

# **Records Management and IT: Bridging the Gap**



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## **Records Management and IT: Bridging the Gap – A White Paper**

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*This paper provided courtesy of*



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## Introduction

In all probability, there is not one Records Manager who at one time or another has gone into a meeting with his/her IT (Information Technology) Department and felt he/she had left their familiar country for a foreign country, of sorts. Everyone in the meeting appears to be using the same terms but the meanings behind those terms is where the difference comes. Most likely the outcome of the meeting was frustrating for both the Records Manager and the IT Manager as neither were entirely certain of the agreements made.

So, is there a gap between Records Management and IT? Some may think not. They may feel that both talk the same language. These individuals are quite lucky that their Records Managers and IT departments talk the same language. On the other hand, they may also be fooling themselves into believing that the two are on the same discussion level.

This white paper deals with the issue of bridging the gap between Records Managers and IT to improve the communications between these key departments. This bridge building will result in a higher level of success in projects undertaken which will greatly improve the organization's level of compliance. To accomplish this, this paper will:

- Explore the business case for why Records Managers and IT must bridge the gap,
- Take a look at how IT and Records Managers view compliance,
- Explore what today's Records Manager needs to know,
- Identify steps that today's Records Manager may take to ensure a compliant organization,
- Take a look at how a team approach and systematic project management will further bridge the gap, and
- Examine the future of Records Managers.

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## The Business Case

Many of you reading this paper may be too young to remember when all the information an organization had to manage was in paper format. People used letters to correspond and when multiple copies were needed, they used carbon paper to create the duplicate and triplicate copies using a typewriter, not a word processor. When people wanted to chat with one another, they picked up the telephone and talked. This was business at its best and at "lightning" speed for its time. At the same time, people dreamt of a day when there would be a "paperless office." While this concept was never realized and in fact paper usage has increased, it was a predictor of the electronic communications and document era of today.

The way we transact business today is totally different. We are literally bombarded with unimaginable amounts of information. Not only do we still receive mail in paper format, we now receive email, possibly managing multiple email boxes, and have the Internet or World Wide Web where any and all imaginable information is at our fingertips. While we still use the telephone to communicate with each other we now have Instant Message as a way to engage in quick, short information exchanges. We have also addressed the convenience of information and communications by using mobile or cellular telephones and PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant) that are connected to the Internet so we never lose contact with others or our information. Today's Records Managers not only need to be concerned about the "copy of record" or "official record" for its organization's records but the many versions of it that exist on servers, laptops, PDA's, etc.

Technology is the enabler that is allowing for better communications tools, increased information being available, and improved efficiency in the way we work. While the technology is good, it compounds the concerns that a Records Manager has in managing and controlling the information in an organization. Email is the way business is transacted today. Unfortunately, in too many cases, the policies and procedures necessary to ensure that the proper use of the technology and the correct information is retained are not in place. Too often organizations don't discover that their information is mismanaged and out of control until it is too late.

Records provide an organization with the information it needs to transact business. Typically, records are grouped into the following categories based on the value they have for the organization:

- Financial – used by accounting (tax forms, budgets, financial statements, etc.)
- Legal – evidence of business transactions or legal decisions (contracts, agreements, etc.)
- Administrative – internal policy, procedures, and guidelines (manuals, reports, corporate directives, etc.)
- Research – determine trends, new products or services (market surveys, market research, etc.)
- Historical – provide a record of an organization's activities (incorporation papers, deeds, etc.)

Additionally, the same categories are used as factors to determine the retention periods for the records. Records retention periods are also based on legal requirements.

The leading business drivers facing organizations today and impacting technology decisions include cost, customer, and risk. In an AllIM industry study<sup>1</sup>, 45% of organizations reported that improving efficiency, reducing costs, and increasing profits and performance are the most significant issues they are facing. Another 31% reported that providing better customer service, improved response and competitive advantage are significant. While risk avoidance is still important, only 24% identified compliance, risk management, and business continuity as important. Records Management and email management rank in the top five technologies that organizations are implementing.

## **Records Managers vs. IT**

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An opportunity for Records Managers and IT to work together is in taking control of the organization's information and managing its technologies through the development of clear policies, procedures, and corporate directives. It is not enough to focus solely on the effective and proper use of the technology. The Records Manager and IT Department must also consider the information and take the necessary steps to ensure that the right information is being retained and managed. The development of policies should not only focus on Records Management but should also include policies for all electronic records, data, and information, including email.

