BUSINESS RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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TO DIGITIZE OR NOT TO DIGITIZE

There has been talk of paperless offices for several decades, only to see paper use continue to grow each year. Recent trending indicates that a growing number of documents are "born digital" and remain in that form throughout their useful life. E-mail is just one of many examples of these types of digital records. What is less clear to some records and information managers are whether documents that are already created as paper documents should be converted to digital format.

MORE TO DIGITIZING THAN MEETS THE EYE

When some people think of digitizing, they tend to oversimplify the process. Because the intent of most conversion activities is to eliminate the original medium, (usually paper or film), there are substantial steps related to quality control that must be followed carefully. Otherwise, digital images may not be legible or may not be captured at all. In addition, care must be taken to ensure that any documents can be retrieved. This involves indexing and capturing metadata. The National Archives and Records Administration is engaged in a major conversion of documents contained in the archive so that they can be placed in the online catalog for easier access by researchers and the public. They provide the same cautions in describing the conversion process.

"For the purposes of this document, "digitizing" should be understood not just as the act of scanning an analog document into digital form, but as a series of activities that results in a digital copy being made available to end users via the Internet or other means for a sustained

length of time. The activities include:

- Document identification and selection
- Document preparation (including preservation, access review and screening, locating, pulling, and refiling)
- Basic descriptive and technical metadata collection sufficient to allow retrieval and management of the digital copies and to provide basic contextual information for the user
- Digital conversion
- Quality control of digital copies and metadata
- Providing public access to the material via online delivery of reliable and authentic copies
- Providing online ordering for reproduction services at quality or quantities beyond the capacity of an end user
- Maintenance of digital copies and metadata".

It should also be understood that the conversion costs related to digital information do not stop at the moment the capture process is complete. There are recurring costs related to server power, cooling and maintenance. Media and format refreshment and periodic migration of data related to operating system, software, media type and hardware. Again, NARA's project document illustrates this, in part, by holding out digitizing as an example of conversion in order to preserve information on more fragile or outdated media types.

"We continually reformat at-risk archival materials so that they may continue to be used by the public. A paper document may become so fragile that we need to create a copy for public access; or, a video recording made in an outdated format, such as Betamax, must be transferred to a modern format that can be viewed on current equipment. As supplies of traditional analog reformatting media diminish due to market forces, digitization is becoming a key activity in NARA's preservation reformatting strategy. We are in the process of adopting a digital workflow for preservation reformatting which will yield tremendous access opportunities as well. NARA commits to leveraging the work done to convert these materials by making them available online to users."

JUSTIFYING THE COSTS OF DIGITIZING

The cost of digitizing paper records can be substantial. According to one study by the City of New York records management department, imaging conversion projects for archival paper records took 16 years to break in the most optimistic scenario and in the most pessimistic scenario would not ever break even. This kind of financial investment must, therefore, be carefully considered prior to launching a project that may have very low or nonexistent return on investment to the organization.

What about preservation as a justification? Many manufacturers cannot produce sufficient test data to establish high confidence in any digital preservation medium for permanent records retention. Media types are simply too unstable at this time, or there has not been sufficient time to do thorough testing. In the example used above, the National Archives and Records administration to facilitate both preservation and expanded access. Because they are a national archive, NARA's preservation timelines are either very long or permanent. This puts them in a different category than most organizations that are preserving records for a more limited period. In cases where records may be damaged (by mold, vinegar syndrome in x-rays, etc.) digitizing to facilitate preservation would be a very good strategy.

Equally good would be selective digitization of vital records as a part of a program of protection through redundancy. In this scenario the original records would be retained but a digital copy would also be created and stored at a different location, such as in a media vault maintained by your information management vendor. This places a copy of the material outside the hands of potential saboteurs. A similar strategy has been employed by some archives using a method known as hybrid capture. In this type of approach information was captured as both a digital file for work use and also as a film image for permanent retention. Some of the most important drivers of digital conversion today are to facilitate frequent retrieval of archival information, improve workflow in the organization, or facilitate distributed sharing of documents across the enterprise.

