

MAKING THE CASE FOR



MERGING

DOCUMENT CONTROL AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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Although document control and records and information management (RIM) employees share a custodial responsibility that includes identifying, protecting, and presenting their entity's records as assets, they do not share the same focus on managing information throughout the entire life cycle – from creation to distribution and use, storage and maintenance, retention, and disposition or archival preservation.

Document control's focus is on just the active phases; concerns about information retention, disposition, and archival preservation are dismissed with the pressing need to begin the next project or the simple question: "Why not just save everything?" Applying records logic is sacrificed to inexpensive storage.

The potential negative impact of this leaves RIM managers no choice – they must become facilitators, leading their organizations to a more defensible position by proposing that these two functions be combined.

Differentiating Between Controlled Documents and Records

An important step toward unifying these functions is to establish within the corporate culture a shared understanding of what is meant by the use of the terms "document," "controlled document," and "record," as well as what the processes are for managing them. People often use these terms interchangeably, which is an error that produces confusion and profoundly affects communication among the stakeholders in a RIM project. This may lead to scope creep – or worse, a scrapped effort.

The subtle differences can best be understood within the context of the information life cycle, which is illustrated in Figure 1: "The Records Life Cycle." (For an explanation of each stage of the records life cycle, see sidebar "The Life Cycle of a Record" on page 27.

- The term *document* describes information during a part of its active state – its creation, review, and initial edits as it is saved.
- A *controlled document* is a document whose use and distribution is tracked and controlled throughout its active state. It requires the user to make a decision: is this the first version or the twentieth? (See sidebar below "The Controlled Document Template.")
- A document/controlled document becomes a record when it reaches the retention state; as the activity to generate the information is completed, it is no longer required for immediate use and is moved toward either disposition or archival management. A *record* is, according to *Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms, 3rd edi-*

tion, "recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics, made or received by an organization in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business."

Controlled documents are structured information that build from work processes and procedures. They issue through document control for two purposes: internal records identification and presentation to the client.

For example, project-driven organizations that certify themselves against ISO 9001:2008 *Quality Management Systems – Requirements* will audit versions of engineering and construction records regularly to determine what content is transferred to the client in the form of an as-built diagram. Engineering and construction records are packages of controlled documents.

The Controlled Document Template

An electronic controlled document is fastidiously guarded by a company. Like its compatriot, the record, it typically has three layers: content, metadata, and links. Often the controlled document is either an engineering and construction design document or a policy.

A header or footer asserts proprietary custody of the information in the controlled document by the company and client only. Issue number and date are usually located here. The number of the document is assigned by document control.

The regular format for a controlled document includes an introduction, requirements, notes on associated controlled documents, vocabularies and acronyms, responsible parties, procedure, a description of equipment, if necessary, headings, and attachments.

Finally, version control is included with description of change on equipment or scope, justification for change, purpose of issue, and approvals. The alternate header/footer says, "Printed versions of this document are uncontrolled."

Controlled documents are further supported by content and system metadata: name, version label, title, keywords, content size, check-in/check-out dates, document owner, site, department, legal company, business sector, document group, sub-group, and more.

Links to associated standards or other controlled documents are also present. Controlled documents become a package that once delivered to the client transitions into the retention phase of the record life cycle.

