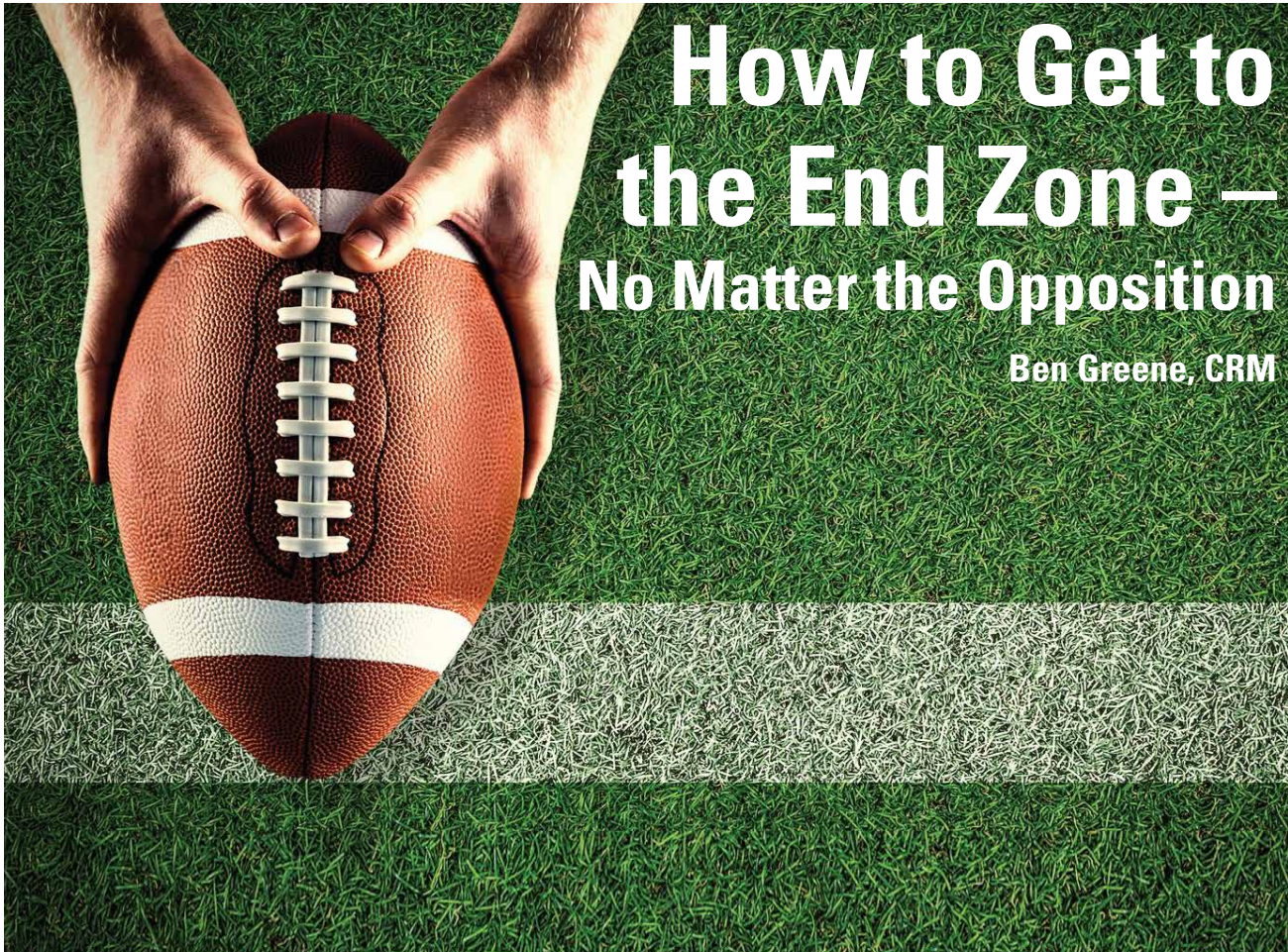


Quarterbacking a PST Reduction Project:



How to Get to the End Zone – No Matter the Opposition

Ben Greene, CRM

Microsoft Outlook's capability to store e-mail as personal storage table (PST) files on users' local drives has freed space in employees' e-mail boxes and has been widely used by many organizations. But managing PST files is difficult and expensive, and many records and information management professionals are looking to reduce PST use significantly. Learn how to take the lead in this reduction effort and ensure that your team makes it to the project's end zone.

For years, organizations eagerly adopted the Microsoft-provided capability that allows Outlook users to store their messages, calendar appointments, and other items as personal storage table (PST) files, or personal folders, on their local hard drives rather than in their mailboxes. While this helped alleviate mailbox space constraints and allowed users to store their content longer, many information technology (IT) and records and information management (RIM) professionals are now eager to rid their environments of PSTs. The reasons are numerous, but two large issues are:

1. PSTs are susceptible to loss or corruption if there is a hard drive crash or malfunction unless they are backed up, which can be expensive to manage.
2. PSTs contribute to the vast amount of stored e-mail, which is the most frequently requested data in litigation proceedings, making it more difficult and expensive to find the e-mails that are responsive to the legal matter.

