



Getting From Point **A** to Point **B**:

What it Means to Take a Federated Approach

Reed E. Irvin

Among the many products available to help organizations simplify the challenge of managing their information, a sub-set of these will promise to take a federated approach to get the job done. Yet, while the term federation has become ubiquitous, its definition presents a host of complexities. Whether the solution is used for records management, e-mail archiving, or e-discovery, it is revealing to learn which attributes make a product a federated solution.

First, do not misinterpret the moniker of “federation” as the ultimate answer for content control. It is actually a method that applications use to talk to other applications. And the degree to which they communicate is where the difference in implementation of federation occurs. So, be aware as the word is used in various contexts.

In the information management world, federation is generally described as the ability to access information and communicate between

disparate content silos. The act of federating to all content – created in document management systems, collaboration programs, file systems, e-mail applications, e-mail archives and more – means it is potentially governable under one umbrella. To accomplish federation, some solutions first pull content into one repository while others leave information in source applications and native repositories. Both approaches facilitate comprehensive searching, assuming that in the first scenario information has to be moved or copied to the new repository.

Hypothetically, there are fewer management headaches involved with the single repository approach, and certainly most organizations today are looking to reduce the number they have – not add to them. Theoretically, having one repository to apply retention policy against would seem to reduce complexity. The drawback, however, is it requires human effort to

ensure that only one copy of the record exists and serious discipline to delete all other convenience copies. Content that isn’t brought into the repository, for whatever reason, is left unmanaged and can become a risk to the organization.

Federated Approaches Can Vary

The differences between one federated solution and another can be as dramatic as night and day. Even though the end result may be similar, one solution is getting to point B via a long and winding road with copious planning and pricey customization. In other instances goals can be accomplished in a clear-cut manner with little disruption to the business. In every case, the solution should help an organization achieve its information governance goals by streamlining the way it manages, controls, and accesses information.

A federated solution should provide capabilities, or enhance existing

processes, for managing, discovering and retaining electronic and physical records, e-mails, and other information assets. Essentially, it should help an organization accomplish and stay ahead of the Electronic Discovery Reference Model, which is the established standard for the e-discovery process. By staying ahead of this cycle, an organization can avoid being caught off guard when it is imperative that it produces a specific set of electronically stored information quickly. Further, it should help an organization mitigate risk, preserve business value, and comply with legal and business regulations in a uniform manner by giving the organization comprehensive control over its information. Depending on the solution, all of these capabilities can be delivered by one system.

Technologically speaking, the actual capabilities delivered via a federated solution can transpire as a result of different processes. A federated approach can vary based on how the organization governs its information and what

sources flow into organizations in a near-constant stream – from employees, vendors, partners, and customers. The information gets stored in everything from databases to content management systems, from data warehouses to departmental file servers, and even on employees' hard drives. The content is created by users with all manner of applications to fit the type of work being produced. And then, using a federated approach, a user can reach into this virtual collection of information – via a search function – to retrieve what is important or needed for a particular business process such as e-discovery or to dispose of stale content. This is the power of federation at work. Of course, there are steps that must be undertaken along the way to make information this accessible. But, with a solution that offers federated capabilities, an organization should be able to accomplish these tasks with relative speed and efficiency. Once established, a federated solution will allow an organiza-

only get to their information, but centrally manage policies and implement controls for content distributed across the enterprise. These tactics increase efficiency and help companies to first, know what they have, and second, be able to produce it quickly when necessary. It ensures that the right people have access to the right information at the right time, which supports sound decision making and defensible best practices.

Getting to Federation

When considering which solution will get an organization to that federated state, be sure the organization's selection meshes with its existing IT initiatives and infrastructure, if possible. Ideally, the organization will want to choose a product that minimally impacts IT and does not reduce overall transparency to the end user.

If the organization's IT strategy has been successfully serving its needs and meeting its obligations, it is beneficial to be able to continue leveraging

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systems are used to generate content. There can also be variation in the amount of infrastructure replacement required or required training to understand how to use the new system. Moreover, IT might incur an added workload to keep things running smoothly. But, similar to the term "hybrid" for fuel-efficient cars – which can include vehicles powered by hydrogen, gas, electricity, or the sun – the term "federation" is a mixed bag of meanings.

A Virtual Collection of Content

Today's enterprises are vast amalgams of information. Myriad content

to enforce policies and procedures with the same over-arching reach that it can apply during a search.

Why Federate at All?

After considering the differences in solutions, the question could arise: What are the benefits of federation that make it such a prevalent and desirable functionality? The fact of the matter is an organization must be able to find information immediately and easily, and the search result should be total and accurate, not piecemeal. With a federated solution, businesses can make this happen. They cannot

its established plan. Spending unnecessary time and resources to make infrastructure and process changes, particularly in a down economy, may not be a prudent route. Making the most of existing technology investments could be wiser and greener.

A Unified (Federated) View

The closer an organization looks, the more it sees how differently vendors define and deliver federation. Some technologies require decisions and processes to be applied program by program, with requirements that can be invasive and disruptive, not to

mention expensive. Others provide a unified view as a way of federating enterprise content without requiring changes to the way content is generated, accessed, or managed.

Ideally, if an organization has access to a central enterprise dashboard, it can unify and simplify the way policies are applied and processes are performed. This leads to comprehensive control, which enables the application of retention and disposition policies, legal holds, enhanced security, and enterprise search. Essentially, the organization's view becomes holistic based on business policy and business obligations; and the organization can perform these duties independent of an enterprise infrastructure or user community.

Pinpointing the Difference

The bottom line is that while some solutions rely more on segmented processes to accomplish enterprise functions such as e-discovery and comprehensive search, others unify these functions to streamline information governance responsibilities. Some solutions provide out-of-the-box integrations, while others depend upon services to connect an organization to its information. Technically, both solutions are actually federating (i.e., merging, joining, and coalescing) but using different implementation styles.

Ultimately, it seems the way organizations control and find information is a task some take for granted, which could be a very costly oversight. At the desktop, it can seem like the same

thing is going on behind the scenes, but it isn't. At the highest level, a federated approach to the management of information enables enterprise content to be controlled and acted upon quickly and efficiently – without leaving any content out of the loop. Likewise, enterprise users can enjoy greater access using these capabilities, but from their desktops. Therefore, the next time an organization considers a solution for records management, e-discovery, or e-mail archiving that offers federation, it should step back and delve deeper into exactly how the solution gets the organization to where it wants to go.

Reed Irvin may be contacted at reed.irvin@ca.com. See his bio on page 54.