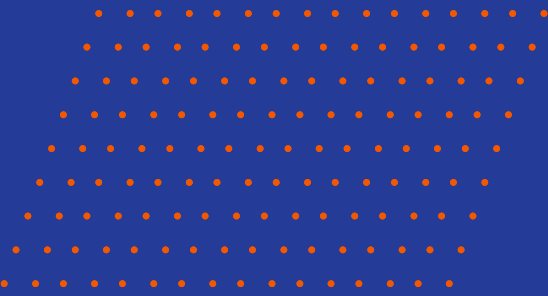




Managing Information Through Transition

Merger & Acquisition Integration Playbook





Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) provide a strategic path for companies to grow, expand their geographical footprint, add new talent and capabilities, and increase their competitive advantage.

However, they come with their own set of challenges, such as the nuances of integrating legacy IT systems, aligning retention schedules, and maintaining business continuity. They involve complex processes with lots of moving parts and potential roadblocks. From due diligence to integration, there are many stages of the M&A process where things can go wrong, causing deals to fail.

Therefore, it's critical to ensure that your corporate information is ready to withstand the rigors of information sharing requirements throughout a deal.

This playbook covers the necessary steps and best practices for information management throughout the various stages of a deal—leading up to, during, and following a merger or acquisition.

Whether your company is positioning for a future acquisition or looking to maximize value from divestiture, the following pages deliver guidance to support your organization's success. Use this playbook to help navigate complex data demands and drive the greatest return from your deal.

The Link Between Records Management and Mergers & Acquisitions

First, let's take a closer look at the link between RIM and M&A. Records and Information Management (RIM) involves identifying, organizing, maintaining, and accessing information assets, both physical and digital, throughout their lifecycle. A strong RIM program ensures that information is accurate, accessible, and secure.

During the M&A process, it's important to have a clear understanding of what information is stored where, how it's stored, and what its potential value is. Having a strong RIM program in place can help make this happen, ensuring that all necessary information is identified, organized, and accessible.

One of the most impactful roles RIM plays in M&A is in maximizing deal value. Buyers and partners need a clear view of your information assets. Knowing exactly where records are stored and what they're worth builds confidence, often leading to better deal terms.

Additionally, when two companies merge, they bring together their respective records and data systems. This can result in a complex and time-consuming integration process, especially if the records and data are not well managed. A strong RIM program streamlines this process by providing a structured approach to managing data across both organizations.



Laying the Groundwork Before a Deal Happens

Information management plays a crucial role in setting the stage for a successful merger or acquisition. Even before due diligence begins, the way your data is organized, stored, and accessed can influence the speed, confidence, and ultimate value of a potential deal. As part of laying the groundwork prior to a deal, focus on building a strong foundation by aligning stakeholders, assessing internal capabilities, ensuring data accuracy, and prioritizing privacy and security—setting the stage for a smooth and successful transaction.

Involve the Right People

Information is one of your organization's most valuable assets. That's why it's critical to bring your data managers or information management consultants into the process early. Their input ensures that your systems are prepared to support deal-making, not slow it down. Leadership must also understand that effective information management isn't just operational, it's a strategic advantage.

Evaluate Your IM Strategy and Your Capacity

Before any negotiations start, review your current information plan. Are your systems capable of sharing information securely? Are they streamlined enough to support integration with another organization? This is the time to identify gaps, improve workflows, and align your information strategy with broader business goals.

Also ask: does the RIM team have the staffing and budget it needs to support a transaction? If not, investing in headcount or external support may be necessary. Deals often hinge on the clarity, accessibility, and accuracy of data. Under-resourcing this function is a gamble few can afford.

Prepare Your Systems and Teams

M&A timelines are often aggressive. Your ability to respond to data requests quickly can make or break momentum. Digitized records make information retrieval seamless, especially in today's hybrid work environments where instant access is expected. Compared to pulling physical files, being able to search and share data in seconds is a competitive advantage.

Well-prepared organizations prioritize:

- Digital file systems that replace manual searches
- Seamless team access, whether remote or on-site
- Defined document retention schedules
- Reliable, centralized document storage

No matter if your systems are still very paper-based, hybrid, or mostly digital, working with an experienced records management partner can help. From retention schedules to security protocols, expert input ensures you're maximizing data value and minimizing risk.