While some organizations have already reduced their PST landscape through good planning and effective teamwork, many others have either just begun or have yet to begin what is a two-step process:

1. Block employees' ability to create new PSTs or save messages to existing ones.
2. Remove PSTs from the systems.

To borrow an analogy from American football, the RIM professional is the “quarterback,” or the most important player on the field, when an organization goes on the offensive to tackle the problem of reducing its PST environment by blocking PST file creation. Adopting some of the following strategies of successful quarterbacks can also help RIM professionals “win the game.”

Perform due diligence to identify any obstacles, determine how to manage those obstacles, and document what steps will be needed to be successful on game day.

Know When to Stay on the Bench

A quarterback who is not ready on game day shouldn't even step on the field. Neither should those that haven't identified an alternative location for employees to store e-mails. If the ability to create PSTs or save messages to existing ones is taken away without providing an acceptable location for saving e-mail, employees will save them in “out-of-bounds” locations, defeating the initiative.

Depending on the desired level of management over employee e-mails, an alternative location could be a records management system (RMS), a recently expanded e-mail system, or possibly even department shared drives.

Records Management Systems

Using a designated RMS may be the best choice from a records management perspective, but implementing it will surely have the most employee impact, possibly requiring lots of training and technology dollars. If an organization already has a designated RMS that has desktop integration and works well with its e-mail system, then by all means it should throw the ball long and go for the 80-yard touchdown.

Expanded E-mail System

With the advent of cloud storage and technologies and basic data storage costs overall being lower, employee mailboxes are becoming increasingly larger. This author's mailbox size is 400 times larger than it was just four years ago, and this is not uncommon. Organizations are paying for that space, so why not use it?

Department Shared Drive

While using a department shared drive would not be a RIM professional's preferred choice, an argument can be made for it being a better choice for e-mail storage

than creating PSTs, given PSTs' corruption issues and the real-life occurrences of employees losing important e-mails due to hard drive crashes. Another benefit of this approach is that the IT group is already backing up and managing the organization's network shared environment and would prefer not to have to back up personal space storage – if the group is even doing that at all.

RIM professionals should collaborate with their technology and desktop teams to identify which location is best for their organizations, as they will know what changes

are coming, which could save a lot of time. For example, if the IT team is going to double the size of mailboxes in two years, that would likely impact the plan for handling PSTs.

Remember, if a repository hasn't been identified that will replace PST storage, stay on the bench and “sit this one out.”

Prepare Properly for the Game

Remember the five Ps in the well-known adage “Proper preparation prevents poor performance.” Successful quarterbacks must prepare properly if they are to be successful on game day. There is a saying in football that “Games are won in the film room, not just on the field.”

The same is true for RIM professionals when it comes to a PST reduction project (or any project for that matter). Proper preparation puts them in the best position to win. Perform due diligence to identify any obstacles, determine how to manage those obstacles, and document what steps will be needed to be successful on game day, whether that is the day of pitching the PST project to a manager for approval or the day of communicating the plan to employees. Either way, preparation includes the following steps.

Define a Realistic End Objective

A quarterback's end objective is always the same – score points on offense. RIM professionals are not so lucky. It takes a little more effort to define objectives and ensure that they are realistic. The end objective should not be to *eliminate* PSTs from the environment, as there likely will be cases where some PSTs must remain, such as PSTs that are subject to legal hold. The objective, instead, may be to eliminate a certain percentage of PSTs or a certain category of PSTs (e.g., those with no known owner or those that have not been accessed for a certain period of time).

Evaluate the Opposition

When preparing for a game, quarterbacks spend more time evaluating the opposition than they do their own team. In the same way, RIM professionals must identify those individuals or teams that may have objections to the PST reduction effort and want to “sack” it. Pinpointing and meeting with these individuals to learn about their needs and address their concerns are as important to the project’s success as is having support from the legal or compliance teams.

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This is where an interesting twist comes into play. Quarterbacks do not study film of the opposing team’s coaches, but rather the actions and tendencies of individual players. So, when evaluating the opposition, spend time understanding the baseline employees’ needs and not just their managers’ needs. Often, coaches will listen to and make decisions based on their players’ feedback, so gaining the support of individual contributors for the project makes it more likely that their managers also will support the project.

Get to Know the Project Team

How quarterbacks direct an offense depends on which players take the field alongside them on game day, as a successful offense requires them to effectively utilize their players’ talents.

In the same way, RIM professionals must develop their game plans based on the talent and resources they have available to them, not on an idealistic approach. For example, they must take time to understand the work habits and strengths of those on the communications and technology teams who will be helping them push the PST reduction effort forward. If they can’t get what they need from their teams, they may have to go to back-up players, but that is only as a last resort.

