

Organizations already struggling with information chaos can expect the challenge of managing it to sky rocket over the next decade as the volume of information created each year increases exponentially.

According to the recent survey “The Digital Universe Decade – Are You Ready?” by IDC, the approximately 800 exabytes – that’s 800 billion gigabytes – of information created in 2009 will grow to 35 trillion gigabytes in 2020. That’s nearly 44 times more than the 24 DVDs worth of information that was created in 2009 for every man, woman, and child on the planet.

That information is scientific data, medical records, and e-mail; it’s structured and unstructured; and it’s rich media in the form of audio and video. And increasingly, it’s being stored “in the cloud,” which raises unique challenges in the areas of privacy, security, and long-term access to information.

Innovation, Technology Stimulate Growth

This exponential growth of information is a result of innovation and technology that has been advancing at a rapid rate. The last 20 years have brought the birth of the World Wide Web, Internet browsers, XML, DVDs, and inexpensive transistor-based storage (flash or USB drives).

E-mail surpassed postal mail in total volume and then

TAKING THE INFORMAT

became the first Web 2.0 application with the introduction of Hotmail. Blogs, wikis, social networks, and the entire Web 2.0 phenomenon have taken the computing world – and, by extension, the world of information management – by storm.

Enter the records manager. Historically, many records managers have not found themselves at the crest of the technology development wave. Even today, they are often the last to know about new systems.



LEAD IN THE ION RACE

Jesse Wilkins, CRM

And, those records managers who are aware that new systems are coming online may not have the technological skills – or even the vocabulary required – to understand the recordkeeping implications of those new systems well enough to raise meaningful concerns. This often results in systems being implemented that either cannot appropriately manage the information they create and store or require significant customized solutions to do so.

Simply put, this has to change. While records are still

being created in physical formats, it is undeniable that the vast majority of records are “born-digital,” and the majority of those are stored, maintained, accessed, and ultimately retained or disposed of as digital information objects. Records managers must actively develop their “technology chops” to continue to be relevant.

RIM Technologists Needed

Today’s records and information management (RIM) professionals must become more like technologists, and to do so, they must have a constant thirst for learning and a curiosity for how things work. These characteristics differentiate a professional from just another duffer. The Institute of Certified Records Managers recognizes this to some extent by requiring continuing education for Certified Records Managers to maintain their certification.

A true professional, though, will attend classes and read relevant media not because they have to, but because they just want to know how stuff works. Nobody is so skilled and so knowledgeable that he or she cannot learn more. The Daniels College of Business (University of Denver) runs ads at Denver International Airport that assert, “The top ten jobs of 2015 don’t exist today.” Twitter didn’t exist five years ago, either. It’s the rapid emergence and widespread adoption of technology like Twitter that will be creating many of those new jobs.



Scanning, Planning Required

It's important for RIM professionals to scan the environment continuously. Organizations do this all the time to some degree – nobody wants to be surprised by the next big thing or by issues that, in hindsight, were obvious.

Some organizations have a functional group that scans the technology environment to determine where to invest in upgrades and where to hold off. RIM professionals need to engage in a similar exercise periodically to ensure they are abreast of what is having an impact on their program today and what is likely to affect it tomorrow. This requires periodically looking outside the cubicle, office, and organization to see what's coming down the pike.

Next, prepare a professional development plan that takes these issues into account. Some organizations are enlightened enough that they assist in developing such plans. But, in most cases, individuals must take responsibility for their own professional development.

You know your strengths and weaknesses. You know what you know and what you don't know. And you should know that if you don't take responsibility for your own personal and professional growth, you can't be surprised when the world passes you by.

Following are useful tools for outlining a plan to help you stay on top of technology developments with a relatively small investment of time and money.

Publications

The first source of information is publications. These are available from a wide variety of sources, including those listed below, and are often free, included as part of a professional membership, or priced relatively low.