Know Your Information Inventory

Due diligence demands detailed, accurate information. But if your data is scattered, outdated, or disorganized, every request becomes a scramble. Ahead of the deal, know what you have, where it's stored, and how to retrieve it quickly.

For example: *can you search for all current contracts by renewal date or termination status? Is there a system for flagging documents that no longer require retention?*

Well-managed digital repositories allow you to respond to requests in minutes, saving time and making a positive impression on potential partners.

Accuracy First. Then Speed.

Quick access helps—but only if the data is clean. Inaccurate, outdated, or duplicate records erode trust. On the other hand, well-maintained information signals operational maturity and reduces integration headaches.

From inventory and employee files to financial records, the quality of your data influences the quality of your deal.

Prioritize Privacy and Security

The risks of data breaches escalate during M&A activities. With teams sharing sensitive files across organizations, privacy and regulatory compliance must be top-of-mind.

Be proactive. Build protocols that ensure only authorized users can access deal-related data. Understand your compliance obligations, especially if dealing with personal, financial, or health-related information, and bake them into your processes early.

Governance Isn't Optional

Strong governance practices embedded into daily operations are your best defense against risk, ensuring that data is accurate, secure, and audit ready. Your information governance policies should define:

- Record-keeping responsibilities
- Retention schedules aligned with legal/regulatory mandates
- Access controls and data privacy safeguards

Having these in place before deal activity begins keeps everything on track and significantly reduces downstream surprises.

In industries with strict regulatory and security standards (for example, healthcare and financial services), a violation or failed audit could cost the organization thousands in fines or legal fees. Non-compliance also has the potential to bring business operations to a halt or freeze a transaction. Ensuring your records are compliant starts with a simple gap analysis of your current plan and procedures, and it is best to conduct that before the deal happens.

Pre-Deal Negotiation and Due Diligence

Before a deal is finalized, the negotiation and due diligence stages are critical. These phases often involve tight timelines, unexpected requests, and the need for rapid access to accurate information. A structured approach to organizing and sharing information can make or break the deal's momentum.

This is the time to lean on your data manager or information management consultant to coordinate efforts and ensure all assets are ready for review and validation.

Expect Uncertainty and Prepare for It

Deal timing is rarely linear. Last-minute data requests and accelerated timelines are common. That's why strong coordination with IT is essential. Work collaboratively to:

- Map out potential bottlenecks ahead of time
- Identify dependencies tied to system access or data transfers
- Plan for contingencies that could disrupt progress

With proactive alignment, you can sidestep delays and keep critical information flowing when it's needed most.

Prioritize Data Integrity

When the time comes to merge data sets, duplicates, inconsistent formats, or unknown file ownership can lead to confusion and risk. Prepare ahead of time by:

- Identifying master records vs. redundant copies
- Using naming conventions and metadata to clarify ownership and version history
- Flagging potentially non-compliant records for review

As regulatory requirements evolve, newly acquired data might introduce compliance gaps. Be ready with protocols to isolate, assess, and resolve these issues early in the process.



Begin with a Strong Kick-Off

As early as possible in the deal process, hold a cross-functional kick-off meeting. This ensures stakeholders are aligned on what needs to be prepared, how it will be shared, and who is responsible.

Bring together:

- Representatives from legal, HR, IT, compliance, and records management
- Subject matter experts who understand what files exist and what's important
- Data owners who can validate content and format requirements

Sample Kick-Off Agenda:

- What are the specifics and structure of the potential deal?
- What type and volume of information will be exchanged?
- What formats are involved (physical, digital, originals, copies)?
- Are there redundant or duplicate records to consider?
- Is there PII or sensitive data requiring encryption or redaction?
- Where is the information currently located?
- How will access be managed and files transferred?

This early planning enables the team to anticipate challenges and prepare data accordingly, minimizing delays during diligence.

Build a Core Deal Team

Form a focused working group with key contacts from both organizations. This team will handle documentation, manage deliverables, and streamline communication. This team should take ownership of:

- Creating a shared, centralized workspace for collaboration
- Involving legal and IT early to assess technical, regulatory, or privacy risks
- Launching a project management dashboard to track milestones and tasks
- Developing a working index of all documents being shared and updating it as due diligence progresses

Building the right transition team is critical to a seamless transfer of information during a merger or acquisition. Involving key players and strong performers will set the deal up for success and ensure an engaged team.

