellent online collaboration features.
* Syncing and offline access.
* Good privileges management features.
* Technology is built to integrate with a lot of external tools.
* Included in Google Suite license.
 | * Potentially confusing for users if you centre is on MS365, so better suited to centres that already use Google Suite and are familiar with working with online Google apps.
* Google Sites can be used as an intranet but are less advanced than MS SharePoint for that purpose.
 |
| **DropBox** | * Easy to use, especially to share files with external users.
* Better suited as a repository for specific projects rather than full organisation documents hierarchy.
* Integrates with MS Office ,Google, and many other tools.
* Free version has limited features.
 | * Dropbox Business is comparatively expensive (requires separate user subscriptions on top of your productivity suite).
* Collaboration features not as extensive as MS365 or Google Drive.
 |

**What’s involved in moving documents to the cloud**

Cloud-based document management solutions are readily available and easy to use, and in theory, very easy to sign up for and set up. In practice, successful cloud document management projects require dedicated effort and time. Your centre will need to consider a number of key activities to ensure the migration to the cloud is done successfully, and that staff adopt and use the tool in the way you intend them to.

There is a learning curve, which can be potentially steep for your teams, depending on how big a change you are making (e.g. moving to a brand new technology) and your team’s skills set. Unless you have skilled in-house resources, it is strongly recommended to source an implementation partner to help you with the migration of documents, set up of the cloud system, and end-user support and training.

**A cloud document management project will include:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Solution scoping and selection** | * Business requirements/scope definition
* Options review and selection
 |
| **Data migration** | * Audit of current documents (volumes, types of files/documents, current storage locations and systems).
* Development of new document structure (file/folder hierarchy).
* Preparation of existing documentation (keep, archive, delete, digitise, migration).
* Migration of files to the cloud including testing.
 |
| **Business processes and system configuration** | * Definition and implementation of consistent processes and guidelines for managing documents and information.
* Set up of document management system (e.g. file structure, tags, workspaces, user set up, privilege management, etc.).
* Design and configuration of document management workflows and other specialist functionalities.
* Development of policies and procedures.
 |
| **Change management** | * Communications with staff and volunteers.
* Involvement of teams in getting data ready for migration.
* Training (at go live and on on-going basis, including induction of new team members).
* Training updates / refreshers as new functionalities get introduced.
 |
| **Deployment and support** | * System go-live and support.
* Ongoing technical support
* Usage monitoring.
* Management of software/system updates and new functionality releases.
* Implementation of back-up and restore procedures.
* Decommission local file servers and/or legacy systems.
 |

3 - CHECKLISTS

**Business requirements checklist**

The table below provides a list of core business requirements you centre may want to consider. This is not a list of must-haves for all centres, and the list should be used **as a starting point** to identify what you expect from your new system.

This will help you refine your requirements and prioritise your needs: you may find some requirements will not be relevant to your centre, or some may be more important than other. You may also find that you have additional requirements not shown here.

| **Requirements** | **Needed?** | **Priority**(critical, important, nice-to-have) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Functionalities** |
| A user-friendly tool, easy to set-up with an intuitive user interface and functionalities | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to centralise documents and organise files and folders | **[ ]**  |  |
| Advanced search functionalities (e.g. search within documents, wild card searches, filters, etc.) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to index or classify files and documents (e.g. through tags, labels, metadata) to organise, search and retrieve documents | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to upload and download documents | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to generate documents hyperlinks | **[ ]**  |  |
| Online collaboration features (e.g. comments, reviews, notifications, assignment) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Version control and tracking (e.g. version history, easy tracking of version changes, ability to restore previous versions) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Document automation capabilities (e.g. templates, document assembly, data merges, etc.) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Workflow capabilities (e.g. notification, version approval, task assignment, reminders) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to save documents directly from another system (e.g. from email attachment) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to scan documents directly into system | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to archive documents | **[ ]**  |  |
| Intranet features | **[ ]**  |  |
| Collaboration workspaces | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to store other files than documents (e.g. images, photos, videos, audio files, etc.) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Flexible storage capacity options | **[ ]**  |  |
| **Access** |
| Access from anywhere with an internet connection | **[ ]**  |  |
| Offline access | **[ ]**  |  |
| Synchronisation of online/local documents and files (including ability for user to set up sync preferences) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Access from any operating system (Mac OS or Windows) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Access from mobile devices including smart phones and tablets (dedicated mobile app, not just web browser version) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to sign-in with existing email account (e.g. sign in with Google account, sign in with MS account). | **[ ]**  |  |
| Mobile access / mobile app for smart phones and tablets | **[ ]**  |  |
| Accessibility features | **[ ]**  |  |
| **Security** |
| Secure sign-in features | **[ ]**  |  |
| Secure storage in Australian locations | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to restrict access to documents and folders including full access, view-only, no delete, no copy, no download, no share, no share outside organisation, etc.  | **[ ]**  |  |
| Easy-to-use privilege management administration with ability to set up user groups and roles | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to share and collaborate on documents with authorised external users | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to transfer ownership of documents from one user to another | **[ ]**  |  |
| Audit trail, monitoring and alerts capabilities | **[ ]**  |  |
| **Integration** |
| Compatibility with MS Office documents | **[ ]**  |  |
| Compatibility with commonly used internet browsers | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to integrate with other systems like databases (e.g. practice management software, CLASS, CRM system) | **[ ]**  |  |
| Ability to integrate with other systems like collaboration tools (e.g. Trello, MS Teams) | **[ ]**  |  |
| **Migration and Support** |
| Ability to migrate existing documents and files in bulk | **[ ]**  |  |
| Back-up and restores functionalities | **[ ]**  |  |
| Disaster recovery plan | **[ ]**  |  |
| End-user support | **[ ]**  |  |

**6 tips for a successful cloud document management project**

1. **Learn from others**

Many centres have undertaken document management projects and have insight and lessons learnt. Find out about what worked for them and what didn’t, and where you can, ask if you can have a look at the system they’re using. It’s also worth connecting with other organisations in your network, like professional law firms, who may have done a lot of groundwork on possible solutions and what works well for a legal practice.

1. **Involve and invest in people**

The technology options available now are very powerful, but only as good as what we make of them. It’s critical to involve people early in the process and invest in training and supporting them as you move to a new system, including your volunteers.

1. **Be prepared to change your processes**

Moving to a cloud document management system provides you with an opportunity to improve processes and become more efficient. Avoid trying to replicate your current ways of working in the cloud and train your users not just on the technology, but also in the new processes.

1. **Consider piloting the solution first**

If the move to the cloud represents a major change for your centre, it is worth considering a small pilot first. For example, a team working on a project or a department/function. This will give you the opportunity to assess implementation challenges and adapt the approach to the rest of the organisation.

1. **Phase your roll-out**

Document management solutions can be overwhelming. You don’t need to implement all the functionalities at once. Consider your priorities, and focus on the basics first to ensure your teams learn the new system and processes, then introduce more advanced functionalities (like workflows for example). You also don’t have to migrate all your documents at once (for example, migrate recent documents first, then older documents later).

1. **Get help**

Document management projects can be very demanding, and working through the migration and set up tasks is challenging, especially when your teams are already busy with their everyday workload. If you don’t have capacity in-house, engage specialists to help you implement best practices and keep your project on track.

1. It can be tempting to have generic users set up so you pay for fewer licenses, but doing so exposes your centre to data security risks, as it will be difficult to track who has done what. A generic user license can be used for ad hoc administrative tasks when there is no need to track changes to the data. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)