From RFP to Selection:
Guidance for Outsourcing RIM Functions

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When outsourcing RIM functions, it is imperative to develop an RFP that clearly conveys your specific needs, prioritize your selection criteria, and get to know potential providers by touring their facilities and asking the right questions. This article provides guidance for ensuring a successful outcome.

Thousands of businesses have chosen to outsource portions of their records and information management (RIM) program needs – for good reason because, in many cases, it makes good business and financial sense to do so.

With the proliferation of high-profile data breaches today, though, a top concern among all organizations and customers is keeping their information safe – and this is an even greater concern for organizations whose information moves outside their immediate control. This makes it imperative for organizations that decide to take this approach to make the most knowledgeable decision possible when selecting a RIM company as a valued business partner.

There is no single, "right" way to select a RIM services company to meet your specific needs, but there is an informed way to proceed.

Review Industry Resources

Fortunately, there are industry resources to guide you through the selection process.

Both ARMA International and PRISM International offer comprehensive guidance for selecting a service provider in publications available for download from their respective websites: ARMA's *Guidelines for Evaluating Offsite Records Storage Facilities* at *www.arma.org/bookstore* and PRISM's *Demand the Best: A guide to help select an offsite information management company* under its "Buy from a Member" section at *www.prismintl.org.*

After reviewing this guidance, begin your search by consulting listings of professional RIM services companies in the Records and Information Management Buyer's Guide at *www.arma.org/buyersguide* and in the "Buy from a Member" section of PRISM's website. You will

RIM Services That Might Be Outsourced

A wide variety of services are available from professional RIM services companies, including, but not limited to:

- Departmental billing
- Disaster recovery services
- Emergency pick-up and delivery
- Facility management/ Outsourcing services
- Index and inventory services
- Information management consulting
- Digitizing/Imaging/Microfilming services
- Remote online access
- Retention schedule monitoring
- Retrieval and refile services
- Secure shredding and destruction
- Data protection and media vaulting
- Tape storage and rotation services
- Document storage
- Cloud services
- Data and document archiving
- Hard drive and other media destruction
- Information governance solutions
- Active file management

For a list of professional RIM companies, visit *www. arma.org/buyersguide* and *www.prismintl.org.*

find a wide variety of companies that offer all or many of the services indicated in the sidebar "RIM Services That Might Be Outsourced."

Prioritize Selection Factors

Selecting the right company begins with submitting an RFP that clearly conveys your specific needs and then getting to know potential providers by touring their facilities and asking the right questions.

To help you get organized, Allan Podraza, director of records management and archives at the American Medical Association in Chicago, suggests that you weigh and prioritize the factors for selecting a RIM services provider that are of most concern to your organization, choosing among personnel, the physical facility, vaults, fire and security systems, storage capabilities, policies and procedures, technology, delivery vehicles and procedures, invoicing, retention scheduling capabilities, disaster planning, and insurance.

Then, devise three or four pointed questions for each aspect. For example, if you need to know more about a company profile, ask about the company's mission and vision, how long it has been in business, what differentiates it from its competitors, and proof of its financial stability, among other questions.

Podraza provides lists of potential questions in his instructive July 2011 blog, "How to Select a Records Center," at *www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140514135055-46254388-how-to-select-a-records-center*.

Take Advice from RIM Experts

We asked several RIM experts to share some tips in crafting an RFP and selecting a RIM service provider to meet your organization's needs. Here are some of their suggestions:

Keep an Open Mind
Don't begin an RFP process with preconceived notions

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about RIM companies, such as whether a corporate or independent RIM company will best meet your needs, says Patrick DeVries of DeVries Business Services, Spokane, Wash. Often, both types of companies can provide needed services, but only you can decide which one best fits you and your organization, he says.

Checklist of Questions to Ask Potential RIM Services Partners

General security
- Do all facilities have 24-hour monitored security?
- Who is authorized to access these facilities?
- How is this access authorized?
- What are the in-house security procedures?
- What training is provided to employees for these procedures?
- Is entry to data vaults monitored? If so, how?
- Is the loading and unloading area secure?
- Does the company conduct a daily security check?
- Are security systems inspected and tested regularly?

Disaster prevention/planning
- Are the smoke detection systems adequate?
- Are the fire detection systems adequate?
- Are the fire suppression systems adequate?
- Does the facility have a no-smoking policy?
- Does the facility have a regularly maintained and tested internal disaster plan?
- Are the fire prevention and alarm systems regularly inspected and tested?
- Is the alarm system activated by line-tampering or disruption?

Facility
- Is the facility in a desirable location?
- Is the facility built to earthquake code and other construction standards?
- Does the facility have back-up power systems?
- Does the company have proper insurance coverage in the event of a disaster?
- Is the facility a stand-alone building?
- Is the facility located in a multi-tenant building?
- Are there other businesses near this facility that could be potentially hazardous?
- Does the company engage in any other business at its facilities (e.g., moving and storage, public warehousing)?