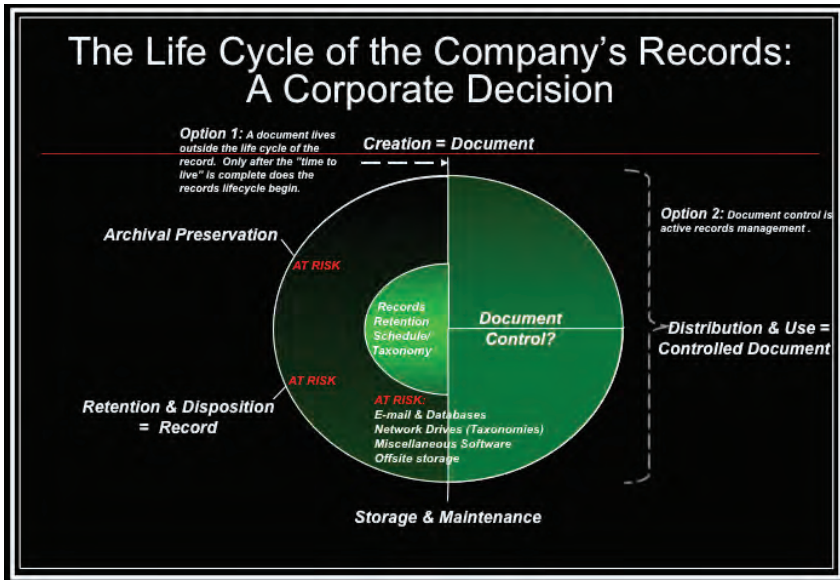


Figure 1. The Records Life Cycle

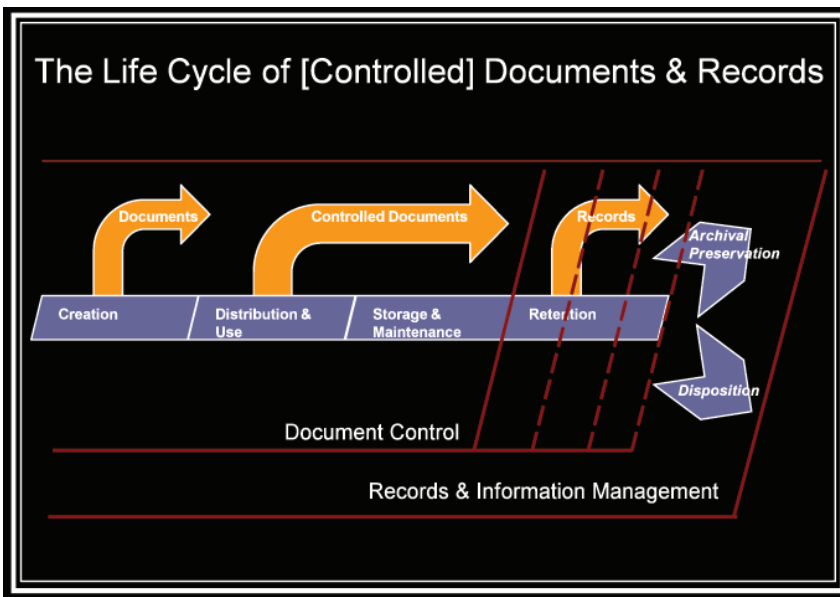


Figure 2. The Life Cycle of [Controlled] Documents & Records

Packaged documents become records based on the corporate culture, accountability, usability, business conduct, and best practices; this is strongly reiterated in ISO-15489:2001 *Information and Documentation – Records Management – Part 1 – General*. Because controlled documents are declared records internally to an organization, document control is a part of the RIM program.

If information assets live in docu-

ment management or active records systems under the purview of the document control manager, then RIM staff also must have appropriate access to those systems because these records may be needed as evidence during audits, inspections, search and retrieval, and discovery activities.

Combining Functions for Complete Life Cycle Management

Although many companies have

the basic suite of records documentation (e.g., records retention schedule and associated policies and procedures), they find it difficult to implement a practical application to house electronic records. This unfortunate truth has long-term implications in any environment.

For example, controlled documents that should graduate to records status are instead kept forever due to a lack of:

- Knowledge about declaring records
- Electronic archival storage options
- Upper management support to enforce the retention rules set by the RIM function

In the past, when hard copy records predominated, records management was solidly placed at the end of work flow. While the creation stage in the life cycle of the record was defined as shown in Figure 2: “The Life Cycle of [Controlled] Documents & Records” – as a document crossing that dotted line into record status toward the end of a business process under the “retention” quadrant – essentially, information died in the records center.

But today, with the integration of electronic records in the workplace, records are no longer transferred with the former regularity of hard copy. Records sit as active documents in file shares, e-mail, instant messages, and in collaborative spaces.

And, if a record is left in an electronic repository, then its metadata is massaged repeatedly, stuck in a never-ending cycle of version control until the project completes. Its retention is still not a consideration. This treatment of metadata is more akin to document control. The issues surrounding custody and usability of electronic documents and records are never truly settled.

Combining functions removes the artificial barrier between document control and records management that hinders the regular transfer of controlled documents into the retention

The Life Cycle of a Record

Creation – Creation is the stage in the life cycle when a document or data set is generated, described for completeness of evidence, and classified for systematic filing and retrieval. The creation phase of the records life cycle is a watershed in which parameters and criteria are set for managing records throughout subsequent phases of the life cycle.

Distribution and Use – Records are kept in files that are required for current use by the business area. Active files are formally “open” files to which new information may be added as a result of related ongoing transactions. New versions are added here.

Storage and Maintenance – Storage is the placement of inactive records in an organized repository for access and control. Maintenance activities, such as new additions to the records file and inventory activities, apply to records as well as information about records and the electronic records management system.

Retention and Disposition – Retention and disposition scheduling is the practice of establishing and applying legally acceptable timelines, locations, and formats for storing and disposing of the record once the record is no longer required for business purposes on a regular or ongoing basis. A retention and disposition period is assigned to a record file or series during creation of the series. The retention and disposition schedule is applied to a records file by the series in which the file is classified.

Archival and Preservation – As defined in *A Consistent Discipline for Managing Hard Copy and Electronic Records*, “Archiving is the selective permanent storage and preservation of records that are identified as having a permanent value” to the [organization].

and disposition stages. Taking this holistic approach also allows an organization’s resources to be used more efficiently and effectively across a single function, rather than two, helping ensure that electronic records are not left indefinitely in files shares and collaborative workspaces.

Selling the Idea to Top Management

RIM is one of the most underestimated and effective tools at a company’s immediate disposal today. Senior management must understand that RIM lays the four foundation cornerstones of accountability, usability, business conduct, and regulations/

standards/best practices. This aligns with their concerns about weighing productivity and protection of the business against risk.

Management must also understand that RIM promotes records as an organizational resource, regardless of the media in which they are presented and stored, and it facilitates the use of records to enable employees to make quicker and better decisions.

If their proposal to top management, document control, records management, and a records management’s steering committee, if one exists, must identify corporate vulnerabilities for information that is not managed

through the entire life cycle, so management will understand that the integration of document control into the RIM function is an important step that will promote the usability of records. If a steering committee does not exist, records management must gather colleagues who are invested in information management to help write a proposal combining the two functions.

This proposal must have an executive sponsor. It must clarify the three types of information (document, controlled document, and records) and compare the two life cycles. The discussion, accompanied by specific, known examples within the company (gathered through inventory and data mapping), will help top management understand just how important a comprehensive records management program is to their business and the need to repurpose the two functions into a RIM group.

After reading the proposal, management should understand how merging the functions of document control and RIM into one structure creates a stronger foundation for business – one that outshines the competition. **END**

Editor’s Note: A follow-up article that expands on the idea of document control as a subset of records and information management will appear in the January/February 2011 issue of Information Management.

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See authors’ bios on page 35.