ARMA International. As the oldest and largest professional association for RIM professionals, ARMA International strives to provide access to publications, standards, and other resources that will enhance the skills and expertise of its members and other RIM professionals. The association publishes *Information Management* magazine, standards, technical reports, guidelines, and various other books it commissions on a broad range of topics. A guideline on website records management was recently published, and a guideline for outsourcing records storage “in the cloud” is being developed. ARMA International also makes relevant resources from other resources available through its bookstore.

Like associations and groups. A number of other professional and trade associations focus on one or more aspects of information management, including North America-based AIIM, The Association for Work Process Improvement, PRISM, and the Business Forms Management Association. Related organizations outside North America, such as the Records Management Society

(Great Britain), the DLM Forum, and the Records Management Association of Australasia, also provide access to magazines, journals, technical publications, standards, and guidelines.

Government. Often guidance can be found through other sources, such as government regulators or state agencies. In 2009 the federal CIO Council published “Guidelines for Secure Use of Social Media by Federal Departments and Agencies.” The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority issued Regulatory Notice 10-06 in January 2010, “Social Media Web Sites: Guidance on Blogs and Social Networking Web Sites.” And the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) recently published “Frequently Asked Questions about Managing Federal Records in Cloud Computing Environments.”

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Trade and business publishers. Finally, there are a number of free or low-cost trade and business publications that provide varying depths of coverage on technical issues. These include, but are certainly not limited to: *Computerworld*, *InformationWeek*, *InfoWorld*, *Government Technology*, *Federal Computing Weekly*, *ECM Connection*, *Washington Technology*, *eWeek*, *CIO*, *KMWorld*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Business Journal*, and *Forbes*.

Because these publications are often written with the business manager in mind, they tend to be less technical and jargon-laden than some of the other resources listed. An added benefit: Your manager is already reading them. It's helpful to keep on top of what your manager is thinking and have an idea of what it could mean to your organization.

Networking

Published information is important, but connecting with industry experts can be more valuable. It may re-

quire a bit more of a time commitment to attend a meeting, listen to a podcast, or watch a video. These experts and thought leaders are typically folks who have been in the trenches and have seen what works and what doesn't.

Conferences and web seminars. Perhaps the single best resource in this area is the ARMA International's Annual Conference & Expo, which offers approximately 80 pre-conference and conference sessions led by thought leaders across a variety of industries. Many of the topics focus on real-world application of technology and strategies for managing it effectively. Similarly, the web seminars are generally led by individuals who are experts on the topic and willing to share their triumphs and battle scars with you.

The annual Managing Electronic Records Conference, sponsored by Cohasset Associates, is highly regarded in its coverage of electronic records issues. The AIIM conference frequently features sessions on managing e-mail, web content, and social media. NARA and the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators have annual conferences, as well.

Chapter meetings. Most major metropolitan areas have at least one association chapter near them. ARMA International has more than 100 chapters in North America alone. Chapter meetings are smaller and less expensive to attend than conferences but still provide high-quality, relevant educational content. You need not be a member to attend in most cases, although the cost may be higher for non-members.

Social media. This includes everything from thought leaders' blogs to Twitter to the records management (RECMGMT-L) e-mail listserv. RECMGMT-L is an invaluable resource. It is not an ARMA International forum or affiliated with any single group or association, but its more than 1,800 members include records managers in many sectors and environments who have done what you're about to do. They have had the discussions that you need to have with your management, information technology, legal, and others. And, most importantly, they are willing to share, both publicly on the listserv and privately when warranted.

How do you find these links to blogs and tweets? In some cases, it's as close as a thought leader's business card, e-mail signature block, or the end of their presentation slides, where they list links to their blog and Twitter account. And some of your peers are either thought leaders in their own right or follow some of them and can point you in that direction.

You can also use the tools as tools. For example, blogs will have links to other blogs of interest. Similarly, you can look at who someone follows on Twitter. Check out who ARMA International follows at www.twitter.com/

Professional Pointers

This sample plan describes the author's approach to keeping abreast of technology developments and includes many ideas that require little time or money.

