



Reference

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More Time for the Animals

Less Is More: ECM on Demand for Danish Farmers



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Nis K. Skau,
Danish farmer and founder of the IKT Agro
network platform

Less time behind the desk means more time to tend to the fields and animals: Dansk Farmer IT achieved this goal for their customers with the help of ELO^{enterprise}. The farming businesses use ELO based on the Software-as-a-Service model, i.e., several farmers share a server. Documents and data are centrally stored in an electronic archive and can be readily accessed. The farmers benefit from significant time savings when it comes to performing daily management tasks, leaving more time to devote to the actual farming business.

In Denmark, most invoices and account statements are delivered electronically. Sending this information by mail would cost up to 2.50 EUR, which represents a high cost factor. In order to avoid media discontinuities and to boost efficiency, it makes sense to also store the files received digitally in an electronic format. For the Danish farmers, this means they have to bring their businesses and administrative processes up to speed with the digital age. Dansk Farmer IT (DFIT), an IT service provider founded in 2009, specializes in catering to the needs of farmers.

The Solution

More Real-World Value



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Anytime, Any Place

Overview

Country: Denmark
Industry: Farming

The Challenge

The goal is to manage files in a single, browser-based platform and bundle all documents in an electronic archive. In addition to the local staff, the data must also be accessible to third parties such as accountants.

Solution

All paper-based documents are scanned into **ELO**. Digitally received receipts and documents are directly archived in the electronic record. Barcodes are used to uniquely allocate documents. The 'simple client' precisely implements the farmers' needs.

Benefits

Searches are fast and smart, allowing farmers to answer queries in a few moments. Printing out information on paper is no longer necessary, saving time and ink.

One of the many people relying on their know-how is Nis K. Skau, Danish farmer and founder of the IKT Agro (information and communication technology for farmers) network platform. One of the incentives of acting as a networker is to operate his own four farms as progressively as possible. "It is my vision to automate as many tasks as possible in order to spend as little time as possible on administrative and financial chores," explains Skau. This also gave rise to the idea of using an enterprise content management (ECM) system. But since most farming operations do not have their own server, the solution had to support a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model so that several farmers could share a server.

This service is ideal since not all farmers are computer experts and, by virtue of their trade, do not spend all day behind a desk. Thanks to this setup, they neither have to worry about installation, maintenance, or data backups. The web-based service also saves the farmers from having to purchase an expensive license. Instead, the costs are spread over the course of the service life. Users can access the application on demand via their browser at any time and from any location.

Dansk Farmer IT was asked to recommend a suitable DMS. Key requirements included simple handling and the option to tailor the interface to the exact needs of the farmers. Thanks to a history of successful projects, the choice was easy: **ELO** Nordic and their ECM.



ELOenterprise has a Java client which, being a platform-independent frontend, provides the ideal basis for meeting the needs of the Danes; in addition, it offers a user-friendly interface.

No 'Off-the-Rack' SaaS Solution

The project was launched in November 2009. The SaaS solution was developed, within the defined parameters, in close cooperation among Nis Skau, Dansk Farmer IT, and **ELO** Nordic. It is part of the FARMVIEW® concept. FARMVIEW® is a system for monitoring cots, silos, and water supply via cell phone. If, for example, a generator fails, the farmer is informed. There are plans to manage the data of all these applications on a single browser-based platform, saving users the hassle of having to log on to various applications. Another medium-term goal is to include the manure tank and power supply.

The initial task at hand was to bundle all documents and data in an electronic archive. In addition to Skau's staff, the data also had to be accessible to external service providers. One such third party is, for example, the accountant who books the receipts and files the monthly VAT return.

The testing stage was successfully concluded in good time at the end of 2009, and the system has been operational since early January. The farmers manage and archive the digitally obtained receipts and documents directly in the electronic record. Printouts are thus obsolete, which saves time and ink. For instance, invoices for repair parts received as PDF files in Outlook can be transferred into the **ELO** record at the click of a button. There, they are allocated to the correct farm or project and marked as paid after the money has been wired. Receipts delivered by standard mail are scanned before they are assigned to the record.



Convenient and Secure

The farmers had already been using other programs as a service provided over the Internet, such as the cattle database. For this reason, they were familiar with the general modus operandi. What makes this solution so convenient for them is the fact that they do not have to worry about installation, upgrades, or integrating it into their IT landscape.

“What really helps a lot is that **ELO** performs a daily backup, thus ensuring that no data is lost. Also, the ‘simple client’ – which has been stripped down to the functions required by the farmers – reduces complexity to the bare minimum,” explains Bent Okholm, CEO of **ELO** Nordic.

The solution has been productive for eight months now. A first evaluation showed that the users are very satisfied with the solution. “The ‘simple client’ is precisely what we were looking for, as it is highly user-friendly. Already it enables us to work more efficiently. We need to touch paper-based documents only once – then they are ready for further processing in the electronic record,” says super user Skau. “The search is intelligent and fast, as is the response performance of the external server. Incidentally, this was a key prerequisite. None of the users would have accepted a system that was not as fast as the NetBank system. Another argument in favor of the system is that there have so far been no downtimes.”



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More time thanks to reduced administration workload

Fewer Unproductive Tasks – Improved Transparency

The record is stored on an external server that the accountant can also access directly from her (external) workplace. This means that the farmer no longer has to send out receipts and can even view the documents while they are being processed by the accountant.

The intelligent search function delivers the required documents on screen with a single click of the mouse. Wasting time hunting for documents is a thing of the past. Nis Skau does not even have to enter full descriptions; instead, a few initial letters lead to the right document, since the system displays a hit list, much like in Google.

As Skau reports, the accountant is also more than happy with the new workflow. She is notified via e-mail when receipts of the previous month have been entered into the system. She then assigns a barcode to them for easy and unique identification. If she has any questions, these can now be resolved in next to no time. When responding to queries, Skau often uses the stick-it function ideal for sending short notes.



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Outlook

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Run-ins with modifications performed by another employee are not possible, thanks to the integrated check-in/check-out mechanism that prevents simultaneous editing of documents. A version history function indicates the corresponding data statuses. This is highly useful when, for instance, creating or editing strategy plans or Excel tables for the bank.

Nis Skau is eager to further increase the level of automation. Of course, he is already saving a lot of time compared to conventional document processing. However, he would like to see an even tighter interaction between **ELO**, the 'O90 online' ERP system, and the banking system. His dream is to have an 'intelligent scanning' system in place that can initiate invoice payments. This is, however, a long shot – also because of budget considerations. But the vision of 'more time thanks to less administration' is becoming reality, step by step.