

# SOUND DESIGN + IMPLEMENTATION = BIG PAYOFF

## BUILDING RIM PROGRAM EXCELLENCE

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**Engaging IT, legal, and other business unit stakeholders to create a cross-functional advisory, collaboration, and liaison infrastructure will ensure records and information management program buy-in, commitment, and support.**

**T**he key to fully implemented records and information management (RIM) principles and practices in organizations is excellence in vision and comprehensiveness in RIM program scope. Many RIM program activities, such as creating quality records retention schedules, designing corporate-wide file plans, building software system taxonomies, and planning for document storage and retrieval, require professional insight and attentiveness.

For a RIM program to be fully engaged with extensive executive-level support and committed employee participation, RIM professionals must reach out to their customers and build strong cooperative relationships. This often requires the RIM professional to take the initiative in what eventually will be a mutually rewarding business relationship.

### **Engaging Other Stakeholders**

RIM program business unit (BU) customers have a vested personal interest in getting rid of useless informa-

tion and ensuring that their important business records will be accessible, regardless of their format. Most BUs are continually coping with the volumes of data that engulf their offices and computers, and they often cannot find information relevant to daily tasks.

They are well aware they could benefit from better management of their information. However, they are extremely protective of their resources and need to have a sense that any business relationships will result in a better ability to meet their work objectives.

All too often, though, RIM program initiatives – to create retention schedules or revise policies, for example – are placed on BUs with little or no direct budget allocation to address the issues that arise. Without funding to work with RIM program personnel, these initiatives can easily be perceived as additional burdens with little return on investment (ROI) for the BU department managers or their personnel.

Therefore, ROI and benefits for BUs must be clearly articulated and presented. It is not sufficient to simply point out the general rewards, such as improved efficiencies or

faster document access. RIM professionals must provide specific, locally generated operational metrics that will be easily understood and appreciated.

As an example, the benefits of having records not needed for immediate access stored securely in a central location are easily demonstrated and calculated. These would include the:

- Lower cost of centralized storage than in-office retention
- Decreased potential for BUs that use an electronic records repository – rather than retain records within their immediate control – to be involved in producing electronic records for e-discovery or testifying in court regarding information or systems

### ***Benefits to IT***

There are also benefits for an information technology (IT) organization and its personnel. IT personnel have numerous challenges regarding data management and protection. In addition, the data in IT systems must be retained and preserved for future access. These interests directly overlap those of RIM professionals and programs. In many cases, such records issues cannot be addressed without detailed collaboration between these groups.

This is especially true for e-discovery, where records requests must often be translated from subject- or people-related inquiries into electronic records with data descriptions and system locations. An electronic records inventory

can be of tremendous assistance to IT personnel in promoting an understanding of the content of data systems. The retention rules that dictate how long items must be retained in IT systems often come from RIM-related policies, but they require IT personnel intervention for implementation.

### ***Benefits to Legal***

Legal counsel in organizations is typically the first to receive litigation-related requests for information. However, legal staff rarely has an all-encompassing knowledge of the content of the paper filing systems or computer systems data used by personnel. They need assistance from IT with respect to the kinds of data that may be subject to records holds and assistance from RIM program personnel regarding the usual retention and location of certain types of records.

Often, legal counsel will directly approach BU personnel and IT for information if a RIM program is perceived as primarily managing inactive data or legacy records. However, BU personnel rarely have a global view of record-keeping systems and repositories, and IT personnel invariably are clueless about paper-based filing systems. When RIM program personnel are knowledgeable about the technologies used as electronic records repositories, the probable locations of paper-based records, and the expected retention periods for all records, they can make a great case

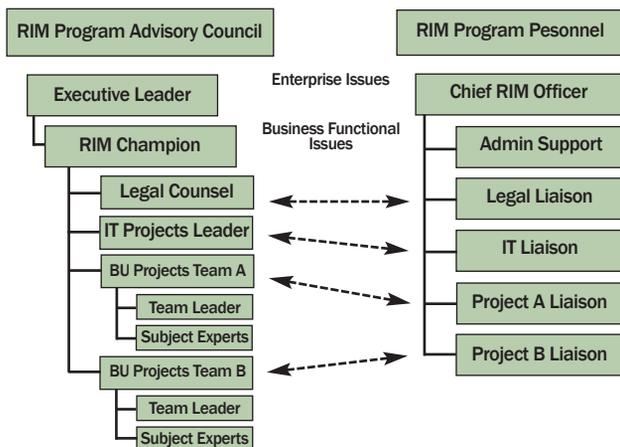


for being an asset to legal counsel’s need to place holds on records of all kinds.

**Other Stakeholders**

Additional stakeholders in RIM program activities that can be a part of teams with common information management interests are disaster protection, business continuity, information security, compliance, and auditing. These departments should have an interest in assigning executive-level oversight of and liaison involvement in an advisory council that assists with the long-term planning of RIM program initiatives and activities. This advisory council should meet at least bi-annually to ensure that the enterprise is benefiting from high-quality information management practices.

**Advisory Council Implementation Flowchart**



**Building Teams to Support RIM**

By creating a business case that focuses on the specific benefits of implementing high-quality records management practices for each BU, a RIM program can be seen to have multiple benefits across the organization. Appealing to stakeholders’ specific interests brings understanding of the relevance and importance of RIM practices and principles to ensure RIM program buy-in, commitment, and support.

RIM program personnel and individual BU stakeholders rarely have the time or expertise to devote to every possible aspect of improving policies, procedures, retention rules, and all of the diverse information management challenges. For that reason, it is advisable to form teams to address different aspects of the activities to be undertaken by a RIM program.

For instance, every IT organization at some point must work with metadata concepts and taxonomies with respect to the operations of computer-based business applications. And an organization’s retention schedule implemented to

monitor the life cycle of records, including electronic records, has a number of descriptors that can be used to describe the content of information systems.