- Is the facility located in a non-flood prone area?
- Are storage containers readily available?
- Are computer media transfer cases available?

Courier vehicles
- Are vehicles designed for safe media transportation?
- Are vehicles climate-controlled?
- Do vehicles have appropriate security?
- Are vehicles secured while they are at a delivery/pick-up site?
- How often do vehicles undergo preventative maintenance?
- Are vehicles equipped with appropriate and reliable two-way communications?
- Are vehicles equipped with fire extinguishers?

Policies and procedures
- Is a statement of service and prices available?
- Is client RIM software available?
- Does the company have a clear and acceptable business contract?
- Are shipping and receiving records signed and maintained for future reference?
- Does the company have a comprehensive employee screening process?
- What is the company's substance abuse policy?
- Are employees and drivers provided with uniforms and identification cards?
- Are employees and/or visitors required to sign a confidentiality agreement?
- Is there ongoing employee education and training?
- Are after-hours personnel trained to handle client emergencies and requests?
- Is the company Privacy+ certified?
- What other certifications are held by the company?

Know What You Need

Make sure that your RFP is clear, concise, and organized in a way that conveys the specific nature and scope of the RIM services your company needs, instead of asking recipients to bid on generic work. Avoid submitting broad, boilerplate RFPs, says Bruce Radke, shareholder, Vedder Price in Chicago, and an expert in privacy and information governance. He also suggests you consider an initial face-to-face presentation with potential recipients to discuss the goals and objectives for the RFP. "A question-and-answer period will greatly enhance the quality of the RFP and the responses," he says.

Provide Enough Information

Martha Mayer, vice president of sales, and Patti Michurski, sales manager, at Business Data Record Services, New Brighton, Minn., stress the importance of providing enough information so you can make apple-to-apple price comparisons. "Make sure to include the volumes because pricing often is volume-based," says Michurski. When submitting an RFP, supply the size and quantities of boxes, whether you index to the file level, and how many new boxes will be added per year, she says. "Do you have a retention policy? How many will be destroyed every year? Vendors will be interested in volume levels and anticipated activity levels in determining their rates."

Ask the Right Questions

Mayer and Michurski suggest asking potential RIM service providers to provide everything from a detailed facility description to a copy of their disaster recovery plan, a storage area description with climate-control capabilities, a copy of courier policies and procedures, a summary of their hiring process and background check policies, and a list of any administrative or miscellaneous charges that will be invoiced to maintain the account.

See the sidebar "Checklist of Questions to Ask Potential RIM Services Partners" for examples of other questions that should be asked.

Ask About Certifications

To help narrow your list of prospects, check whether a RIM company is certified through programs such as PRISM International's Privacy+, says Mike Szerlong, director of information management services at Vanguard Archives, Chicago. This certification, for example, identifies RIM services providers that have been willing to invest in an outside audit process designed to publicly demonstrate their commitment to protecting the privacy of information entrusted to them by their clients.

This voluntary program is open to all companies worldwide that provide outsourced storage and protection of hard-copy records and off-line removable computer media. To achieve this certification, companies must establish internal controls designed to meet a set of control objectives designed by PRISM International and intended to promote information privacy. The extent to which a company meets these controls must be evaluated and

confirmed by an independent third-party audit.

For a list of certified companies, visit *www.prismintl.org* and click "Privacy+ Certification."

Ask for Customer References

"References are huge," says Michurski, who stresses that companies are wise to provide references from both current and former satisfied customers. Also, stay mindful of your future needs. You may be concerned with paper storage and destruction today, but your business goals may change in coming years. Find a RIM company with the breadth of services to meet your changing needs.

Tour Facilities

To select among a small group of companies, tour their facilities, Mayer says. "It provides a hands-on view of a RIM company. By touring, you can literally see if you and a RIM company are a good fit." Podraza adds that good questions during tours include asking for a copy of their standard operating procedures and privacy policy, a demonstration of their vehicle and building security system, and a review of the inventory tracking and imaging systems.

Think Beyond Price

Although RIM is a volume-based business, pricing should not necessarily rank as your top concern, says Szerlong. Equally important, he and Podraza contend, are security, privacy, data protection, service levels, and contract terms.

Moreover, with company data breaches dominating the news today, find out whether there are controls in place to adequately protect your information. Does the company conduct a daily security check? Are security systems inspected and tested regularly?

Look for Differentiators

A good RFP should help differentiate some of the more subtle differences between RIM companies, says Sherri Taylor, president, Armstrong Archives in Carrollton, Texas. "Often the things that differentiate companies are their people, services, and how they respond to customers' needs."

RIM Services – It's Not Just About Boxes Anymore

There are myriad RIM services for you to consider and evaluate, from hard-copy and imaging services to management services, customer service, and digital storage. The RIM services industry has evolved to offer more than storage. Now you can rely on your RIM partner to help you develop an appropriate strategy for managing your company's information at all stages of the information life cycle. The RFP process is just one step – albeit an important one – in taking advantage of all the industry has to offer. **END**

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