The value of records needs to be elevated so that the information is thought of as an asset rather than something that must be managed and tolerated. When viewed as an asset, information is then retained based on its content rather than the age of the file, the amount of storage that is available, or other factors used to reduce the amount of information to be managed. As a managed asset, organizations position themselves to be more compliant than if they did nothing to the information they have. It is important for organizations to determine the value of their information and to take appropriate actions to guarantee that the value is preserved. Unfortunately, too many businesses learn this lesson the hard way.

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<sup>1</sup> "Payback Time: The Practical Application of ECM Technologies" Conducted by AllIM—The ECM Association, 2005.

When Records Managers and IT meet to develop plans and policies to meet compliance regulations, each plays a vital role. Records Managers have a clear understanding of the importance of the information, the way it is being used in the organization, and the business processes that use the information. IT understands the information architecture, including the hardware and software, used to store and work with the information. Records Managers understand the importance of technology as a tool to manage the information while keeping the view that information is an organizational asset should be wisely used and preserved. Because of the Records Managers' knowledge of the information, regulatory requirements, legal requirements, and the actual way the information is used, they can educate and explain how technology and information work together and ensure that proper Records Management policies and procedures are being followed.

As information issues present themselves, Records Managers need to be consulted early in the process so that information is not unnecessarily destroyed or lost. Records Managers protect the vital records and trade secrets of an organization. In the eyes of an IT person, the information is nothing more than storage on a magnetic drive or disk. Unlike Records Managers, IT views the amount of electronic storage used to be a primary concern rather than the value of the information content.

Records Managers ensure that records are properly managed so that they can be found and accessed when they are needed. Information workers spend an inordinate amount of time locating information. When the appropriate tools, procedures, and policies are developed and enforced and all employees are trained, organizations can realize a time savings.

Critical to being able to retrieve the records (or any content) is assigning the correct metadata to the information. Briefly, metadata is information describing the document that assists in the retrieval of the document. Metadata is used to identify an author, title, abstract, structural information about the document, file type, access levels, and how the document was created. There are numerous metadata schemas available. Probably the best known is Dublin Core Metadata Element Set. The Dublin Core defines a set of elements that could be used by authors to describe their documents.

The area of Records Management has become very complex—and will continue to develop in complexity as more technology is applied, more documents are created in electronic format, and additional regulations are introduced. No longer does a Records Manager only need to know the principles of Records Management and how to manage records both on- and off-site and how to conduct records inventories. Today, Records Managers need to have a background in IT, legal, business, and Records Management fundamentals which are critical to successfully managing information in an organization. They must also, at a minimum, understand the principles of document, content, and forms management. Records Managers, along with legal practitioners, are most knowledgeable of the regulatory and legal requirements for their organizations including the nuances from the industry the organization serves.

The use of IT technologies aids Records Managers by providing powerful database functionalities, collaborative processing, distributed processing, integration of systems, and the information contained in repositories. The combination of the knowledge of the Records Manager and the IT tools guarantees to some degree the successfulness of an organization and that its employees are effective in the way they conduct their business.

## **What Does a Records Manager Need to Know?**

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Records Management is not easy. With the introduction of technology, the role has become very complex and may continue to become even more so as more business is transacted electronically, technology becomes more sophisticated, laws change, and the volume of email and electronic information grows. So, what do Records Managers really need to know to stay ahead in this ever increasingly complex world?

There are several areas in which Records Managers need to develop a firm foundation upon which to build additional layers of expertise: IT, legal, and business. In the area of IT, it does not mean that Records Manager need to know how to configure a network or set up a laptop to develop in the area of IT. However, it does mean that they should be able to justify the purchase of a Records Management application on the basis of an ROI (Return on Investment) or TCO (Total Cost of Ownership). Records Managers should be able to provide advice from a policy perspective on Records Management issues as they relate to the organization and regulations. They should also be able to advise IT on the functional requirements of the Records Management application. Based upon the requirements, Records Managers should assist IT in the decisions connected with the system configuration of the application.

The Records Manager is in a unique position to assist the organization in understanding the difference between information, records, and evidence and helping them to understand what is needed and should be retained if a lawsuit arises and the organization's information is required. Working together with the legal department, Records Managers can help the organization to better understand how the regulations impact the records that they must retain. In addition to promoting an awareness of the importance of records and records being a corporate asset, the Records Managers should provide ongoing training to all levels of the organization on Records Management practices and the implications of the regulations on the way the organization handles its information.

A Records Manager can have the greatest impact on the business of the organization. The Records Manager is most likely the most knowledgeable person on the organization's business processes since he/she must understand completely the way the records are created, used, and disposed. This knowledge, coupled with the general understanding of the organizational strategic goals, enables the Records Manager to be able to work with senior management to tie the strategic goals to the information. This ensures that the information is an organizational asset that can be used to support new opportunities and increase the organization's competitive advantage. Records Managers help organizations to leverage the business value of their information.

