Records Management: An Approach to Getting Started
The Situation

On August 24, 2012, the Office of Management and Budget and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) issued a joint memorandum, per the presidential memorandum signed on November 28, 2011 indicating the launch of an executive branch directive to reform records management practices and policies.

In summary, the memorandum’s main objective is to promote electronic records management and to eliminate paper to the fullest possible extent.

When it comes to records management it is common for individuals to have a general idea of the basic concepts involved. However, most don’t have a solid understanding of the varying complexities that go into creating records management policies for an organization. Records Management (RM), in both the private and public sector, is often a lot more than retaining formal records (both physical and electronic) for a period of time then ultimately destroying them.

This whitepaper will provide an in-depth overview of records management, define common records management terms, define guidelines for identifying the typical key stakeholders are for an organization’s RM policies, lay out common records management terms, and will also provide some parameters for establishing a records management program within the context of Enterprise Content Management (ECM).

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Records Management - An Overview

Records management (RM) is the practice of identifying, classifying, archiving, preserving, disposing (and often destruction) of records. RM services provide business entities with secure, repeatable and verifiable compliance with RM policies as required by the Federal Records Act (the FRA, 44 U.S.C. 3101). This is accomplished through the provision of efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of evidence and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records.

Any information, regardless of whether it is in electronic or physical form that details business transactions is a record. Physical records include paper records, tapes and microfilm. Electronic records can be classified into two broad categories, structured and unstructured. Database information is considered structured and all other electronic information is considered unstructured. Unstructured records include, but are not limited to, documents, spreadsheets, presentations, audio video files, email, image files and PDF files.

Unstructured records are separate business objects and can easily be managed independent of other records in a repository for Document Management (DM) that has RM capabilities. This approach, however, does not lend itself to the structured environment. Structured records, typically information elements of databases, are managed for RM purposes. They use data fields that are incorporated into the database, or are managed using metadata constructed at various stages in the development of the data that involve complex mappings of data relationships and associations. The preferred method for affecting the disposition of structured data is mass purging or manual deletion according to strict “cutoff” instructions established for the data retention in a business entities retention policy.
Records Management As A Part of an Enterprise Content Management (ECM) Strategy

AIIM (the Association for Information and Image Management) is the leading non-profit organization focused on helping users to understand the challenges associated with managing records, documents, content and business processes. For over 60 years the organization has provided education, research and best practices to help organizations find, control and optimize their information.

AIIM describes ECM as:

“...the strategies, methods and tools used to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver content and documents related to organizational processes. ECM tools and strategies allow the management of an organization’s unstructured information, wherever that information exists.”

ECM is a grouping of technologies for Web Content Management (WCM), Collaboration Services (CS), Digital Asset Management (DAM), Document Management (DM), and Record Management (RM). (Note: In addition, Business Process Management (BPM), and Case Management (CM) are also often included in the ECM mix). These technologies provide capture, management, storage, delivery and preservation/archival services for all unstructured electronic content in an enterprise and are not limited by the type of content. Such content may involve documents, scanned electronic records, digital media, and email.

ECM incorporates services such as categorizing of content (via metadata), searching content, library services such as check-in, check-out, version control, annotating, workflow, collaboration, archiving etc. ECM provides users with targeted information, library services and editorial integrations to allow content creation and revision. By providing a virtual room through collaboration services, ECM delivers an integrated view of the information and the processes used to manage that information. Through workflow service and BPM, ECM allows integration of process and information, regardless of the information type, and its delivery regardless of the medium through which the information is consumed. ECM also manages the preservation and archival of content as part of the information lifecycle.

As part of an overall Enterprise Content Management (ECM) infrastructure, RM services are often implemented in conjunction with a Document Management (DM) implementation to manage electronic records. It is imperative to store records in a system that can apply the appropriate RM controls.

2. AIIM - What is Enterprise Content Management - http://www.aiim.org/what-is-ecm-enterprise-content-management

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The relationship between RM and ECM is depicted in **Figure 1**

As depicted in **Figure 1**, RM is an integral part of an ECM strategy that incorporates the preservation and archiving of information. For many business entities, the RM scope includes both electronic and physical records and depending on the ECM vendor, some RM platforms can handle management of both. Alfresco and Documentum, for example, are both DoD 5015.02 certified (defined in a section below), and support management of electronic and physical records. For organizations using Sharepoint requiring RM functionalities, Gimmal offers a Sharepoint extender specific to RM.

**Records Management: Under the Covers**

RM includes technologies that facilitate the capture, storage and protection of electronic records, as well as efficient and verifiable mechanisms for destroying records after they have met the retention requirements. RM leverages ECM concepts such as the capture, management, and preservation of information to ensure good record keeping. RM handles the long-term, safe storage and backup of static, unchanging information, as well as temporary storage of information that does not need to be archived. RM can also include the technologies to better manage physical records.
Functionally, RM services can:

- Provide the capability to establish standardized service-wide policies and procedures to ensure consistent records management across the enterprise.
- Integrate records management, document management and workflow activities to track records location and disposition status throughout the enterprise and lifecycle of the content.
- Assist with e-Discovery and Legal Hold policies.

Records are pieces of information that are created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. While the definition of a record is often identified strongly with a document, a record can be either a tangible object or digital information which has value to an organization. For example, tax information, correspondence and various business emails are all examples of records.