Set Up a Secure Virtual Data Room (VDR)

A virtual data room is essential during the negotiation stage. It serves as a secure repository for the confidential and proprietary information required for due diligence. Benefits of having a VDR include:

- Controls access by stakeholder role and responsibility
- Prevents version control issues and data duplication
- Ensures proper handling of sensitive and compliance-regulated data

If you're the acquiring party, define early what information you need access to, and who from your team should be granted entry. Setting this up early reduces the risk of miscommunication or data mishandling.

Prepare for Information Sharing

Before anything is shared, perform a thorough assessment of what will be exchanged and how it aligns with compliance standards. It’s important to note that early sampling may not reflect the overall condition of the files. Consider bringing in an external partner to audit, organize, and clean up content before the due diligence review.

EVALUATE	ASK
- Legislative and industry-specific recordkeeping obligations - Volume, format, location, and condition of the information - Existing records management policies and system compatibility - Human, technical, and procedural assets involved in the exchange	- Is all corporate data accounted for—across departments, work-in-progress, and employee “desk files”? - Are you considering all formats (physical, digital, offsite, cloud)? - Are active, semi-active, and archived records included?

Adopt a Proven Process for Best Results

You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Follow the lead of others who have navigated and optimized the intricacies of managing information through mergers and acquisitions. Adopt standard frameworks and proven processes to make your work faster and more reliable.

As the deal progresses, track issues and lessons learned, document process workflows and file organization methods, and consider post-diligence feedback loops or process reviews.

These insights will not only help complete the current deal but will also make future transactions smoother and more efficient.

Pre-Close Planning for Information Integration

With terms agreed and the deal structure in place—specifically, the time before the final purchase and sale agreement (PSA) is signed—this stage is about laying the groundwork for integration. This is where preparation meets action. It's time to lead the charge on integrating information efficiently, securely, and strategically.

Whether you're onboarding data from a newly acquired company or preparing your own assets for transfer, it's essential to recognize information as a critical business asset. At this stage, missteps can lead to costly delays or compliance risks. Treat information integration with the same level of precision and care as financial or legal operations.

Now that access and permissions are in place, the real work begins. This phase is about harmonizing systems, processes, and people. That starts with taking a hard look at the existing information infrastructure.

Audit: Understand the Current State

To ensure a smooth handoff or integration, you'll need to assess the maturity and compatibility of the other organization's information management program. Questions to consider:

- Is there a formal governance program in place?
- What kinds of employee or client databases will be integrated?
- Are there files in transition or held with external providers? What are the terms of those arrangements?
- What technology tools are in use and are they compatible with your systems?
- How is metadata and file indexing managed? How current and consistent is the database?
- Who will lead the onboarding, and what training will be required to get employees and clients up to speed?



Inventory: Evaluate the File Collection

Once the current state is understood, it's time to take stock of the files themselves. Beyond knowing what exists, focus on what should be kept, cleaned, or discarded. **Consider these questions:**

- Do the files meet compliance and operational standards?
- Are there retention schedules or destruction logs in place?
- Can redundant or outdated files be eliminated to streamline integration?
- Does the information architecture align with your classification needs?
- Are there privacy risks or governance issues to resolve before transfer?
- Can physical documents be digitized? If so, how will they be structured to fit your system?
- Are there any critical gaps that must be filled before integration?

Special Considerations: HR and Confidential Data

Among all records, human resources files often pose the most complexity. These documents are deeply sensitive, tightly regulated, and can be subject to various employment laws, depending on the jurisdictions involved. Work closely with HR, legal, and compliance teams to ensure that employee data is transferred, stored, and accessed in full alignment with privacy legislation and internal policy.

Best Practices for Information Integration

The devil is in the details. Effective information integration depends on diligence and foresight, especially with the “small stuff.” These best practices can make a significant difference in the outcome of your M&A integration:

- **Establish a trackable chain of custody.** Always know where files are, who handled them, and how they were transferred.
- **Implement a document index and tracking process.** This provides structure and helps maintain version control and accessibility throughout the process.
- **Quantify the scope of information.** Understand the volume and format. (e.g., number of boxes, sizes of electronic files, and media types involved.)
- **Clarify what will be transferred, retained, or destroyed.** Set these parameters early and communicate them clearly.
- **Leverage subject matter experts.** Key contacts can help identify what's essential and what can be excluded.
- **Work with an experienced information management partner.** A trusted external expert can streamline workflows, reduce errors, and help you avoid costly missteps.
- **Use a phased approach.** Integration doesn't have to be done all at once. Breaking the process into manageable phases helps reduce complexity and align expectations.

