

Proactive Records Management Education

WITH KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM DISCUSSIONS, SOLUTIONS, AND STRATEGIES OF THE AIIM COMMUNITY.

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INTRODUCTION

Our traditional notions of records management are quickly changing as the tsunami of digital information that we must manage every day becomes ever more overwhelming. According to our most recent **AIIM 2021 State of the Industry Report**, members tell us that "records are everywhere" and that their organizations are losing the battle against information overload. Indeed, many members grade their organization's ability to manage the chaos as either 'poor' or 'needs improvement.' RM pros stress the need for new approaches and competencies in Intelligent Information Management.

MAKING THE GRADE

Digitizing, automating, and integrating processes is a top priority of RM practitioners today, but AIIM members point to a need for greater education and awareness when it comes to best practices, policy, and the strategic value of records management overall. A number of roadblocks stand out in our research: An immature digital culture (18%), a need for the right in-house skill sets and expertise (12%), and a general lack of a true strategy for managing information assets (24%).

One survey respondent put it this way: "Informing people, trying to make them participate, and understand why it is important is our biggest challenge." Another respondent said, "We need more success in educating individuals on why changes need to occur, especially when automating. It is important for the individuals to understand how the policy or change will improve their work environment to then gain their support."

THE CLASS IS IN SESSION

More education is needed in order to gain the level of awareness and support RM practitioners need. Thankfully, AIIM is here to provide a resource for members to explore ideas and solutions. That was the case in **a recent AIIM Community discussion** where several members explored the need to raise the profile of records and information management and educate both users and executives on best practices and strategies.

Diane Sherman, Executive Director at Clay Chapman Iwamura Pulice & Nevell, was first to spark the discussion: "Hi everyone! I am curious about proactive RM education for the masses. How do you train people in regards to:



- The full life-cycle of physical files
- What is an official Corporate Record and what is not
- Keeping staff engaged in maintaining good records
- Avoiding the reactive process of dealing with closed files that are not easily scannable due to staples, post-it notes, duplicates, or disorganization

Diane asks again: "What has your experience been with trying to educate other people in your organization?"

A number of responses and ideas were shared, including this one from **Sonia Rees**, Information Management Officer for the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission in Saint Lucia.

"I like to start from a Change Management plan, that way I can plan strategically from the highest to the lowest levels like training and reminder emails."

BE TRANSPARENT

But what can you do when training and planning don't seem to be enough? **Connie Prendergast**, Records Management Clerk for Flagstaff County in Canada, mentions that it can be helpful to consider how to make RM as transparent as possible for users. "Our office decided they didn't want the records creators and users to have to deal with any of that and we eventually discovered that our new ERMS actually can accommodate that. We are using a Transparent Records Management concept where our users place their records into the folders arranged to mirror their functions and we have controls set on those folders to tag any records that go into those folders for specific retentions."

While being more transparent is an advantage, Connie also stresses the need for hands-on administration as well. "I am the RM administrator and I monitor the documents, ensuring that the folders/retention/documents are getting tagged correctly. Once a year, the records are all pulled out to where I can set the retention timers on them, and shortcuts are left behind in the users' folders. We have special controls and automation on those folders where events trigger the start of the retention period. Records in those folders do not get pulled out until those triggers happen."

POLICY GUIDED BY COMPLIANCE

The type of business you are in and what, if any, guidelines or local laws you need to meet are important considerations. **Robin Shaw**, Records Administrator for the Metropolitan Sewer District in Louisville, KY says that they have to follow policies and retention schedules created by the Environmental Protection Agency (federal), the Kentucky Department of Environmental Protection (state), as well as many of their own local standards. "If you don't have one now, says Robin, "You will need to set up and follow a Retention Schedule for the life-cycle of the physical files that are to be kept for a time according to that schedule. Corporate Records are what is necessary to keep by law or by standards set by the company."

"Making sure the staff all keep good records is a hard one. It's like the old saying, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

Robin acknowledged the challenge of ensuring policy and practices are in place and followed. "Making sure the staff all keep good records is a hard one. It's like the old saying, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. I've been here for a long time, and I still have individuals that don't care or have just never been informed properly on how to keep the records. People will still keep piles of paper in their drawer or on their desk. The hardest part of your undertaking is getting buy-in and their understanding of how important it is to follow standards."

QUIT HORISING AROUND

Joanie Valdez, Senior Information Governance Compliance Manager at Univar Solutions, agrees with Robin's 'you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make them drink' comment when it comes to retention. "My interpretation of proactive RM education is jaded. There is a small percentage of employees that care about records. I think success is not changing people but forcing a change through the environment.

As an example, as consumers, we prefer to use checkout lines when shopping, but when cashiers are taken away, the incentive to use self-checkouts is greater; hence the environment changed. When we give too many options or do not provide limitations, people will continue doing what they do because they do not have time and lack education and motivation."

MOVING FORWARD

The role of records management is being redefined in organizations across the world. It's no longer enough to be a steward of information. Business executives are looking at records managers to play a critical role in accelerating business activities, enriching customer experiences, and improving operational agility. What is your experience with RM education? Join in the discussion and let us know! **The discussion continues here**, or go to the **AIIM Community** and start your own discussion.