FREQUENT RETRIEVAL

If there is only one copy of a document in archival storage, the document must be transported to you in some way: physically delivered, sent via fax, or scanned when requested (called scan on demand) and e-mailed. Some types of archival information may be retrieved frequently. If this is the case then the costs of physical delivery or labor costs to pull and fax documents will increase to the point where digital conversion costs may be completely justified. The types of documents involved will vary widely by organization; working with your records and information management vendor to identify some of these types of documents may help reduce overall retrieval costs while improving operational efficiency.

SEARCH ENHANCEMENT

As Google™ has clearly demonstrated, the ability to search information quickly can help enhance productivity and improve workflow within an organization.

According to Network World, "Butler Group, a London-based IT research and analysis organization, this week released a report titled 'Enterprise Search and Retrieval,' which concludes that 'ineffective search and discovery strategies are hampering business competitiveness, impairing service delivery and

putting companies at risk.' Specifically, the research firm contends that as much as 10% of a company's salary costs is 'frittered away' as employees scramble to find adequate and accurate information to perform their overall jobs and complete assigned tasks." There are many other studies that have been mentioned online; all of them identify a percentage of employee hours wasted looking for information.

Labor is the most significant cost item for most organizations. If there is an identified problem with time wasted in searches for archival information, overall productivity may improve when information is digitized. A cost comparison of labor savings versus the cost of digitizing could make a digital conversion pay dividends to the organization.

ENTERPRISE USE

One of the most obvious reasons for digitizing information is to make it accessible to multiple persons in different locations at the same time. If there is a need to use archival information across the enterprise then this is clearly a circumstance where the business imperatives of the company far outweigh the costs of conversion.

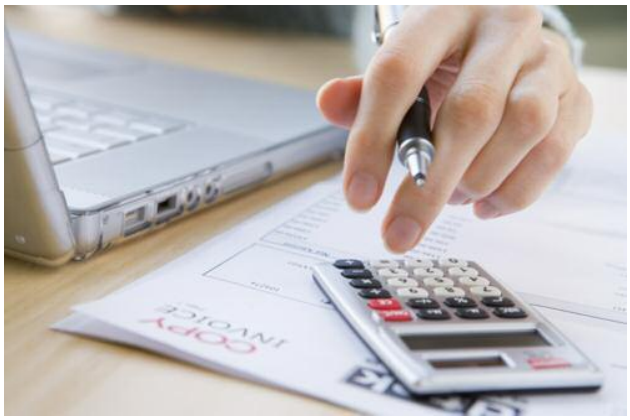
CONCLUSION

Conversion from physical copies of archival records to digital copies is an expensive process that is not likely to return the investment for many years, if ever. However, there are certain business needs that may be more important than the costs of conversion. Being able to distribute information across the enterprise, protection by redundancy, enhanced search capability, frequency of retrieval, and conversion to a digital medium to preserve fragile or obsolete media types are all good reasons to consider an imaging conversion program.

CALCULATING THE ROI FOR CONFIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION SERVICES

Return On Investment (ROI) is a calculation familiar to many involved in management and operations. The traditional ROI calculation is: Investment Gain – Investment Cost divided by Investment Cost. That number is then multiplied by 100. ROI is a much-used term, because it can be modified to suit a great many applications. The website Investopedia www.investopedia.com) offers the following illustration.

"Keep in mind that the calculation for return on investment and, therefore the definition, can be modified to suit the situation -it all depends on what you include as returns and costs. The definition of the term in the broadest sense just attempts to measure the profitability of an investment and, as such, there is no one "right" calculation. For example, a marketer may compare two different products by dividing the gross profit that each product has generated by its respective marketing expenses. A financial analyst, however, may compare the same two products using an entirely different ROI calculation, perhaps by dividing the net income of an investment by the total value of all resources that have been employed to make and sell the product."