The importance of having the IT data descriptions and retention schedule and records inventories using similar, if not identical, terminologies becomes very clear during any litigation-related discovery request that asks for documents, such as “correspondence” related to an individual or an event. The organizations needs to have decided:

- Are “internal memos” stored in office filing cabinets “correspondence?”
- Is e-mail just another form of “correspondence?”
- Are text messages within workflow systems “correspondence?”

Obviously, there needs to be a team formed to determine how to describe information in an organization consistently.

It is best if each organization assigns a management-level individual to make decisions and recommendations within the teaming process, as well as an individual with expertise in the teaming subject area. By approaching the teams in this manner, someone with organizational decision-making capability will be monitoring team progress and decisions, even though he or she may not be attending all of the meetings.

In contrast, the subject matter expert for that organization will be very familiar with the topics covered during team meetings and can add detailed informational value of use in creating the products expected of the team. They should be working partners in the organization so they are in close communication among themselves.

**Assembling a Subject Matter Expert Network**

RIM has become a very complex arena, requiring in-depth knowledge of information management practices, principles, technologies, and organizational change challenges. When teams are formed to support RIM program initiatives, very knowledgeable and experienced individuals are required to provide information for team activities and to make recommendations that may require organizational changes and an investment of resources.

For this reason, it is very important to select these individuals carefully and ensure they are assigned to RIM-related teams because they truly have expertise that will add value. Simply assigning a person to a team because there was little work for him or her at the time can result in the team’s failure to accomplish some goals.

There are many instances when the specific selection of an individual is very beneficial to both the individual professionally and to the organization as a whole because he or she rises to the occasion and actually learns and contributes quickly. However, the organization must be very careful to ensure that those individuals assigned to teams

have the requisite expertise, time, and overall ability to contribute. Continually changing team personnel requires new assignees to be oriented, informed, and trained, which often results in a team failing to meet deadlines.

In addition to assigning well-informed and capable individuals to RIM initiative teams, RIM program personnel should be continually building collaborative, mutual-interest relationships with employees across the enterprise. In many cases, RIM personnel do not need to have continuous support from experts in an area; they may need only occasional access to knowledge in certain areas. However, these individuals are very important because they build supportive relationships out into the organization that can be used for knowledge or other support as projects move forward or change.

Many organizations have created internal knowledge management (KM) databases that profile the expertise of individuals with their resumes and job experiences. Sometimes only the human resources organization has access to these KM repositories, but some organizations place this information on websites accessible to any company personnel. These sites and databases can be of tremendous benefit to the RIM program in cultivating needed expertise to develop a subject matter expert network. Examples of those with specific expertise that may be needed are cloud computing experts, privacy attorneys, security personnel, and data backup or IT system operators.

### **Focusing on Information Governance Implementation**

For a RIM program to fully realize its potential, RIM activities must encompass *information governance*, which Gartner defines as “the specification of decision rights and an accountability framework to encourage desirable behavior in the valuation, creation, storage, use, archival and deletion of information. It includes the processes, roles, standards and metrics that ensure the effective and efficient use of information in enabling an organization to achieve its goals.”

Although historically the province of IT departments planning the integration of computer applications and ensuring better accessibility to data for users, *data governance* has transitioned into a more general concern that affects content management, electronic records management, compliance initiatives, and document delivery support during litigation.

Information governance is simply good management in that it encompasses the tools, techniques, and activities needed to ensure high-quality information management overall. Data governance can be seen as a subset of information governance wherein the higher-level vision of information management issues includes cross-enterprise policies, procedures, and information security and retention rules.

The term “governance” has become much more important with respect to how organizations are managed in that it implies excellence in stewardship for information and resources. Unfortunately, in recent years, many organizations have suffered under executive management oversights, intentional or unintentional, and the concept of governing an organization wisely is now very important to government regulators, litigators, auditors, investors, and the public at large.

Information governance can begin by building bottom-up from data governance tools and logical constructs then extrapolating those into higher-level policies and rules. Or, it can be generated top-down by starting with high-level organization challenges, such as compliance mandates and regulations, and working down into the organization to en-

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sure there is commonality in understanding of terms and concepts regarding information and records that are retained.

The primary goal is to ensure that there is good communication regarding information across the organization.

### **Building a Network to Drive Information Governance**

Information governance activities must be built on a network of teams communicating consistently about data, information, and records if there is to be an integrated view of information in an organization.

Some departments will call a report an “executive overview briefing,” and some departments may call the document a “project review report.” So, is it a report, a briefing, a document, or what? Is it an “invoice” or a “bill?” Is an “engineering drawing” really a “diagram?” The opportunity for the creation of a proverbial Tower of Babel, in which communication breakdown occurs due to no one speaking the same information language, is enormous in most organizations.

Refining such terminology into a cross-organizational thesaurus of terms is what is eventually needed, with data description-level activities in order to have informational bits and bytes consistent within computer systems. However, these terms must be related to the organization's overall regulatory and compliance environment, as well.

If an e-discovery request demands "accounting data," the organization needs a consistent perspective on what comprises that information. Accounting data can exist in paper reports identified in records retention schedules, in Microsoft PowerPoint software data files on computers, in Oracle software accounting applications, or even as computer output to laser disk report text files on optical disk drives.

Creating a cross-enterprise information governance

strategy requires many different professional perspectives, internal organizational expertise, and thorough understanding of information management practices and principles. Having a good technical understanding of information management tools and techniques is very important to creating an organization's information governance model.

But, the most critical element of all is to take advantage of an existing RIM program advisory, collaboration, and liaison infrastructure to network with other individuals in order to build a common view of information managed within the organization. **END**

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