

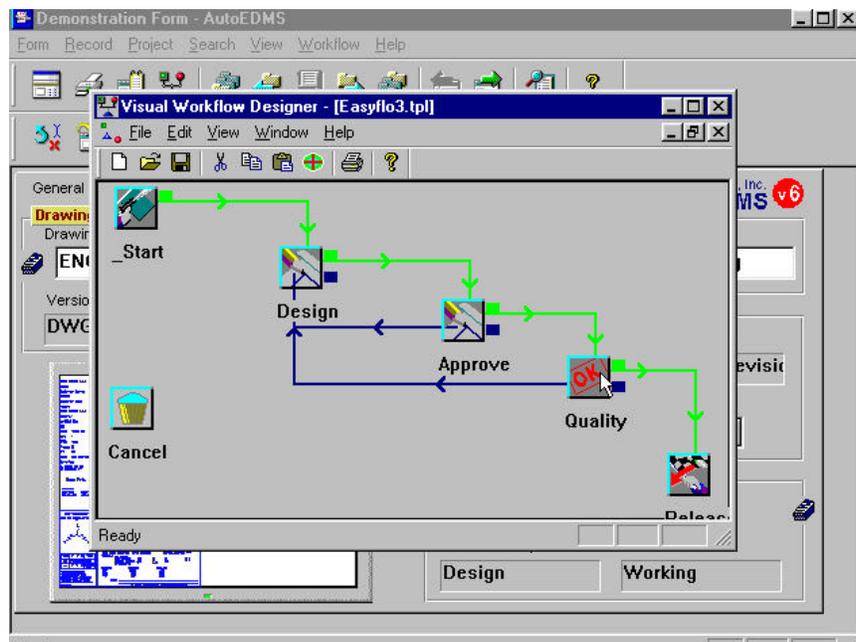
Project Extranet/ Collaboration Tools

Pay to Use

Many of the Internet collaboration sites are pursuing a “pay to use strategy” that requires potentially interested customers to pay prior to using. There are demos that future customers can register for. At times, you have to register once to receive information, once to view certain information and once to walk through the demo. This is very frustrating and not streamlined at all. The primary draw back with this business strategy is that clients may not get all the information they need in a pre-scripted demo or pamphlet. However, one company has decided not to use the pay to use strategy and opted for a more liberal try and pay if you like incentive. At Buzzsaw.com, clients can create their own project management website without having to register and the first 100 megabytes are free. After the first 100 megabytes, clients are provided several pricing options.

Document Management & Workflow

Document management and workflow are concepts that have been defined and re-defined in order to meet customer expectations. Several software companies believe that workflow and document management solely deals with who opens, closes, deletes, edits, and creates documents. However, in the modern computer age the workflow concept is much more than simple file storage. In brief, workflow (as it is associated with technology) is the automated process of document management with sophisticated software driven logic that requires little to no human interaction to accomplish streamlined document transactions, improved business communication and robust document management. Ideally, all processes take place without the system user knowing what the exact steps are or prompting users to save a file to a special location. For instance, in an automated workflow environment the only thing the consulting architect has to worry about is making the changes or recommendations tasked to him and save the file. After that, an email is automatically sent to the ten people in the quality group requesting them to review the file. Then, if they reject the changes and/or modifications, the file is automatically sent back to the consulting architect for re-work with notes attached. AutoEDMS is an example of one of the available software packages that offers a solid client/server document management solution that can easily manage thousands of documents. If you're running Citrix Metaframe then you're client/server application has just jumped onto the Internet.



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Conclusion

Document Management and Workflow concepts have become “catch-phrases” for the likes of Cephren, Buzzsaw and Bricsnet. In my opinion, these products provide solutions for companies that have a relatively small document base and a solid in-house workflow process in place. Those organizations seeking a “harddrive in the sky” concept that deal with medium to large projects will benefit from these products. However, companies that have thousands of complex documents combined with highly demanding workflow processes will be frustrated using any of these products. It appears that Cephren is trying to distinguish itself from other peer web tools. Cephren offers limited workflow capabilities and enhanced document management features as compared to Buzzsaw and Bricsnet.

Each product has its drawbacks and strengths. As time goes by vendors will continue to increase their offerings and outdoing each other. Unfortunately, the primary factor that is not keeping pace with technology is some of the pricing structures offered by these vendors. On average \$200/month will purchase approximately 1 gigabyte worth of storage space. In today's dollars, that's a new 40 gigabyte storage device a month. Do a little in-house development and it becomes relatively easy to have a 1-terabit-storage device in the sky that can handle any type of document for the entire enterprise.

Product	Requirements	Pricing	Redlining	Document Management/Workflow	Summary Notes
Bricsnet ProjectCenter	Requires java enabled browser to view CAD drawings. A JDK 1.1 compliant browser: Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 or greater; Netscape Navigator 4.06 or greater; AOL 4.0 or greater	\$259/month for unlimited users at a maximum capacity of 250 megs	Yes, requires plugin	Slightly bulky, no real workflow offered other than showing who did what to a file.	Interesting product for small organizations with a modest product.
buzzsaw ProjectPoint	Must have Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.01 or higher. No other browsers will work.	0-100 megs free; 100 megs - 1 gigabyte \$200/month; 1 gigabyte - 5 gigabyte \$500/month	Yes, requires plugin	Relatively easy; drag and drop interface, but provides no real workflow engine.	Intuitively easy to use and free to use up to a point. Good strategy for conservative clients. Offers WebEx conferencing tool at 20 cents a minute.
Cephren ProjectNet	Will work with any Windows PC. Macintosh users must use Windows in virtual mode. Either Netscape 4.0 or higher or Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 or greater will work.	Unknown. Registered 4 times at website to gain information, but had to call company. Called company, sales representatives were at lunch. Requested information via snail mail, never received it.	Yes, does not appear to require plugin, built directly into software	Strong document management that offers a workflow engine. Very similar to a CMMS.	Looks like Microsoft Outlook, which could be an advantage or disadvantage. Has other features such as Calendar, Industry Forms, Online Conferencing and Messaging.