This article is focused on ROI for confidential destruction services, but the same ideas could be just as easily applied toward the justification of a records and information management program, and doubtless have been in a great many presentations to management by records and information managers. It is important to note that the calculation is easy to manipulate based on the input; the flexibility of the formula then also becomes its weakness. What is critical is to carefully define the components used to make the calculation and be prepared to defend these decisions. E-how provides the following

sample calculation: ABC Company invests $100,000 in an advertising campaign that generates 150 interested respondents. 50 of these respondents actually buy the product, which generates $500,000 in revenue. The simple calculation would be $500,000 - $100,000 divided by $100,000 multiplied by 100 equals a 400% ROI. www.ehow.com/how_2311286_calculate roi.html

IDENTIFYING CONFIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION COST

This part of the calculation is very straightforward. Your confidential destruction costs should be clearly identified on your invoices. Simply compile them for the period you are calculating and use this number as the total. If you have multiple vendors or various services that can be included in the category of confidential destruction, you will need to assess which costs belong and which do not.

Some small business websites that provide instruction in calculating ROI stress that all component costs need to be included. This would include any internal costs if you have any. One cost that is often missed by many small businesses, particularly those just opening their business, is including accurate labor cost information. Training employees to use destruction consoles may also be a cost consideration. Incentives, monitoring costs, audit costs or other internal compliance costs may also be included.

QUANTIFYING INVESTMENT GAIN FROM CONFIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION

The other part of the equation is more difficult to quantify and will be the focus of the balance of this article. Where a financial return is generated through an investment, the ROI calculation is simple. The key question here is "How do you define your investment gain from confidential destruction services?" This may represent a completely different way of looking at confidential destruction services, who are more accustomed to seeing only costs and not investment gains. In beginning this exercise it may be helpful to think about why you use confidential destruction services. Some organizations may identify compliance drivers as the main reason. For others it may be an effective risk management strategy. Still others may seek to ensure that brand investments and the reputation of the organization is protected. Or, there may be significant security concerns, such as managing confidential information or trade secrets that require the investment in order to prevent espionage or endanger public sector employees or programs.

INVESTMENT GAIN FROM COMPLIANCE

Laws such as HIPAA, the FTC Data Breach Rule, and numerous state laws provide for very severe fines for information breaches. HIPAA fines can reach $1.5 million and FTC fines can reach $5 million. In many state laws and in HIPAA, shredded information that may move beyond the control of the former records owner or the shredding partner is not considered a breach. In this sense, shredding provides insurance against compliance failures that may lead to substantial fines for your organization. In order to prevent identity theft and ensure the prompt notification of individuals whose information may be at risk, various states and the United States Congress are considering further legislative and regulatory action that may include further fines. Allocating these fines over a realistic period in order to determine a benefit is a challenge, but even factoring a 25-year period against the maximum FTC fine of $5 million provides an investment gain of $200,000.

INVESTMENT GAIN FROM RISK MANAGEMENT

In addition to fines, there are very substantial costs associated with unauthorized release of sensitive information. Numerous laws, rules and regulations promulgated by the states and by the federal government require notification of each individual whose sensitive data has been compromised. In addition, credit-monitoring services can be mandated. These costs can be substantial.

The HIPAA Data Breach Rule (Federal Register 42761- 42765 Vol. 74 No. 162, Monday, August 24, 2009) provides some helpful statistics in estimating the costs associated with a data breach. Health and Human Services reports

that in 2008 there were 107 health-related data breaches affecting 2,888,804 individuals. Based on those breaches, HHS estimated the cost of e-mail and first class mail notifications as $1,376,528. The cost of inbound toll free phone service to handle questions from affected individuals, as well as associated labor costs is estimated at $8,237,309. Costs for credit monitoring services were not provided; however, a recent Ponemon Institute Report estimated the average cost of a data breach, which includes a credit monitoring cost component, at $204 per person, per incident.