Assess Negative Impact

Quarterbacks must assess how certain decisions they make might impact their team in a negative way on game day. RIM professionals also must assess the potential negative impact when they begin blocking and ultimately removing PSTs from their environment.

Employee Impact. An entire article can be written on the various impacts blocking and removing PSTs could have on employees, but this article will focus on just the

emotional impact. Employees often will be upset when the way they deal with e-mail is affected, even if they are provided an acceptable alternative. RIM professionals should not underestimate the emotional impact this change may have on employees; they need to listen to employees’ concerns and be empathetic.

Technology Impact. Blocking PSTs by group policy will affect certain employees’ ability to do their jobs effectively, so there must be an exception process for certain functions, such as the following:

- **Forensics** – Employees who provide forensic and investigative data services must be able to continue to export data to PSTs for delivery to the requesting team.
- **Legal/Human Resources/Audit** – These teams are typically involved in discovery and other investigative actions that require their ability to open and view messages contained in PSTs.
- **Desktop Support** – The desktop support team will need to be able to export data into PSTs to perform services on employees’ computers.

In addition, some temporary exceptions likely will be needed. For example, a manager who needs to access an old PST from a former employee will need access, and an employee who is on leave of absence and can’t perform necessary activities before PSTs are removed will need to be excluded from the process temporarily.

Playing the Game

Those who have properly prepared by taking the steps described above are ready for game day! Just like quarterbacks, RIM professionals have a number of responsibilities once the “game,” or project, has begun. They must:

Watch the Clock

Quarterbacks must constantly watch the game clock when the offense is on the field because they have only a certain amount of time to start each play. RIM professionals that are responsible for implementing PST changes need to be aware of how much time they need to give employees between announcing the changes and beginning the technology implementation.

Depending on their organizations’ culture, employees may need as little as a few weeks to as much as a year before the changes are enacted. In general, though, this author has found success by waiting 90-180 days after an-

nouncing the change before taking the first step of blocking PSTs and then waiting another 90-180 days before taking the second step of removing the PSTs.

Call Audibles

After an offensive play is set in the huddle, quarterbacks sometimes see from the way the opposing team lines up that they need to change the play at the line of scrimmage in what is called an *audible*. RIM professionals also may need to call an audible, adjusting the plan in response to

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how their organization is absorbing the impact of reducing PSTs. Whether it is having to adjust the style of communication or the implementation timeline, don't be afraid to quickly adjust the plan to get the project back on course toward the end zone. As in football, sometimes an audible is more successful than the original plan would have been.

Monitor Progress

No matter whether leading or trailing, quarterbacks and their coaches are constantly watching their electronic tablets while on the sideline. Quarterbacks are looking for things they may not be able to see while on the field and reviewing plays to determine if adjustments are needed.

Likewise, RIM professionals should continually monitor the progress of their PST reduction projects to ensure that they are keeping current with project activities, technology developments that could impact how group policies are pushed out, and the amount and type of calls the help desk is receiving from employees. This will allow them to adjust the plan quickly when warranted.

Serving as the 'Face of the Franchise'

Quarterbacks are often called the "face of the franchise." As the designated leaders, they are required to meet the media – win or lose – and they have off-the-field responsibilities that other players don't have. Similarly, RIM professionals need to be the face of their PST reduction projects by being visible in the following types of ways:

- Make presentations and conduct training for employees.
- Set up a table in a commons and be available to respond to employees' questions and concerns.
- Set up a designated e-mailbox for employees' questions and answer at least some of the inquiries – particularly the difficult ones – personally.

Counting on the Whole Team

While quarterbacks may be the most crucial player on their team, being successful requires the efforts of the entire team. Reducing PSTs also takes a full team. As an example, one organization that undertook this effort had the records manager as quarterback and had supporting players from the following functions: computer forensics, litigation, compliance, project management, desktop computing, corporate communications, SharePoint support, human resources, and IT infrastructure. Why so many players?

- The forensics team was asked to identify any impact that blocking PSTs would have on its investigation and e-discovery support capabilities.
- The litigation folks needed to approve the plan for blocking and reducing PSTs so there was no accidental deletion of matter-relevant information.
- A project manager was assigned to help with meeting schedules and other administrative tasks.
- The communications team drafted and disbursed employee communications.
- SharePoint support assisted with creating an effective exception request and approval workflow process.
- IT infrastructure and desktop computing teams played obvious roles in implementing the technology changes.
- Human resources assisted with communicating the changes to the non-employees who had company e-mail boxes.

The positive of having this many groups involved was that "no stone was left unturned," and valuable input and feedback were received. The challenging aspect was that each team or individual had its own priorities, and managing them within the scope of the project took much skill. Like quarterbacks, RIM professionals have to manage people as well as know their "Xs and Os."

Being Successful

Unlike quarterbacks, who have to be born with athletic ability to become star athletes, RIM professionals can become well-skilled in the strategies and tactics needed to ensure that their PST reduction efforts will be successful. They just need to prepare diligently, keep their head in the game, and adjust the plan when needed. **END**

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