

More Than Paper:

How RIM Can Influence IT and Shape IG

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Records and information management (RIM) professionals are perfectly positioned and have the requisite expertise to play an advisory role that will help ensure that their organizations are governing all information in all formats in ways that will reduce costs and risks. To step into that role, though, they must forge a collaborative relationship with IT. This article describes how professionals can do that by demonstrating that they understand IT's perspective and can help them meet their unique challenges and goals.

The rapid, dramatic shift from physical records to digital documents is evident in nearly every industry, leading many records managers to question the viability of a career based on managing a format that is decreasing in volume. Although organizations continue to produce volumes of paper that require expert management, job descriptions in records and information management (RIM) are evolving. This is good news because RIM professionals are perfectly positioned to serve in an expanded role – that of information governance (IG) advisor.

In a 2010 blog posting, Gartner analyst Debra Logan writes that Gartner defines IG 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.” A RIM professional lives and breathes every word of that definition as it applies to physical documents, but the same knowledge and expertise are typically not inherent to IT managers, who are responsible for managing the ever-expanding ocean of digital data.

Because compliance regulation and privacy laws – and associated penalties for violating them – apply equally to both paper and digital formats, classifying information based on format is an outdated practice. Forward-thinking organizations see their information as either managed or unmanaged, and RIM professionals are well-versed in this distinction.

They can ensure that information is properly managed through its life cycle and troubleshoot IG gaps that IT managers probably would not recognize. The key to un-

locking this insight is making sure a relationship between RIM and IT is created and maintained; nurturing such a collaboration, though, requires more than RIM simply sending IT a list of suggestions to follow.

Bridging Technology-Created IG Gaps

Technology facilitates vast amounts of digital data, which has spawned an industry aimed at creating solutions to help manage it. As a result, organizations have a variety of management options, including cloud storage, software as a service (SaaS), digital imaging, data dictionaries, SharePoint®, e-discovery retrieval, and more. Unfortunately, an abundance of options often obscures the unique needs every company has and subsequently creates gaps in IG implementation. As IG advisors, RIM professionals can help organizations understand such lapses and offer corrective advice in any of the following areas.

Decentralized Documents

It is common for organizations to have dozens of siloed data repositories across their networks. Only certain departments have access to this data, making it difficult for IT to locate it during a regulatory audit or when a legal matter requires discovery.

RIM Expertise: RIM professionals know all too well the risks associated with decentralized records and are experts at creating infrastructure to maintain access for appropriate parties. They can offer real-life examples of the risk reduction associated with data centralization.

Gluttony for Data

Cloud storage is convenient and relatively inexpensive, which, theoretically, sounds like a win-win. However, when faced with limited storage for the growing moun-

tain of data that IT managers own, many will opt to buy more storage instead of managing or reducing their data footprint. Having too much data increases risk and is a speedbump to attaining IG health.

RIM Expertise: Retention schedules are typically not IT's forte, as evidenced by the "throwing storage at the problem" solution. Records managers can offer guidance in creating full lifecycle data management strategies that reduce the risks associated with excess data. In turn, organizations are less likely to fall out of compliance, and if a breach occurs, there is much less data for cyber criminals to compromise.

Non-Uniform Classification

Digital documents are often created and saved with classification methods that differ from solution to solution, department to department, and person to person. Such a wide variance leads to data retrieval inefficiency and expands risk because there is no intuitive path to pinpointing what data exists.

RIM Expertise: Given their deep-rooted familiarity with IG implementation, RIM professionals can quickly identify whether sensitive data exists in a physical record based on the method by which it has been named and filed. Their expertise in crafting intuitive, uniform classification policies



can translate into helping IT understand the type of data in a digital document and where to find it. Additionally, very important documents are no longer “floating” around on the network, waiting to be accessed by unauthorized personnel or, worse, a cyber criminal.

Stagnant Policies

Technology becomes obsolete at a rapid pace, requiring frequent updates and replacements to information management systems. However, many organizations fail to update the policies that dictate how data should be handled in the new systems, leading to gaps in IG standards.

RIM Expertise: RIM professionals are well-versed in developing and updating policies and can share examples of how to lessen data risk by simply revising guidelines. Additionally, rules and regulations that dictate information management – and, in turn, IG strategies – also evolve. The knowledge that records managers possess in updating policies can help promote greater compliance.

Forging the Relationship with IT

IG implementation would be easy if trust between records managers and IT could be initiated by a records manager saying, “I have a wealth of experience, and these are really great ideas.” But the reality is that records and IT managers often have two very different points of view with differing objectives and simply do not interact on a regular basis. In short, relationships – and the trust that accompanies them – take time. Given IT’s growing importance in driving business, building the relationship is more important than ever to ensure IG health. Records managers should consider the following strategies for creating and sustaining a successful RIM-IT partnership.

Speak the Language

To initiate a conversation – and to adapt to the records manager’s evolving role – it is critical to have a continually expanding knowledge of technology and its impact on digital data. While IG theories may translate from physical to digital information because regulations apply equally to both, RIM professionals may need to adjust the ways they implement best practices to better relate with IT. Understanding where idea transference may hit a snag and having a greater appreciation for IT-specific challenges and obstacles will give records managers more credence when they make suggestions.

Collaborate

Participate in projects and committees where interaction and problem-solving with IT can occur. While such projects may be peripheral in nature to IG, getting face time and working with IT managers will help facilitate relationship-building. More organizations are creating IG steering committees; this is a perfect example of a collaborative effort that empowers records managers to share their knowledge with IT managers. Records managers can also reach out directly to seek ways to work together.

Present Ideas to Decision-Makers

Present IG best practices to influencers, even if IT isn’t included. If a case can be made to C-level executives, then records managers’ influence and ideas can migrate to other departments. Raising visibility through internal thought leadership is key to getting important ideas taken more seriously and put into action.

Leverage Legal Knowledge

RIM professionals have been trained to be keenly aware of legislation and industry regulations that impact information management at all times. Sharing news of new regulations or trends with appropriate stakeholders not only positions the records manager as an expert but could serve as the proverbial “foot in the door” for dialogue with IT. To that same end, RIM professionals often have a more direct relationship with legal and can serve as a liaison among all three departments.

Becoming Trusted Advisors

RIM professionals are – and will continue to be – doing more than utilizing their expertise to manage physical documents. To maintain visibility and remain a business-critical component of an organization’s strategy, they must identify synergies that exist between their wealth of information and the ways information is and will be managed.

The role’s evolution will require them to be trusted advisors in trouble-shooting IG challenges and creating policy that helps organizations avert risk and maintain compliance. By developing meaningful relationships with IT and other decision-making departments, RIM professionals have the power to help implement IG best practices in the largely undefined realm of digital data management.

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