

Consulting Services in Enterprise Document Classification and Taxonomy

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THE KEY—BUT MISSING—COMPONENT IN ENTERPRISE DOCUMENT RETRIEVAL SYSTEMS

QUESTION:

What does it take to enable an organization to find exactly the records it wants and needs, every time and all the time, in response to any user query, as quickly as needed? Or, to put it another way, given that large organizations have literally millions of documents and records in all media forms and formats, how, exactly, can a user locate any one of them “on demand?”

ANSWER:

These millions of documents must be organized and identified into recordkeeping systems in a manner that supports accurate and timely retrieval, on the part of any user, across the enterprise. Also, the appropriate technology tools must be in place to support these requirements. ***But computer systems alone are not enough!*** Documents can be electronically lost or misfiled just as easily as paper ones. The only way to assure accurate and timely retrieval of all stored records is to combine a standard records structure—an enterprise document classification and taxonomy—with appropriate hardware and software resources. To do this requires specialized expertise, which is a key component of our consulting practice at Zasio Enterprises.



How well—or poorly—do your organization’s recordkeeping systems perform in supporting accurate document retrieval enterprise-wide?

Consider the following scenario. In response to any search query formulated by any person seeking information from the enterprise document store, one—and only one—of five things can happen:

1. The system delivers all the documents specified in the query and no others.
2. The system delivers all documents desired, as well as others deemed not relevant.
3. The system delivers some of the specified documents, but not all.
4. The system delivers some documents; however, none are deemed relevant.
5. The system delivers no documents at all and some are known to exist that are relevant to the query.

Your organization’s goal should be to run its recordkeeping systems so that they consistently perform at level number one above. However, without an enterprise document classification or taxonomy scheme, this cannot occur.



The supermarket may stock thousands of individual products in hundreds of major and subordinate categories in thousands of square feet of floor space, but any of them can be located in no more than five or so minutes, with no special customer training required—only a general familiarity with the basic concept.

The Problem: Inconsistent Methods of Organizing and Naming Documents

Regardless of whether they are paper- or electronically-based, filing and recordkeeping systems frequently perform poorly in consistently delivering the documents and data required by their users in a precise and timely manner. Generally, these systems are poorly designed and implemented with an absence of professionalism.

The inevitable result: impaired productivity of system users and inefficiencies in overall business performance.

The essence of the problem is that if no standard record structure—enterprise document classification scheme—is present, the system users will typically make an arbitrary decision to assign a file name or other identifying descriptor to newly created documents when they need to be saved in the recordkeeping system for future reference. They may need to save any number of files each day, and may also assign similar file names to them, again in an arbitrary manner. Every other person in the entire enterprise may do the same. As time goes on, the enterprise suddenly finds itself with literally millions of documents, each of which bears a file name that was arbitrarily assigned by whoever entered it into the system.

The result: a poorly organized and structured enterprise recordkeeping system that is highly fragmented and very difficult to use. In such cases, like records maintained in different workgroups and departments are very difficult to retrieve, especially in cases where an enterprise-wide search must be conducted and the documents are of any age.

Shopping for Products at the Supermarket

At Zasio Enterprises, we design enterprise document classification systems based on the concept of organizing and retrieving information easily. In the systems we design, documents and records are organized and indexed in a hierarchical structure of major and subordinate categories, from the most general to the most specific.

Consider the analogy of shopping for products at the supermarket, where the products are organized in logical categories and subcategories by aisles, shelves, and sections and subsections of aisles/shelves. The indexes to major product groups are suspended on signs over each aisle in a manner visible to the customers. The supermarket may stock thousands of individual products in hundreds of major and subordinate categories in thousands of square feet of floor space, but any of them can be located in no more than five or so minutes, with no special customer training required—only a general familiarity with the basic concept. In theory, document retrieval should be no more difficult than this, at least in all but the most complex and specialized recordkeeping situations. In practice, however, organizational recordkeeping systems must be operated based on the principles of structure and discipline that are employed by any supermarket that expects to maintain a large base of satisfied customers.

The Solution: An Enterprise Document Taxonomy

Taxonomy is the science of classification; a system of organizing objects—in this case records and documents—into a logical structure, hierarchically ordered from the most general to the most specific. At Zasio Enterprises, we custom-design these systems for our clients. And we implement them on our state-of-the-art software if the client desires to deploy this solution.

Enterprise document classification schemes are typically designed for installation in single or multiple workgroups/departments, or enterprise-wide. Their most important characteristic is that they provide a standardized filing structure and a uniform filing language or vocabulary to guide system users in making files classification decisions. The major benefit is a significant reduction in the arbitrary judgments made thousands of times each business day concerning how to identify documents for filing and where in the system they should reside.

The inevitable result of arbitrary files classification decisions: highly fragmented filing systems and imprecise/untimely document retrieval. Without consistent files classification based on a standard record structure, high-quality recordkeeping systems are not possible.



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The Hierarchical Taxonomy Structure

We develop the hierarchy of categories in enterprise document classification schemes in a manner that reflects the major and subordinate functions reflecting the organization's business processes—at the following levels:

- Enterprise
- Business process
- Sector/region
- Staff or department
- Subdepartment/workgroup
- Workstation/desktop

Then, we organize the standard categories reflecting the information maintained by these groups in a multi-tier hierarchical arrangement, as follows:

- First level – primary categories
- Second level – secondary categories
- Third level – tertiary categories
- Fourth level – quaternary categories
- Fifth level – quintenary categories

Selecting the Document Categories

Our basic methodology for selecting the document categories in an enterprise classification scheme is based on the following basic principles:

- The standard categories are selected to serve the specific needs of the users. All categories are fully customized to reflect the document retrieval requirements of each business process.
- The primary and subordinate categories are selected in a manner that achieves the right degree of fragmentation with respect to how information will be segmented. If the categories are too broad, too specific, or if they overlap or fail to cover a subject/functional area, the users will experience retrieval difficulties.
- Our goal is to develop categories that are “mutually exclusive” with respect to their contents. Ideally, there should be only one place where any given document can be filed.

Frequently, we find that enterprise document classification schemes need not be developed below the secondary or, at most, tertiary levels. The depth to which these schemes need to be developed depends, chiefly, on the nature of the business process and the complexity of the recordkeeping systems that support them. In many instances, a two-level structure is perfectly adequate to facilitate proper document classification and accurate retrieval. If the structure is developed at levels deeper than is required, it can be cumbersome to implement and may actually hamper document retrieval operations. When developed in this manner, the system users can exercise their own discretion to develop subordinate subcategories below these levels.

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