When we talk about "data breaches" the most common forms deal with failures in electronic records management, particularly the theft of a laptop or some other type of portable storage device. It should be noted that the accidental release of information, regardless of medium, can still be classified as a data breach. Again, the allocation of these costs can be difficult when estimating ROI. It may be helpful to think in terms of possible scenarios and how many individual would be affected if a certain type of information were accidentally discarded and discovered by a criminal. This will vary substantially by organization but just to use an example based on the figures contained above, lets assume that a weekly report is generated of clients who are due to renew a service with you. In the average month there are 1,000 names on the report and lets assume that the report contains some type of individually identifiable sensitive financial or health information. In this scenario the Investment Gain would be $208,000. You may wish to further allocate this amount or, if the risk is present every day or every week, you may wish to leave it as it is.

INVESTMENT GAIN FROM BRAND OR REPUTATION PROTECTION

Organizations spend millions of dollars in advertising, labor, research and other costs to build a respectable brand. For those who are unfamiliar with the term, a brand is one way to refer to the reputation of a product or an organization. Some laws and rules require the media to be notified if as few as 500 individuals are affected by a data breach. Media notification is designed to help spread the word to individuals who may be affected by the breach. It also damages the brand or reputation of the organization. One of the most important questions to ask when trying to identify the investment gain is "How much would it cost to restore the reputation of the organization to its former status?"

This information may be difficult to acquire and/or estimate. Certainly there would be marketing costs involved. A public relations firm would likely be hired or, if already retained, their billable hours would significantly increase in order to assist the organization in managing the negative media attention. Sales representatives may need to divert attention from calling on new accounts to reassuring existing customers. Employees may need to be reassigned to answering the calls of concerned individuals. The sum of these costs can be very substantial and should be allocated over the measurement period.

INVESTMENT GAIN FROM SECURITY OR CONFIDENTIALITY

Some public and private organizations hold confidential information that is so sensitive that its unauthorized release could put lives in danger, compromise sensitive assets, or place the company at a sudden competitive disadvantage against competitors. In these situations where security is already tightly managed, the value of confidential destruction is much higher.

The costs of failure may be too high to quantify – if not, then it would be impossible to complete the calculation using this criterion. If the cost can be quantified, this may require placing a value on human lives, on corporate equity, or on national security. Investments to protect this type of sensitive data are likely already seen as money well spent, and additional enhancements to further protect the information are top of mind.

CONCLUSION

Calculating ROI on anything is something of a subjective process. The quality of the calculation will only be as good as the thoroughness of the

information included in the equation. When assessing confidential destruction services, careful assessment with the costs linked to incidents of the unauthorized release of information comprise the main component of Investment Gain.

FILING METHODOLOGIES

In records management, as in many other disciplines, there are many different types of filing and information organization systems. This article explores some of the most common methods of filing and their uses.

Alphabetical filing systems are very frequently used, particularly among small file volumes or in small business applications. Two common approaches are to file by the name (last name of an individual or the name of a company) or by subject.

Filing by last name might be applied to personnel files. Customer files, or vendor files might be filed by company name. An index or filing guide is optional in this method since the method of retrieval is intuitive, but indices or other finding
aids can be very helpful when subject filing, since employees may need guidance in placing files under the proper category. (Example: would a copier lease be filed under "Copier", "Office Equipment", "Leases", "Legal" or under "Vendor"? These types of distinctions can be clearly articulated in the index which can then be updated as needed.

There are other distinctions when applying alphabetical filing systems. Letter by letter arrangements provide for alphabetizing of files in strict alphabetical order ignoring word breaks or punctuation. A word-by-word arrangement treats each word as a separate filing unit. Alphabetical systems might also arrange files in a dictionary form (which mixes various file types such as names and subjects in a single alphabetical order), or an encyclopedic arrangement where files are first ordered under

broad headings (finance, marketing, legal, etc.) and then under sub-headings (accounts receivable, advertising, contracts, etc.). Chronological filing systems are based upon a key date. A very common example of chronological filing in widespread use is a "tickler file"where items are placed in folders labeled with a date, month, or year, and are recalled when the corresponding folder is opened. Invoices, correspondence,
or deposit files are all samples of items that might be filed chronologically.

