



7 Ways to Take Control of Your Records Management Program

Access[®]
Information Protected.

There are a number of steps you can take to become more efficient in dealing with your offsite storage vendor, saving time and money.

Introduction

Taking control of your records management program can be very challenging; you need to know what can be controlled and what is beyond control. This special report addresses many of the challenges records management professionals face when trying to implement a strong records management program. It includes tips, ideas and strategies that enable you to take control of your records management program and put you in a position to stay there.



#7. Low Hanging Fruit

There are challenges of consensus building, proper protocol, dealing with internal politics, and other potential roadblocks that could inhibit your ability to implement even simple change. Despite this, there are some easy gains that are available in your effort to take control of your program.

Dealing with an offsite storage vendor There are a number of steps you can take to become more efficient in dealing with your offsite storage vendor, saving time and money.

If your records program is decentralized, which permits direct interaction between departments and your offsite storage vendor, you can:

- Monitor requests for information and take steps to consolidate deliveries or pickups
- Limit the use of priority services
- Ensure that your vendor is aware of your company's retention policy and provides reports of records that are due for destruction

If you have centralized all records management responsibilities when dealing with your offsite vendor, you can:

- Limit the groups that deal directly with your offsite storage vendor
- Implement policies for scheduling activities
- Consolidate requests to cut costs

Simple steps can also be taken regardless of the type of records program you manage. For example, you can:

- Standardize your indexing protocols through the use of predefined spreadsheets to the more advanced approaches
- Implement software solutions designed to manage physical records.

The right vendor can help you take control by providing you with technology and tools that will make you successful in meeting your goals now and into the future.

#6. Vendor/partner

Another way to gain control of your records management program is to optimize your vendor relationship. Having a vendor that acts like a business partner rather than merely a service provider plays an important role in your success. At the most basic level, your vendor should:

- Work with you to understand your challenges, such as your budget constraints and staffing limitations
- Dedicate resource to help you address the challenges
- Offer quarterly or semi-annual business reviews to improve communication. These reviews should include financial analysis, program performance and strategic planning.

In addition, the right vendor can help you take control by providing you with technology and tools that will make you successful in meeting your goals now and into the future. Your vendor should be leading the way by articulating a vision of the future that aligns with your view. In fact, they should be informing you of trends that might be beyond your current scope. Strategic solutions like policy promotion, SharePoint integration, and a path to paperless should be your vendor's areas of expertise, not topics they will research after you've inquired about them.

While implementing a path to paperless solution certainly increases control, it isn't the final solution. After all, taking control of electronic documents is as hard as or harder than managing paper.

#5. Path to Paperless

Everyone wants to get to the paperless office because it will increase process efficiencies. There are also great benefits from a control perspective, such as tightening your grip around access, enhancing security, and reducing risk. Organizations that fail to view a paperless initiative through the spectrum of records management run the risk of creating more control problems than they are solving.

While embarking on the path to paperless, most organizations will find that only a small portion of their documents are truly active. By targeting these active documents and making them available digitally online, you'll achieve a significant ROI, streamline processes, and increase efficiencies. In addition, since so many documents are inactive, it makes sense to retain them physically in a low cost model and only scan them in on an on-demand basis. After all, there's no reason why you should take on the expense of converting inactive documents to digital until they are needed. This blend of digital and physical is the strategy that will result in the best outcome. It ensures that the business-critical information a company needs is available instantly on the desktop while optimizing the spend associated with document retention.

Organizations that achieve this paperless goal:

- Tighten their control of content
- Greatly improve information accessibility
- Achieve cost savings
- Mitigate risk related to missing documentation

More information about going paperless is available in Access' special report: *Going Paperless Is Easy, Getting Started Is Hard.*

Organizations that utilize a SaaS solution can strategically focus on their core business initiatives rather than integrating and managing an internal infrastructure.

#4. Find it

While implementing a path to paperless solution certainly increases control, it isn't the final solution. After all, taking control of electronic documents is as hard as or harder than managing paper.

The statistics highlight the difficulty:

- Managers spend an average of 4 weeks each year searching for or waiting on misfiled, mislabeled, untracked or lost information.
- Office workers can waste up to two hours a day looking for files – physical or electronic.
- Large organizations lose a document every 12 seconds.
- The average cost of recreating a one-page document is \$180. Sounds like a good reason to consider eliminating paper.
- The thousand largest companies expect to spend \$1.3 billion, or 7.1% of their litigation spending on e-discovery.

The solution is a system of record – one place where you can declare a record and apply policies that help you get rid of all the disparate systems that are managing your paper and electronic information. You also need to maintain the right taxonomy to be able to find your information every time, and find it quickly. In order to accomplish this, more and more companies are turning to Software-as-a-Service solutions to more efficiently manage their records because they provide instant access to business-critical information through the Web. They are cost-efficient and eliminate the large up-front investments in infrastructure in order to get up and running.

