

Document Imaging Report

Business Trends on Converting Paper Processes to Electronic Format

4003 Wood Street ● Erie, PA 16509 ● PH (814) 866-2247 ● <http://www.documentimagingreport.com>

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SkySync Offers Solution for Merging ECM & FSS Systems

A couple years ago, I attended a presentation by long-time ECM industry analyst Alan Pelz-Sharpe, who was discussing the proliferation of file, sync, and share (FSS) use at Global 5000 organizations. One point he made was that as organizations add new repositories, including FSS systems, old ones rarely go away. So, while users may be simplifying processes for themselves, when it comes to information governance, they are creating new administration headaches.

A company called **Portal Architects** has set out to address this quandary. Founded by CEO Mark Brazeau, an ECM industry veteran who also has extensive experience with SharePoint, Portal Architect's flagship product, SkySync, is utilized by more than 2,000 organizations worldwide. It acts as middleware to connect diverse repositories by offering bi-directional sharing of files, as well as meta data, permissions, folder information, and more.

"We're solving an age old problem in the information management industry," Brazeau told *DIR*. "That is, 'how can you mix and match multiple file storage platforms?' With SkySync, any system can be your source and any system can be your destination. The majority of our current clients are looking to take a closed, on-premise ECM system and tie it to a cloud service.

"They love the idea of cloud-based services that enable them to access documents anywhere on any device. But, they also want to be able to leverage their existing ECM platforms, that they have spent years building integrations for and that are wired into all their other systems. Basically, they want their cake and eat it too."

When we spoke last month, Portal Architects had written 32 Connectors for a diverse set of file systems. These include ECM systems from well-known vendors like **IBM, Open Text, Documentum, Oracle**, and

Alfresco, as well as FSS systems from vendors like **Box, Dropbox, Google**, and **Microsoft** (Office 365, SkyDrive, and three generations of SharePoint Server). Connections can also be made from network file systems.

"If there is an API, we can write a Connector to it," said Brazeau. "We've even written integrations to some older systems that you don't hear about anymore. The goal of our Connectors is to remove a lot of the friction you can run into when you try and move files between dissimilar systems. An example might be that one system keeps track of major and minor versions while the other does not. Or there might be a naming convention in one system, like a use of an '&' sign, that isn't allowed in the other. We can set up SkySync to automatically replace '&' with a dash if we need to."

Brazeau gave us a demo of how SkySync works. Basically, a user chooses their source and

destination systems. "Once a connection is established," he said, "you can start dragging and dropping the content that you want to sync. You can grab folders from Documentum and start putting them into SharePoint. You can also set up preferences like if you want to move folders or copy them.

"Basically, you are setting up jobs that SkySync is going to run when you schedule them. You have options about the type of meta data you want to sync. You also have options like keeping the files in an ECM system when you move them to an FSS system but deleting them from the FSS system once they are moved to the ECM system. You can also choose only to sync certain types of files, or files with certain meta data fields, or files created or modified during a certain time period. You can get fairly granular about what you want to sync.

"The administration is all GUI, so it's pretty simple to configure. But, there are a lot of capabilities. If something goes wrong, chances are it's because something was configured incorrectly, like the user inadvertently checked a box to move files instead of copy of them. Users can do dry runs to test how their jobs will perform before going live."

The logistics

SkySync can be scheduled to run off hours to prevent network logjams. "One of our customers has 13,000 home drives on a network file system that they wanted to sync," said Brazeau. "They were able to move 120 TB in 42 days. Now we can go through the whole tree and check for changes in two and a half hours."

Contrary to what its name would seem to imply, Portal Architects does not make SkySync available as a cloud service. "Our name is somewhat misleading," admitted Brazeau. "SkySync is software that is installed behind a user's firewall. A user could deploy it in their own Azure or AWS environment, but we have no access to anyone's files."

The pricing for SkySync is subscription based. There are three basic licensing levels. There is a Professional level, for up to 500 users, starting at \$1,495 per year. There is Business level for 500-5,000 users, starting at \$5,950 per year, and there is an Enterprise level with individualized pricing. There are also performance criteria and features that differentiate the three levels.

"Our customer base is fairly evenly distributed among the three levels," said Brazeau. "Of course, the enterprise customers are spending more dollars. We have one client that has 140,000 users."

One of Portal Architects' challenges is getting word out to potential customers that there is a product that solves their repository migration issues. "The lion's share of our business is coming through referrals from vendors like Box, Dropbox, Google, and IBM," said Brazeau. "They have clients that want to sync content between their repositories and another

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Editor: Ralph Gammon
4003 Wood Street
Erie, PA 16509
PH (814) 866-2247
FX (412) 291-1352
ralphg@documentimagingreport.com

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4003 Wood Street
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repository. We also just started a reseller channel, which is going to be a focus for us in 2016.”

Rapidly accelerating growth

According to Brazeau, adoption of SkySync has seen hockey stick growth over the last couple years. “We launched the company in 2011 and spent two years building the product,” he said. “We first hit the market in late to mid-2013. We finished 2014 with 400 clients and now have more than 2,000.

Portal Architects is based in Ann Arbor, MI, and is privately funded. “We are also profitable, which is unheard of in today’s start-up environment,” said Brazeau.

A next-generation release of SkySync is planned for Q1 of this year. It will include a new Web-based UI, improved support for remote offices with low bandwidth issues, and improved administrative controls over desktop syncs. “This last feature is important in highly regulated industries,” noted Brazeau.

“We also have a soon-to-be-released patented technology that will change the game of how content migrations are implemented,” he added. “Historically, migrations have been performed via bulk moves—meaning that whatever is in System A is migrated to system B, whether the content is relevant or not.

“In the next generation of SkySync, rather than this broad, non-descript methodology, system administrators can precisely define the characteristics of files they want moved or copied like ‘files Ralph has authored in the last three years.’ SkySync will then automatically execute a federated search across all connected content stores and ‘virtualize’ the results based upon the admin-defined search criteria. The virtualized result, which could literally be tens-of-millions of files, are either migrated or copied to the new system while at the same time being automatically classified. An effort that once took thousands of hours to complete will now take seven mouse-clicks.”

Brazeau concluded that SkySync is addressing a problem that everybody has. “If you think about the market, FSS products are fairly hot. Organizations want to migrate their files to those platforms so they can share the files with third parties without having to enable them to log into their systems. But, they also need to keep ECM in place because it serves a mission critical purpose. It’s a hybrid mode that they want to create, and we can help them do that.”

For more information: <http://skysync.com/>