Sometimes one filing method can be used within another method. Depositions might be filed under a client matter number, for example, where a numerical system is used first. Within the matter number depositions might be filed using a chronological system.

Where large volumes of records must be maintained, numerical methods are frequently utilized. Law firms frequently file under a client matter number. Legislative tracking systems may file under a session number and bill number. A numerical filing method familiar to most people is the Dewey Decimal System in use at public libraries.

Numerical filing methods are also used when file subjects must remain shielded – in the case of medical records which contain protected health information, or in the handling of

classified documents, for example. Numerical filing systems can also be combined with alphabetical systems such as subject files, which might use the first three alpha characters of the subject and then number corresponding files in sequence. Numerical methods are also popular because each file number is unique.
A specialized type of numerical filing is called "terminal digit filing." This type of filing method is frequently used in hospitals and other large file rooms in order to provide for an equal growth and activity level across the entire work area. ARMA International's "Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms" defines terminal digit filing as, "A system of numeric filing using the last two or three digits right to left of each number as the primary division under which the record is filed." This method is very helpful for very large filing areas, or for records that are frequently purged leaving gaps in other file groupings.

Handy Tip
Here are some basic tips for establishing a terminal digit filing system in your workplace:

• Divide the filing area evenly into 100 sections numbered 00 to 99.

• Assign sequential numerical values to each file

• Read numerical sequences from right to left in groups of two digits

• File in the corresponding numerical section of the filing area.

Natural order filing systems are groups of files that seem to indicate their own organizational grouping. Purchase order files might indicate a numerical order, even though an alphabetical subject filing method may be in use elsewhere. This illustrates one of the most important considerations in designing a filing system. Keep the system as simple as possible. The easier it is to train employees to use the system effectively and accurately, the more effective the system will be. This is especially important when considering the cost of a misfile. 14% of all files are misfiled at some point during the information lifecycle and at a cost of $165 per misfile.

Did You Know?

It is estimated that the cost of maintaining 8 cubic feet of records (one five drawer vertical file cabinet) in an office environment for one year is $2,100. And did you know that an 8-tier open shelf lateral filing cabinet is more than twice as efficient as a 5 drawer vertical filing cabinet? Source: Oregon State University Archives Handbook.

HIPAA Help
Many records managers involved in healthcare or insurance industries now find themselves grappling with the issue of HIPAA. Here are a few helpful tips in dealing with your commercial information management company:

1. There is no such thing as HIPAA Certification. Health and Human Services has issued a letter to PRISM International (the association of commercial information management companies) stating clearly that certification of Business Associates is not a condition of HIPAA.

2. Model Business Associate provisions should either be incorporated into contracts, or added to the contract through addendum. Ask your commercial information management partner for sample language.

3. Covered entities are not liable for the actions of Business Associates, as long as they enforce the model provisions in the contract or addendum.

Top 10 Reasons Companies Outsource:

Strategic
- Improve business focus
- Access to world-class capabilities
- Accelerate reengineering benefits
- Share risks
- Free resources for other purposes

Tactical

- Reduce and control operating costs
- Make capital funds available
- Cash infusion
- Resources not available internally
- Function difficult to manage or out of control

"Up to 15% of a firm's total revenue is tied up in managing documents." ***– The Gartner Group***

Records Classification Systems: Identifying the Records Series

The National Archives and Records Administration offers the following definition of a record series. "A series is the basic unit for organizing and controlling files. It is a group of files or documents kept together (either physically or intellectually) because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction,
take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance, or {in the case of Federal Government records} use (36 CFR 1220.14)."

