

# A 5-Step Strategy for Harnessing Global Information Growth

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**O**ur 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 de-

termined 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-

ing information management, including from within the institution, operational lines of business, regions and country management, legal, audit, and other corporate functions

5. Establishing a truly global information management strategy

### Action Steps

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.

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There were certainly growing pains along the way, but we began to transform ourselves into internal consultants by taking the following five steps.

### 1. Establish Line of Business Liaisons.

The first step in becoming more strategic and consultative was to establish liaisons from each of our eight lines of business that were headquartered throughout the world with subsets at the regional and, in some cases, country levels.

Our department had established good relationships with these lines of business, which helped pave the way for our successful outreach to them. Our conversations and presentations about the importance of managing, using, and retaining information for business efficiency, productivity, and regulatory compliance, coupled with what lines of business owners and regional management already knew about their needs convinced them to assign their employees to liaison roles.

After the first line of business came on board, the others followed suit in rapid succession with minimal, if

any, concerns about their “turf.”

These liaisons played a pivotal role in executing our new global records management strategy. They knew their operations intricately and were better suited to manage the daily records management tasks, such as contracting with local service providers who could dovetail services to satisfy our global information and records management strategic goals.

Ultimately, the liaisons took on additional responsibility for records management, and in a number of cases, they had notable expansions of responsibilities. For example, the role of a liaison in the UK who was very effective in watching over and caring

for records was expanded to provide expertise throughout our European region.

### 2. Provide Education and Support.

With the liaisons’ relieving the global records management team from transactional responsibilities, the team had time to consult and educate the lines of business and regions about more strategic things, such as retention schedules, privacy, and compliance.

We structured our robust educational sessions through individual meetings, “lunch and learns” for larger groups, and telephone conferences for folks in regions outside the United States. We also supported the liaisons with project management and direction.

With these liaisons in place, our global records management team now could concentrate its focus on strategic projects designed to integrate globally sourced information into a cohesive resource, transforming our records management function into one that could accommodate and sustain our growing worldwide business while

complying with myriad regulations worldwide.

### 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 e-mails 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

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.

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.

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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,

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.

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

Some team members were more comfortable with the transactional tasks of records management, so we helped place them in new roles that more closely matched their interests. The majority, however, embraced and thrived in an environment that included challenging work assignments and interaction with all levels of employees across many countries.

### 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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