Success Spotlight

Phased Digitization Supports Growth for Quick Service Restaurant Brand

A major restaurant chain, known for frequent acquisitions, faced challenges managing employee records across hundreds of locations. Paper-driven HR files made it difficult to maintain visibility and compliance, especially during M&A activity.

With a limited budget and a freeze on large capital projects, the company needed a flexible, cost-conscious digitization strategy. Partnering with Access, they adopted a phased scanning plan that allowed them to digitize employee records over time—starting with newly acquired files and eventually integrating over 2,000 U.S. and Canadian employee records into a centralized document management system.

This approach delivered immediate improvements in file accessibility, risk reduction, and compliance, while remaining within budget. Their success proved that digitization doesn't have to be all or nothing. A phased approach can be both practical and have a high impact.



Post-PSA Information Transfer

Once the purchase and sale agreement (PSA) is signed, the acquisition becomes official. It marks the start of the final phase of the deal. All stakeholders can now be formally briefed on the transaction details, and the process of preparing, inventorying, and transferring data moves into full execution.

This is a complex yet critical phase that can either enable a smooth transition or introduce costly setbacks. While this stage is often one of the most demanding for information management teams, thorough preparation during the pre-deal phase can significantly reduce risk, cost overruns, and delays.

At this point, the priority is executing seamless transfer and integration of data assets. Migrating records from one organization to another requires precision, coordination, and the right resources. Adequate budget, time, and personnel must be allocated to ensure the process is executed within operational and contractual constraints.

Consider these aspects when preparing for data migration:

- **Records Storage**

Are there physical records to be migrated? How will they be combined with existing collections? Where and how will they be stored—onsite, offsite, or digitized?

- **Document Classification & Retention**

What classification system is currently in use? Can metadata or category codes be mapped or converted to align with the acquiring company's structure and retention schedules?

- **File Identification & Naming Conventions**

Do electronic and physical records meet your compliance and governance standards? Will renaming, reformatting, or metadata enrichment be necessary to meet policy?

- **Records Management Systems Integration**

What software platforms are in use? How will data from the acquired organization be imported into your primary system? Are there compatibility issues requiring format conversions, updated protocols, or additional backups?

Three Keys to a Smoother Data Integration

Once the data migration process is underway, the focus shifts to ensuring integrity, accessibility, and alignment within the receiving organization. Data is among the most valuable assets changing hands, so it must be secure, structured, and validated before it becomes part of the operating environment.

Maintaining a single source of truth is critical. As new records are integrated, ensure they map correctly to your existing systems, classifications, and governance policies. This prevents discrepancies that could undermine future decision-making, reporting accuracy, or compliance.

Collaboration between organizations remains vital. The groundwork laid during the pre-deal stage, such as identifying key contacts and creating communication channels, now pays off. Close coordination with the selling or acquiring party, and alignment between legal, IT, and information management teams, helps keep the process controlled and predictable.

Finally, timing plays a pivotal role. Meeting deadlines tied to service-level agreements (SLAs) is not optional. Delays in data delivery can disrupt operations or trigger contractual penalties. Ensure the migration timeline is realistic and that resource capacity matches the demands of the transition.

Best Practices for Data Migration

- **Review the PSA early**
Review the purchase and sale agreement (PSA) details in advance to ensure data sharing plans reflect legal and operational requirements from the start.
- **Budget for the full scope**
Secure adequate funding to support the migration of both digital and physical records, which may include scanning, software integrations, and third-party services.
- **Prioritize and consolidate inventories**
Organize and align incoming and existing file inventories to streamline the review process and avoid duplication.
- **Align records with compliance standards**
As files are received, adjust formats, classifications, and retention policies to meet your organization's legal, privacy, and regulatory requirements.
- **Track file movement**
Establish a check-out/check-in system to maintain chain of custody and ensure the integrity of all migrated records.
- **Enable smart access and classification**
Train staff on how to retrieve, tag, and classify information correctly. Enhance digital files with metadata to support searchability, minimize redundancy, and reduce the risk of misinformation.



