Is it document management or content management?

There is considerable confusion in the market between document management systems (DMS) and content management systems (CMS). This has not been helped by the vendors, who are keen to market their products as widely as possible.

These two types of systems are very different, and serve complementary needs. While there is an ongoing move to merge the two together (a positive step), it is important to understand when each system is appropriate.

Document management systems (DMS)

Document management is certainly the older discipline, born out of the need to manage huge numbers of documents in organisations.

Mature and well-tested, document management systems can be characterised as follows:

- focused on managing documents, in the traditional sense (like Word files)

- each unit of information (document) is fairly large, and self-contained

- there are few (if any) links between documents

- provides limited integration with repository (check-in, check-out, etc)

- focused primarily on storage and archiving

- includes powerful workflow

- targeted at storing and presenting documents in their native format

- limited web publishing engine typically produces one page for each document

Note that this is just a generalised description of a DMS, with most systems offering a range of unique features and capabilities. Nonetheless, this does provide a representative outline of common DMS functionality.

A typical document management scenario:

A large legal firm purchases a DMS to track the huge number of advice documents, contracts and briefs. It allows lawyers to easily retrieve earlier advice, and to use 'precedent' templates to quickly create new documents.

You can't build a website with just a DM system

Content management systems (CMS)

Content management is more recent, and is primarily designed to meet the growing needs of the website and intranet markets.

A content management system can be summarised as follows:

- manages small, interconnected units of information (eg. web pages)

- each unit (page) is defined by its location on the site

- extensive cross-linking between pages

- focused primarily on page creation and editing

- provides tight integration between authoring and the repository (metadata, etc)

- provides a very powerful publishing engine (templates, scripting, etc)

A typical content management scenario:

A CMS is purchased to manage the 3000 page corporate website. Template-based authoring allows business groups to easily create content, while the publishing system dynamically generates richly-formatted pages.

Enterprise CMS

In recent times, systems known as "enterprise CMSs" have emerged. These consist of a core web-content management system, with supporting document management capabilities.

These go a long way to meeting the information management needs, although high costs and lack of consistent functionality between products are still outstanding issues.

Summary

Content management and document management are *complementary*, not competing technologies. You must choose an appropriate system if business needs are to be met.