Every morning

- Check the blogs subscribed to for updated posts.
- Check Twitter, particularly any mentions or direct messages.
- Skim e-mail for relevant messages from records-related listservs (e.g., RECMGMT-L, ERECS-L, RMAA_LIST, RECORDS-MANAGEMENT-UK).

Every week

- Read any blog posts skipped earlier in the week that seem particularly important.
- Read "Records and Archives in the News," which is frequently updated with links to numerous articles about information-related topics. (Subscribe to the RAINbyte group at RAINbyte-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or follow on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/RAINbyte>).
- Read any vendor/analyst white papers received over the course of the week.

Every month

- Read ARMA International's *Information Management* magazine.
- Read the free trade magazines mentioned in the article.
- Try to attend the ARMA International and AIIM chapter meetings in your area.

By exception

- Attend relevant web seminars from ARMA International, AIIM, vendors, and analysts.
- Attend ARMA International, MER, and/or AIIM conferences and regional meetings.
- Engage in lengthy conversations on RECMGMT-L.

Those individuals who wonder where they will find the time to use this approach may discover that it requires less time than most people devote to watching TV, so giving up a few daily TV shows may be all that is needed.

arma_int and its other social media accounts at www.arma.org/social_media.cfm.

Informal encounters. There are also less formal opportunities to interact, such as through conversations that take place in the hallways and during the lunch breaks at meetings or conferences. Most speakers are happy to discuss their topic or other issues at lunch and on breaks. Some meetings and events are less structured, allowing for more one-on-one interaction. There are social events at conferences and through some chapters where lots of good information is exchanged.

Vendors

Vendors frequently get a bad rap from practitioners because some vendor representatives have their sales hat on all the time and see every issue through the prism of a particular technology or solution. In some cases, the vendor rep just doesn't get it.

But vendor reps are often practitioners in their own right – designing, implementing, and supporting content creation and content management solutions. They are the best resource if you want to know the gory details about how SharePoint works, how to federate searches across several repositories, or whether a given solution meets a given standard. They offer a wealth of information that can be valuable to RIM practitioners.

Vendors include the following:

- Hardware and software vendors, resellers, and integrators
- Analyst and research firms
- Consulting firms
- Trainers and training firms

Many vendors provide white papers on a particular process or technology issue, which may be written by the vendor or an analyst or consultant the vendor commissioned. The vendor website often includes case studies describing how a client used its technology to address a particular need.

Vendors often provide references, either as lists and logo slides in presentations, or by doing joint presentations with reference accounts at conferences. These can be quite powerful; if the client is satisfied enough to talk publicly about the project and the vendor's solution, that's a pretty good indicator of its value.

Analyst firms tend to spend more time conducting research and writing white papers. In some cases, the research is quite expensive, but your organization might already have a subscription to Gartner, Forrester, or another analyst group. Sometimes the research is free or sponsored by a vendor who, in turn, makes it available for free. The IDC survey referenced earlier is an example of this type of offering.

It is important to consider the source and remember

the context of vendor information. A vendor that asserts that a given solution is far superior to its peers (or asserts that its solution is unique and has no peers) may be right – or not. Regardless, it is important to evaluate the content and determine its worth the same way you'd evaluate speakers, blog posts, or messages on the listserv.

Crossing the Finish Line Reaps Rewards

Keeping abreast of changing technology and its potential impact on business does require some time, roughly four to five hours a week, to keep current on what's going on in the field. That estimate is larger if you intend to cast a wide net across many resources. One of the great things about many of these resources is that your peers and thought leaders are doing some of the filtering for you. For instance, if it's published in a maga-

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zine or it's presented as a conference session, the odds are it will have some value to you.

More importantly, as a RIM professional in 2010, you cannot sit idly by while someone else does your organization's technology selection and implementation in a vacuum. To do so is a dereliction of your professional responsibilities. You don't have to be a technology expert, know everything about everything, or be able to spout acronyms and buzzwords. But, you do need to know how key technologies work, especially as they relate to content creation or management. You also need to know what's on the horizon because the horizon is pretty short these days. Develop your technology skills and help lead your organization to more effective management of technology, rather than let technology manage your organization. **END**

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