"Each record series must be scheduled for appropriate disposition. The series concept is a flexible one, and programs should create series by organizing documents in ways that facilitate management of the records throughout their life cycle. For example, each record series in hard copy should be physically separated from all other record series. Electronic records should be managed in ways that link records to their disposition authority, within the context of a recordkeeping system."

Information that is organized by record series assumes the identification of the particular subjects, functions, activities, transactions, etc. as noted in the NARA definition. Records managers might use any number of methods including records surveys, inventories, or interviews with business units to derive the information necessary to assign such grouping.

Once identified, the various records series are then arranged into an index of records series to aid in the retrieval of information. Many central records depositories require departments depositing records to provide extensive information on any new records series. The State of North Dakota, for example, asks the records owner to provide the name of the records series, as well as detailed information about the medium used to store the information. A copy of North Dakota's form SFN-2042 is available online at:
http://www.nd.gov/eforms/Doc/sfn02042.pdf

Once each record series is defined and indices or other finding aids are created, the series is then managed according to the system design methodologies selected by the records manager. Each records series may be assigned a numeric value, an alpha-numeric value, a subject label, etc. An example of an index or finding aid might be structured similar to the following:

INSURANCE/General
INSURANCE/Health
INSURANCE/Liability
INSURANCE/Property
LEGAL/Contracts
LEGAL/General
LEGAL/Litigation
PERSONNEL/Applications
PERSONNEL/Benefits
PERSONNEL/Handbook
PERSONNEL/I-9 Form, etc.

Here are some handy tips for identifying records series in your operation:

• Survey records creators to determine the type of information, its purpose, other similar types of information created, and how the information is typically organized.

• Determine from the records owner how they will be asking for the information and what the information is called. This might include intra-company jargon for certain forms, contracts or transactions.

• Use forms or other data gathering devices, wherever possible, to guide the records creator in providing as much descriptive data as possible about the records.

• Use cross references in the index that refer to intra-company slang terms. Think like a records requester when providing cross references and other finding aids.

By working with the records creator and likely requesters of the information, you can design a system that will save time, money and improve the overall efficiency of your company.

EFFECTIVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Public companies are now under intense scrutiny to verify the authenticity of their financial records and accounting transactions. These companies, and private companies who may have equity partners exerting similar pressures, must turn to records and information managers in order to verify the validity of records, locate key supporting information, and to provide key information to auditors who seek to authenticate prior work. In this environment of high pressure and scrutiny, records management effectiveness and efficiency will be tested through use. The good news is a sudden realization of the value records and information managers add to an organization, through their critical role in restoring investor and stake-holder trust.

In September, 2001, an important milestone was achieved in standardizing records and information management practices around the world. This achievement was initiated by records management standards organizations in Australia, and through the cooperative technical committee of the International Standards Organization, culminated in the creation of an international standard for records management called ISO 15489. A further document expounding on the original Australian Standard 4390, titled "DIRKS – A Strategic Approach to Managing Business Information" has also been created by the National Archives of Australia as a potential resource to records managers around the world.

In the scope statement, ISO 15489 states "This International Standard provides guidance on managing records of originating organizations, public or private for internal and external clients." It adds, "The standardization of records management policies and procedures ensures that appropriate attention and protection is given to all records, and that the evidence and information they contain can be retrieved more efficiently and effectively using standard practices and procedures." This standard, along with the DIRKS Manual and other resources, can provide key substantiation for changes in records management policies when communicated to appropriate management personnel. This article explores a few key elements presented in these documents and other records management resources.

