Our global records management and compliance department faced a huge challenge: handling the explosive growth in information being received from businesses located around the world – the result of both organic and inorganic growth due to the acquisition of a complementary financial entity. We realized the company needed a global approach to records management; playing its traditional role, our records management team simply could not support the needs of our growing global company.

In transforming our team from that traditional to a more strategic role, we established objectives, took actions, and learned lessons that should be of value to other organizations struggling to harness the ever-widening pools of information they must manage efficiently in their daily course of business.

**Program Assessment**

First, we took a critical look at our current processes and the future of information management. We found that our global records management team was primarily focused on the transactional elements of records management, such as preparing items for offsite storage, reacting to internal business units’ needs, and responding to crisis requests.

These were all complicated by the wide variation in the level of records management sophistication among lines of business and locations in various countries, and dealing with these tasks left very little time to prepare for exponential information growth or to coordinate our efforts globally. We determined that to provide much greater value to the company, we needed to shift our records management team’s focus from transactional to the strategic components of information management.

**Strategic Objectives**

We focused on five strategic actions to harness, use, and control information:

1. Consolidating retention schedules throughout our worldwide operations
2. Establishing processes and methods for universal information subject categorization and indexing
3. Aligning access to and management of both paper-based and electronic information
4. Creating processes to continuously solicit stakeholder feedback regard-
Because of our growth, there was a widespread realization that we needed a more comprehensive way to manage information, and our internal environment was primed for change. That made it easier to “sell” the need to change our team’s approach from task-oriented to strategic.

3. Establish Corporate Department Liaisons.

We also needed to establish additional relationships in functional departments, such as legal, audit, compliance and IT—all corporate functions with operations in the lines of business and regions. Like in the lines of businesses, personnel in these functions shared the realization that something needed to be done to handle and manage information for our expanded and growing business; each had a vested interest in doing so.

4. Partner to Develop the Strategic Plan.

The functional department liaisons became strategic partners in the development of the global records management strategy; their input and involvement were critical in making it successful. They welcomed a collaborative approach to determining how to manage information on a global basis. They knew the importance of doing so and appreciated the opportunity to help establish the processes.

Each member brought a unique perspective, which we debated until reaching agreement about our global strategic direction. As an example, we identified and discussed the issues related to electronic records management, which previously had been considered the IT department’s concern.

With the rapid expansion of the business, IT had an immediate and pressing issue: how to manage—especially for retention and regulatory compliance—tens of thousands of emails generated and received worldwide every day. IT needed help and welcomed the opportunity to have...
input into the strategy and tactics to carry it out.

Previously, the company did not have a forum for lines of business and functional departments to express ideas and concerns related to information management. This new forum allowed the team to work together to establish the priorities for the global strategy.

5. Take the Lead.

Although it was broadly acknowledged that we needed to get a handle on our global information growth to be effective, no single functional department took the lead in addressing this concern. This created a leadership void into which the global records management team gladly jumped! With our former transactional responsibilities managed by the liaisons, our team was able to accept the responsibility for managing the project and completing its priorities.

Lessons Learned

The transformation process that allowed us to accomplish our global record management strategy required hard work and perseverance and generated a number of take-aways and lessons learned:

1. A group decision will take longer, but the results will be better.

There was a temptation to believe that we had all the answers and didn’t need input from others. But, the results of our efforts improved dramatically as we brought the lines of business and functional departments into the process.

Not only were the decisions better, but the scope of records management expanded to information management, taking into account all information. Even more important, giving the lines of business and functional departments the opportunity to participate in the development of the strategy created buy-in. No one likes a mandate from corporate!

2. Establishing a global strategy doesn’t mean everything is done in one manner.

This was particularly evident as we expanded beyond the U.S. borders. This concept goes beyond simply accommodating differences in culture, language, and country records retention laws.

However, as we tried to mandate this approach with our regions and countries, we found the provider didn’t have the ability to service some countries, as we had expected. We ultimately adopted an approach that involved a global strategy in terms of managing and maintaining information, but provided local flexibility to make decisions on things like choosing the optimal provider for that location.

3. You must be willing to step up and take the lead.

As we met with the lines of business and functional departments, it became very apparent that our role would expand if we were willing to take the lead on the various priorities. By taking the lead, we assumed much more enriching and strategic job responsibilities, showed ourselves as the subject matter experts in information management, became a more valued resource to the company, and developed stronger working relationships.

4. Change is not easy.

We had numerous growing pains during the transformation, some of which affected members of our staff. Transforming our organization to meet ever-growing global responsibilities represented a sea change for our team as it became more strategic and shifted tactical processes to the lines of business.

... the results of our efforts improved dramatically as we brought the lines of business and functional departments into the process.

One of our initial strategies was to use one global records management provider in all the countries where we were operating. The provider was the incumbent in the United States, and we were under the impression that it was positioned to meet our global needs. Some of the benefits we expected included global access to our information, singular account management, consistent operating procedures, and reduced expenses.

The Bottom Line

The transformation of our global records management team involved hard work and dedication. Our team members took a critical look at our current organization and responsibilities and realized we were not prepared for the information explosion that had become part of the company’s daily operations. We created partnerships with internal stakeholders, taking advantage of their collective thoughts and considering their needs. Through the efforts of the entire team, we created a global records management team that has enriched job responsibilities and adds true value to the organization. END

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