Records Managers must continue to learn and take on new challenges. The ever-changing horizon of legal regulations and the need to ensure that the organization meets the latest compliance requirements may make this seem to be a nearly impossible task to accomplish but it is not.

## **Team Approach to Records Management**

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No longer can one or two people manage the volume of information with which organizations much deal. It takes a team. The composition of the team is critical to the successful management of information.

Ideally, the team should consist of representatives of the key stakeholders from the organization including a Records Manager, IT, legal, and end-users. Including Finance, Human Resources, and

Purchasing on the team is always a good idea. These areas are large information users and owners, and their issues and needs are important to be heard. The committee must have a project or team leader to whom the team may look for direction. This individual will ensure the tasks are clearly defined, deadlines are set, and commitments are met.

Independent of the size of the organization, it is vitally important to include end-users who are able to represent the needs of multiple departments or functional areas in the organization. The end-users should be ready to discuss Records Management issues and be able to identify recordkeeping issues. They should assist, if not develop, action plans to mitigate or eliminate risks in records keeping. It is always a good idea to have a champion or someone from senior management on the team to assist in promoting the good work of the team. The champion, along with senior management, and key end-users, should see as their primary responsibility the need to raise awareness to support the Records Management program.

The legal department representatives should come to the team ready to share pertinent regulations and laws that impact the organization's records. It is legal's responsibility to validate that records retention periods meet the legal obligations of the organization at the local, state, and federal levels.

While IT should come prepared to explain the organization's technology infrastructure, they should also be ready to learn about Records Management. In many cases, this means that IT must provide basic technology training so that Records Managers will understand the technology concepts. Projects like this provide an excellent opportunity for the Records Management and IT departments to provide cross training to their employees.

When selecting team members, the following qualities are important:

- Expertise in information management with a comprehensive understanding of the records retention requirements and practices
- Knowledge of information technology capabilities and the best ways to utilize the technology as well as the current infrastructure
- Understanding of the legal requirements for the organization's Records Management
- Knowledge of the way records are used in the departments and the organization
- Knowledge of the key business processes of the organization and cross-departmental responsibilities

Through the use of the team approach, the risk that may be encountered is minimized because each team member brings varying viewpoints and ideas that, combined, develop a comprehensive project. The support and acceptance for the work is also better because many people in the organization are involved in the process.

## **Systematic Project Planning**

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With the high impact of technology on the Records Management area, records-related projects must be organized and managed like any other IT project. This means holding a kickoff meeting where the project team roles and responsibilities, and project schedules, are discussed. This initial meeting is where the project is planned and the project planning documentation is reviewed. The main purpose of this meeting is to achieve a common understanding, amongst the project team on what the records project is and how it relates to the organization's goals. This agreement provides the basis of the project scope.

To ensure success of the project, all project team members must accept the plan. It may also be helpful during this meeting to provide some basic Records Management training, concentrating on the organization's policies to ensure that all team members have a common understanding of the procedures, policies, and issues trying to be resolved by the Records Management project.

A key element to the project plan, beyond the milestones and tasks and their associated due dates, is to define and agree upon the scope of the project. The scope must be specific enough to discourage scope creep, so detrimental to the overall success of any project. The scope should be stated in terms of the organization's goals and processes. When the scope is not specified in a detailed manner, it can easily be expanded to include other processes, groups, or functionality, commonly known as "scope creep." Scope creep results in schedule delays and budget overruns. However, there are instances when the scope needs to change. When this happens, be sure to document the reasons for the change and identify the impact on the budget, project schedules, and overall goals.

Once the project scope has been agreed upon, identify core business processes that will be impacted or should be included in the Records Management project. This includes identifying the relationship between the processes and the business, and the improvements that can be made. While looking at the processes, it is important to identify the information that is to be included in the project and assess the quality of the information to determine the way the information should be managed. With the assistance of IT, the existing technology should be reviewed to determine if it is able to manage the information and the processes in the manner that the project team has identified.

When it is determined that new technology is required, the team must thoroughly review the requirements analysis to ensure that they remain valid. If gaps are found in the initial requirement analysis and the current picture, they should be noted and included in the analysis. Do not skip steps when working on a large project such as this. This means that the team should make use of RFIs (Request for Information), RFPs (Request for Proposal), vendor presentations, and site visits. Not doing these things will place the project in peril.

## **What Is the Future of the Records Manager?**

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Many years ago, and to a certain extent today, when someone says he/she is a librarian, the image of a grandmotherly woman with a hair bun, glasses, and frumpy clothing almost immediately spring to mind. For many, this is the same image that is conjured for Records Managers but with the added caveat that they work in dark places either in vaults or underground amongst the dust. In both cases, this is definitely not the truth. However, the image does pose difficulties for Records Managers as they try to move into the IT world.