Classification Systems

Because lack of records capture and irretrievability are such critical components of records and information management, special care must be given to systems design that will promote and enhance both areas. The records classification system, or file plan, requires much thought, communication and planning in order to maintain language familiar to employees who are generating the records, and who will be eventual requesters of centrally managed information assets. AS 4390 (The predecessor to

ISO 15489) defines the benefits of a good classification scheme as "1) providing linkages between individual records; 2) ensuring records are named in a consistent manner over time; 3) assisting in the retrieval of all records related to a particular activity; 4) determining appropriate retention periods for records; 5) determining security protection appropriate for sets of records; 6) allocating user permissions for access to or action on particular groups of records; and 7) distributing responsibility for managementof particular sets of records." This list is somewhat expanded in ISO 15489. Clearly the importance of a good classification system cannot be understated, since many critical components of insuring record authenticity and access hinge on its design and implementation. In designing (or redesigning) a classification system one of the first pieces of critical information is an understanding of terminology. Some records systems employ a "Thesaurus" to assist in information retrieval and classification. The development of this document starts with many questions.

Helpful Hints:
1. Talk to employees to gain an understanding of what types of words are used to describe business activities, reports, forms or transactions.

2. Track the way information is currently requested, then compare those requests to current descriptive information captured when records are accessioned.

3. Locate resources that may identify common industry terms in use within your organization and others engaged in the same type of work. (Incorporating those terms, even if they are not widely used within your organization may assist greatly in incorporating records inherited through mergers or acquisitions.)

The Audit Trail
An element that has received recent scrutiny on Wall Street and elsewhere has been the preservation of an audit trail. This term, though commonly associated with accounting, is not necessarily financial in nature. Rather, it may also be used to describe the tracking of document versions, persons who had access to certain information, or when alterations were made to information. In their Guidelines for Ensuring the Long-Term Accessibility and Usability of Records Stored as Digital Images the State Archives and Records Administration of New York provides the following comments regarding audit trails. "Effective audit trails can automatically detect who had access to the system, whether staff followed existing procedures, or whether fraud or unauthorized acts occurred or are suspected. Software is available for keystroke monitoring, time and date stamping, virus detection, and other controls that can be built into the design of systems."While this reference is specifically geared toward digital images, the same general principles apply to paper, microfilm or electronic records.

Helpful Hints:
1. For paper documents make sure to utilize the resources available to you through your offsite commercial information management partner. Bar code tracking systems, work orders and other documentation may assist in providing a record of which employees or departments were requesters of information and when.

2. Where the contents of some items in storage may not be known, your commercial information management partner may provide indexing services to verify the contents of stored items that may have been inherited through merger or other business activity.

3. A visit to your IT department may provide a surprising array of underutilized software features designed to create an audit trail. Example: Microsoft Word™ provides a "version" option under the file menu, as well as title; author; manager; keyword; and comment fields under the "properties" option.

Structuring an effective audit trail involves many elements that require coordination. Some systems design requirements mandate that metadata be captured along with the record itself. In fact, ISO 15489 also calls for this approach when outlining principles of records management programs. "Organizations should

institute and carry out a comprehensive records management program which includes determining what metadata should be created with the record and through records processes and how that metadata will be persistently managed." Software structures may make the automation of this function transparent to the user, but in the case of manual systems a little planning can go a long way.

The Thesaurus

The DIRKS Manual and its related appendices provide a wealth of information regarding the implementation of a systematic records program. The DIRKS method suggests the creation of a business classification scheme, and using this information to drive the creation of a "functions thesaurus". The manual outlines a five-step process for the development of a business classification scheme, as follows:

- "Collect information from documentary sources and interviews;
- Analyze the work performed by the organization;
- Identify and document each business function, activity and transaction;
- Develop a business classification scheme based on a hierarchy of business functions, activities and transactions; and
- Validate the analysis of the organization's business activity with senior management."

Rather than starting from scratch, DIRKS recommends looking for other types of business analysis that may already exist within the organization, such as business process re-engineering; quality certification; workflow analysis or other types of documentation. The DIRKS concept embodies the principle that records management should be integrated into everyday business practices. The development of the business classification scheme provides greater understanding of those business processes and how records management functions can be incorporated.

