

Computer File Chaos

Why Windows Explorer Fails
at Document Management



Windows Explorer is far and away the most commonly used document management tool in the world. Its familiar interface provides the basics: folders, file names and a date/time stamp. It may be an acceptable tool for an individual user, or even smaller workgroups, but Explorer fails to meet the document management challenges of larger organizations.

In fact, relying on Windows Explorer's folder structure leads to computer file chaos. Mistakes are inevitable: Someone stores a file in the wrong folder; a document is lost or overwritten; a copy is incorrectly assumed to be a final release. These are all hidden costs that have a huge financial impact. Plus, problems increase daily as more people create more documents across more geographic locations.

Consider the perspective offered by CAD Management consultant Robert Green: "Companies continue to spend thousands on workstations, CAD and Office software, email clients, analytical modules and other tools; and then rely on 1980s technology to manage their information." To understand why it's time to equip your organization to meet the challenges of the 21st century, let's contrast Windows Explorer with Adept, an engineering document management system.

Find Files Fast:

It's easy to find a file in Windows Explorer, when you know the file name and where it's located in your folder structure. But when you're looking for files created by someone in a different workgroup; or when you're not sure of the file name or location, finding files is time consuming. Oftentimes, you can't find the files and you waste valuable time recreating them from scratch. When you consider the time spent by each individual and multiply that by all the people in your company, you'll realize how much time and money is being wasted.

Adept collects the information about each document into a database, so unlike Explorer, you can find documents based on any information about the document—project name, part number, job number, description, last user—regardless of its location on the network or the file name.

Collaborate:

When you find a file in Windows Explorer, you can't tell if someone else in the organization is working on it. So it's possible for two people to work on the same document. Adept serves as a traffic cop, so the moment a file is checked out for editing, or moved to the next step of a workflow, authorized users see its status. Adept prevents duplicates and overwrites from occurring.

Control Revisions:

To manage revisions, Windows Explorer lets everyone create their own standard. Such manual processes leave plenty of room for error. Incorrect revisions on a construction site or manufacturing plant create expensive mistakes. Adept ensures that users have access to the latest revision of every document throughout its life cycle.

Maintain a Document Audit Trail:

Unlike Windows Explorer, Adept's audit trail tracks the history of a file, including, who worked on it, when, their intent, what changes were made, and who approved it. This automated tracking makes it easier to comply with ISO, TQM, LEED or other industry or internal standards.

Maintain Relationships Among Files:

Engineering files have built in relationships, like XREFs in AutoCAD or parts and assemblies in Autodesk Inventor or SolidWorks. Windows Explorer offers no support for keeping these relationships intact when you move, copy, or rename files. Adept, on the other hand, offers tight integration with these CAD tools to make certain all inter-relationships are maintained.

Security and Access Control:

While an IT manager can set network folder rights, users can still go into a folder and copy a file to a local drive, edit it, and pass around an unapproved version. Adept provides security for your documents and more granular control over user permissions.

Summary:

Windows Explorer is not an effective tool to manage your documents across departments or the enterprise. A document management system helps you find files quickly, control revisions, reuse design data efficiently, collaborate across multiple sites, automate workflow and approvals, manage complex file relationships, maintain a document audit trail, and comply with industry standards. These capabilities offer you better overall business results through improved productivity and collaboration, greater project quality, and streamlined processes enabling you to be more competitive and profitable.

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