Considerations Beyond the PSA

The PSA typically outlines the broader legal and financial parameters of the deal—but it rarely covers the specifics of data migration. That’s why it’s critical at this stage to revisit the information strategy and confirm the scope and structure of what’s being transferred. Key considerations include:

- **Is the inventory complete?**
Confirm that a full list of records exists and identify any missing elements or gaps that need resolution.
- **What’s in the files?**
Understand the actual contents of each collection. Knowing the value and relevance of specific data helps prioritize processing.
- **What is most critical?**
Identify which records are essential for operations, compliance, or client service post-close.
- **Will any data remain with the seller?**
Clarify which files will transfer and which will be retained by the selling organization.
- **Who pays for the transfer?**
Confirm financial responsibility for logistics, digitization, and other transitional services.
- **What is the delivery timeline?**
Reassess deadlines and ensure they align with service agreements and operational needs.
- **Are copies or originals required?**
Decide which files must be duplicated and who retains the original version, especially for legal or compliance purposes.

Sustaining Momentum After the Deal Closes

Once the deal is complete and the data migration is underway or finalized, the focus shifts to maintaining control, minimizing disruption, and delivering on the strategic goals of the acquisition. Oversight and accountability in the post-deal stage are key to ensuring the success of the integration.

To avoid missed milestones or budget overruns, organizations should actively track progress and address gaps early. Keep the integration on course by:

- Conducting regular audits through system reports, KPIs, and feedback from frontline users
- Identifying and closing any records management gaps left during the transition
- Confirming staff are trained and fully operational in new systems and processes
- Ensuring new standards, such as updated naming conventions or retention policies, are consistently followed
- Monitoring risks related to privacy, compliance, and data access across all environments

Communication plays a critical role in this phase. Ongoing collaboration between IT, compliance, operations, and information management teams helps align expectations and support system adoption.

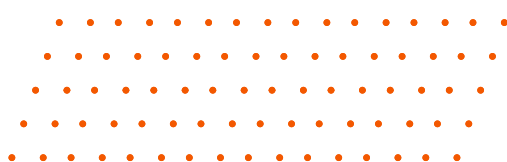
The integration team should remain actively engaged, with sufficient resources and visibility to make adjustments and optimize performance as the organization moves forward.

Success Spotlight

M&A Activity Sparks Digital Shift for Energy Company

Initially resistant to digitization, a small energy company reconsidered its stance as it undertook a series of digitally driven acquisitions. Long reliant on paper, the company recognized that continued growth through M&A demanded faster, more collaborative, and compliant information access.

The deals became a catalyst for change. With support from Access' scanning, document management, and retention solutions, the company transitioned to a digital model. Today, they can deliver all files digitally across the organization—enabling increased collaboration, improved compliance, secure and authorized document access, and faster completion of future M&A deals.



Final Considerations for Managing Information Through Transition

Data is one of the most valuable assets exchanged in a merger or acquisition, but successfully transferring and integrating that data often comes with hurdles. Incompatible systems, outdated paper records, inconsistent retention practices, and siloed processes can all introduce risk and delay. Add tight timelines and budget constraints, and it becomes clear why information management and IT teams must be involved early and often.

The strategies outlined in this guide are designed to help you navigate these complexities and set your team up for a smoother transition. When your records are well-organized, digitized, and governed by clear policies, you gain more than operational efficiency—you unlock the ability to move quickly, maintain compliance, and make informed decisions long after the deal closes.

Digitization is no longer optional. It's a competitive advantage that improves transparency, accelerates access to critical information, and strengthens your ability to respond to regulatory, legal, and client demands throughout the M&A process.

At Access, we specialize in helping organizations overcome information management challenges at every stage of the deal lifecycle. Whether you're dealing with paper archives, inconsistent file structures, or the need for rapid digital transformation, we bring the tools, expertise, and support to help you manage the transition with confidence.

We're here to guide you—[contact us](#) to discuss the right approach to digitization and data integration for your unique M&A needs.



About Access

Access is the largest privately held records and information management services provider worldwide, with operations across the United States, Canada, Central and South America. Access provides transformative services, expertise, and technologies to make organizations more efficient and more compliant. Access helps companies manage and activate their critical business information through offsite storage and information governance services, scanning and digital transformation solutions, document management software, and secure destruction services. Access has been named twelve times to the Inc. 5000, the ranking of fastest-growing private companies in the U.S.

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