DIRKS identifies four key "relationships" that are incorporated into a Thesaurus. They are "Equivalence, (preferred and non-preferred terms); Hierarchy (glass is broader than wine glass); Association (establishes non-hierarchical relationships); and Scope notes (provides guidance and clarification). The manual goes on to identify types of abbreviations and the arrangements of those relationships. This information is accessible online at www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/ In creating the thesaurus, concepts such as standard terms, preferred terms, synonyms and finding aids can be incorporated.

Managing Risk

One final point in effective records management should be the effective management of records themselves. Records and active work materials can be in danger if some thought is not given to the safety and security of active files and current work products. A quick remembrance of the World Trade Center and office work being scattered across all five boroughs of New York, or the Dallas newspaper photograph of FBI agents combing vacant lots to pick up papers scattered by a tornado should paint a vivid illustration of the need for some type of conscious policy on active records management.

Some employers utilize a "clean desk policy" to make sure active records and information are removed from desk surfaces after hours. In addition to the benefit of placing information in some type of container that will not be subject to disruption by wind, (in the case of severe weather,) there is also an added benefit of minimizing unintended viewing of potentially sensitive information by cleaning personnel, unauthorized employees, or others who may gain entry to work areas.

In addition, the management of vital records, (including computer back up tapes, microfilm masters, corporate charters, etc.,) is made more secure by redundancy. If copies of these materials exist at a remote location, the effects of a fire or other potentially catastrophic event can be more easily overcome through prudent records management procedures. Since events like arson or data sabotage are often initiated by disgruntled or recently terminated employees, a third party vendor is frequently employed to preserve vital records copies or originals. Here are a few things to consider when managing risks and hazards.

Helpful Hints:

1. Are you storing your records correctly? Are records located in basement areas or under water pipes which may be prone to flooding? Are the records protected against fire? (Your commercial information management partner can help you determine whether some records may be at risk.)

2. Are your records policies and procedures clearly defined? Do those policies and procedures provide for the auditing of the records program to ensure compliance? Are employees trained in proper procedures for submitting records along with the appropriate documentation?

3. Are computer backup tapes, vital paper records or copies of tape or disk libraries located away from the originals?

4. Are restricted records such as personnel files or protected health information shielded from unauthorized viewing and locked when not in use?

5. Is a copy of your disaster recovery plan located away from company facilities, in case the facility should become inaccessible?

ISO 15489 presents a number of key principles of records management programs. Among them are, "Assessing the risks that would be entailed by a failure to have authoritative records of activity; ensuring that records are maintained in a safe and secure environment; and identifying and evaluating opportunities for improving the effectiveness, efficiency or quality of its processes, decisions, and actions that could result from better records creation or management." These, when taken with other critical records management principles, comprise the core mission of the records manager.

Upcoming BRM Events:

National Association for Professional Organizers (NAPO) Shred Event - April 16, 2011 at the Cranberry Library from 10am-2pm. The library is located at 2525 Rochester Road, Suite 400, Cranberry Township, PA 16066. This event is open to the public to drop off paper records to be shredded. The first 2 boxes are free, $6 per box after.

Manchester Historical Society ''Earth Day 2011'' event - April 16, 2011 at our North Side Location, 1018 Western Avenue from 8am-2pm. Open to the public to drop off paper records to be shredded at no cost.

Crafton Ingram Food Bank Shred Event - May 7, 2011 from 9am-2pm at the Giant Eagle in Crafton. Bring a non-perishable item(s) as a donation to the Food Bank and BRM will Shred you materials at no cost. Limit 4 boxes, $6 per box after.

Business Records Management provides information management services to over 3,000 organizations throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia, and parts of New York. BRM's services include Document Management and Delivery Services; Disaster Recovery Planning, Support and Facilities; Software Escrow; Certified Destruction Services; Computer Media Storage and Rotation; Records Management Consulting, and Electronic Vaulting (E-vaulting).

If you would like more information, please contact Business Records Management at 412-321-0600, or via email at brmdetails@businessrecords.com.