In the late 1980s, a Records Manager might have been expected to only have experience in micrographics and Records Management as well as supervisory experience. They were looked at to evaluate, design, and develop methods to convert existing systems to a comprehensive Records Management system in accordance with corporate and regulatory policy guidelines. Records

Managers were expected to provide for the collection, protection, retrieval, distribution, and/or disposition of reports, forms, correspondence, and other required documents. Today, while the emphasis is on electronically- or digitally-born information, much of the above is still a requirement of this role but with the addition of electronic technology. Records Managers need to be able to deal with complex information management issues and related IT, legal, and business matters that affect

Records Management. This is an ever-changing area with new compliance challenges being introduced daily that impact the way records are managed.

Because Records Managers are knowledgeable of the information requirements of each department in the organization to ensure the successful functioning of the Records Management system, they are well positioned to advance to senior management of the Information Services or Information Resources areas. Records Managers can no longer be only concerned with Records Management and regulations. They must also learn and understand the technology.

No longer relegated to their dungeons, Records Managers are well positioned to become the CIO of their organization based upon their knowledge of the business, processes, and regulations. Given that Records Management is increasingly becoming part of the CIO's office and Records Managers are increasingly in need of coordinating with the CIO on information policy issues, this career path is becoming realistic. The Records Managers' understanding of the organization's information issues places them in a position to assist the organization in focusing on the information policy and management that it needs to survive in today's business world.

## What Should Records Managers Do?

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As identified by Randolph Kahn and Barclay Blair in *Information Nation Warrior: Bootcamp for Information Management Compliance*, we are in a new era of Information Management. In order to survive in this new time, organizations need knowledgeable people or warriors. The warriors need to:<sup>2</sup>

- Get executives inspired to help promote compliance
- Meet with representatives from business units and promote shared values
- Promote RM as a service and deliver those services to the internal customers that need them
- Involve internal customers to build support for a new project
- Take suggestions from internal customers seriously
- Provide a clear vision of what RM can do and what needs to be done
- Partner with departments to become part of the solution to business problems

Additionally, Records Managers need to help their CEOs better understand the value and role of information in their organization. This enables the CEO and everyone else to be able to obtain the right information at the right time to manage and direct their organization. Records Managers should work with their CIOs to develop organizational information plans, policies, and strategies. Working together to establish the policies ensures that the information policy and the business policy are aligned, which leads to a greater degree of success.

It is also the obligation of the Records Manager to communicate and enforce the value of information among senior management as well as all end-users. They should contribute to the information decisions regarding Records Management applications, document management systems, tools, techniques, and policies.

Records Managers should also stay well abreast of the current information issues. This does not mean that they must read the technical journals but be aware of the latest technology changes. They should also have an understanding of the breaking technology innovations such as blogs, wikis, RFID, glyphs,

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<sup>2</sup> Kahn, Randolph A., Esq. and Barclay T. Blair. *Information Nation Warrior: Information Management Compliance Boot Camp*, 2005.

and the latest trends in information security and regulations to be ready to assist in positioning their organization to take advantage of these and other tools.

## Best Practices

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In order to ensure that the bridges you build in your organization are structurally sound, the following are some best practices that come from the trenches:

- Train IT on Records Management principles.
- Develop reference sheets that contain key Records Management principles.
- Let IT take care of the equipment and software installation and set up.
- Ensure smooth hand-over from IT to Records Management, especially with regard to testing the application.
- Collaborate with IT on the development of the test plan for the software application.
- Use the system documentation as the basis for the test plan.
- Ensure that IT and Records Managers attend the same vendor-provided training to facilitate exchange of an organization's Records Management program details.
- Obtain clear understanding of server administration requirements.
- Educate the organization on retention practices.
- Add functionality to the Records Management system in a controlled manner.

## Conclusions

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The gap between IT and Records Management does exist. The gap will most likely never completely close, but build at least a footbridge that will allow for a better overall Records Management program.

Now is the time for Records Managers and IT to work together to manage their organization's records as assets. Jointly they must be proactive in their work, rather than complacently waiting for the next regulation or technology to be introduced. They must promote the sharing of information to break down the information silos that exist. Most importantly, they must educate each other and their organization on the technology and the policies to ensure that their organization makes efficient, effective use of its information in a compliant environment.

Records Managers and IT can work together to better meet the organization's business, regulatory, and legal needs, and in so doing, Records Managers and IT will benefit from a better understanding of records and technology.

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