Organizations that utilize a SaaS solution can strategically focus on their core business initiatives rather than integrating and managing an internal infrastructure. The end result is the ability to streamline business processes, eliminating risk, driving out costs and increasing efficiencies.



#3. Track your information

To really control your records program, you need to be able to access your critical data elements. By tracking this information in real time, you will be taking great strides in your on-going effort to be prepared for action, such as meeting the next discovery request. The challenge is then mining this data out of the various systems you may be leveraging. You also need to be able to track physical records that are stored in the office. If you don't have a system to manage these records before they go to storage, you're going to be challenged to meet this goal. Without a system in place, this becomes the hardest one of all.

All these things apply to your storage vendor as well. Most vendors have the data you need but they don't often make it easy for you to get your hands on it. They must provide you with the necessary reports and then you need to figure out how to make it actionable. They should be a proactive participant in supplying you with the critical data you need to make efficient and timely decisions related to your records collection.

#2. Retention Policy

Few things will enable you to take control of your records management program like a well-defined and well executed retention policy. Proper policy promotion does a lot for an organization. The benefits include:

- Controlled accessibility through security
- Preservation of declared records
- Improved cost management through managed retention
- Risk mitigation
- Litigation preparedness
- Lifecycle management – from active to semi-active to inactive
- And proper records classification

Creating and implementing a retention policy is a challenging and time consuming process. Once it's established, the next big challenge is having it adhered to throughout your organization. The records management group or compliance department is accountable for communication and execution of the retention policy, but to ensure full compliance it takes teamwork with all the departments in your organization. In addition to in-house resources, it is also critically important to partner with and leverage the resources of your company's offsite Records Management provider.

Actions you can take to ensure your retention policy is adhered to include:

- Assigning to each box and/or file the necessary information needed to execute the retention policy
- Setting up where you and your Records Management company audit the index information associated with the records on a regular basis
- Reviewing records eligible for destruction using a process that checks and rechecks the records to be destroyed to minimize the chance for error
- Destroying eligible records and receiving a certificate of destruction

The records management group or compliance department is accountable for communication and execution of the retention policy, but to ensure full compliance it takes teamwork with all the departments in your organization.

#1. Federation

Records Managers from across all industries have the same complaint – they have systems for electronic documents, physical records, digital documents, email, and more. Some of these systems integrate well with each other, but not at the level that’s needed. There must be a single interface that enables the management of all information, allowing you to create, manage and enforce policy across all record types and formats.

A fully federated solution would be a breakthrough, but it doesn’t exist just yet. While it’s not here today, you need to be working toward the goal of managing everything through a single interface.

Work has begun to achieve full interoperability between ECM systems. There a standard being developed called Content Management Interoperability Services (CMIS) that is designed to work over existing repositories. The idea is that one day you will be able to build and leverage applications against multiple repositories, unlocking content you already have. This initiative is underway, but it will be a while before it’s finalized and even longer to actually start to implement. In the meantime, you should focus on working towards this; both with the process and systems you have internally and with your external providers. The goal is to work with as few vendors as possible and select vendors that have a view into this future.

There must be a single interface that enables the management of all information, allowing you to create, manage and enforce policy across all record types and formats.

The plan is to be strategic, but the allure of immediate cost savings can win the day. When this happens, the long term results are almost always disappointing.

Avoiding Traps

As you move forward with an action plan there are a few traps you should be sure to avoid. Organizations too often can give into old habits and miss opportunities to implement meaningful change. Instead they end up with marginal improvements at best, and negative results in the worst case scenarios.

- Focusing too much on price
 - Regardless of the solution you're looking to implement, whether it is acquiring a new ECM system or changing your hardcopy vendor, be diligent about creating a requirements document and stick to achieving your goals. Plan for the future and do your best to budget accordingly. Then make sure the decision you make aligns with your current and future initiatives. The plan is to be strategic, but the allure of immediate cost savings can win the day. When this happens, the long term results are almost always disappointing.
- The paperless trap
 - You might decide it's time to begin the path to paperless. Make sure you have a plan for success. Simply replacing paper with scanned images isn't a strategy. You need to know where the images will reside, how they are indexed, what retention policy applies to them, and much more.

With the proliferation of information reaching greater and greater proportions, getting your arms around your records program is harder than ever.

- Focusing solely on short term priorities
 - This is a more difficult trap to avoid, particularly in this economy. It's tempting to manage for today and deal with tomorrow when it arrives. You can develop a long term plan that is strategic. It's ok to revise it regularly based on your changing needs, but have a plan and measure your short term decisions against your long term vision. There may be times that you need to make decisions that are not aligned, but just be sure you do so knowingly. At least that way you can manage your path to the future.

With the proliferation of information reaching greater and greater proportions, getting your arms around your records program is harder than ever. You have more tools at your disposal than ever before and yet it's harder and harder to keep up. By applying the strategies in this report, you'll be able to fight the good fight to take and keep control of your records programs.



accesscorp.com

877.345.3546