The practice of records management involves all of the following activities:

- Creating, approving, and enforcing records policies, including a classification system, a records retention policy, and a vital records policy.
- Executing a retention policy to archive or destroy records according to operational needs, operating procedures, statutes, and regulations.
- Developing a records storage plan: this includes the short and long-term housing of physical records and digital information, as well as disaster recovery.
- Identifying existing and newly created records, classifying them, and then storing them according to standard operating procedures.
- Coordinating the user access and circulation of records both inside and outside of an organization.

Often, a records management system helps to aid in the capture, classification, and ongoing management of records throughout their lifecycle. Such a system may be paper based (such as index cards as used in a library), or may be a computer system, such as an electronic records management application.
Getting Started- How to Understand Records Management within Your Organization

Step 1: Research Best Practices and Policies

Effective records management requires the creation and maintenance of records that document key business functions. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is an independent agency with the core function of overseeing federal records management in compliance with the Federal Records Act. In addition to policy and regulations, NARA develops records management best practices and guidelines that are designed for Federal Agencies but can be applied in both the public and private sectors.

NARA offers a variety of resources that are available to records management through their website. Researching some of these basic concepts and best practices are an excellent way to begin the process of understanding what all needs to be addressed in your RM system. Some of these resources include:

- RM implementation strategies
- How to develop a retention schedule and determine disposition
- List of various Records Management related laws and their governing authorities
- How to select sustainable formats for electronic records
- Online training courses
- How to conduct a records inventory

Step 2: Getting Started - Identify Key Stakeholders

The primary responsibility of a records manager is to manage records according to a formal file plan set forth by a governing body. Because of their unique perspective and requirements, it is paramount to incorporate these individuals in the RM planning process from the beginning.

Once you have researched best practices for RM policies, a good way to start employing this knowledge into your organization is to schedule meetings with key stakeholders in different parts of your organization who might have their own input/needs as far as how their specific records need to be managed and maintained.
There are several typical key stakeholders involved in an organization's record keeping, though each specific organization certainly has their own needs and requirements. Listed below are some general records that can provide a good starting point for scheduling meetings with your identified stakeholders. Some good key places to get started are:

- **Human Resources**
  - Employee Information
  - Complaints
- **Accounting**
  - Tax Information
  - Payroll Documents
  - Financial Report
- **Legal Department**
  - Sales Contracts
  - Purchasing Agreements
  - Partner Agreements
  - Land Use Contract
  - Trademark Registration and Patents
- **General**
  - Articles of Incorporation
  - Company Policies & Procedures
  - Operating Report

Once you have set up these meetings and mapped out various records in your organization, you should be able to better understand who else would be involved in a records management solution.

**Step 3: Participate in an ECM Program Charter**

When establishing a RM System within your organization, it is crucial to understand the organization's enterprise content strategy as a whole. This will help you in understanding:

- Where the records are coming from?
- Who all is involved with the creation, maintenance, and preservation of various records?
- What department has control over the record?
- What format the records are in?
- What is the records final destination?
As an example, each business process that generates revenue must have the critical records for that process defined in the RM handbook and applicable policies and procedures developed to address them. An Enterprise Content Management system that works in conjunction with an organization’s Records Management system will provide for better lifecycle management of the records while simultaneously simplifying the access to critical information.

Establishing an ECM Charter, Program, and ECM Advisory Board within your organization is a key element in the success of an enterprise content strategy. An ECM Charter and Program will be your blueprint for ECM standards, policies, and procedures. An ECM Advisory Board will include all stakeholders from the inception of the ECM rollout through production level support and maintenance of your ECM system.

Part of the standards, policies, and procedures should include records management---not as an afterthought, but as part of the initial and ongoing overall strategy. (For full comprehensive tips for starting an ECM implementation project see the Armedia whitepaper on “Creating an ECM Advisory Board and Program Charter”2 by Ronda Ringo.)

**Step 4: Create an RM Handbook- Define the Policies**

The concept of a RM Handbook is to create an outline which prescribes the various policies and procedures for managing the records of the organization. There are several key components to RM that we will cover in this portion of the whitepaper. Each of these key RM concepts should be carefully considered and clearly spelled out in a RM Handbook, including: compliance requirements- the DoD 5015.02 Standard, records vs. non-records, retention policies, disposition, records declaration policies and procedures.

1. **The DoD Standard - What does it mean**

The U.S. Department of Defense’s (DoD) Design Criteria Standard for Electronic Records Management (ERM) Software Applications, better known as DoD 5015.02, debuted in 1997. Since then, it has become a de-facto standard that organizations in both the public and private sectors, including the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), readily endorse.

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2. Armedia Whitepaper: Creating an ECM Advisory Board and Program Charter by Ronda Ringo
In 1996 Joint Interoperability Test Command (JITC) began to draft the standard. It took into account NARA and other federal RM directives, incorporated research provided by Australian and Canadian standards, and developed requirements for managing email as records. The result was DoD 5015.02, Design Criteria Standard for Electronic Records Management Software Applications. JITC remains responsible for maintaining the standard and administering the software certification testing program.

Revised in June 2002, the DoD 5015.02 standard defines mandatory functionality for RM software used within the DoD. Each mandatory functional requirement is included because it relates to U.S. federal regulation and/or NARA policy; these are listed in the DoD 5015.02 standard document’s references section. In June 2002 a new version called Chapter Four was added which contains requirements for records management applications supporting classified (i.e., secret) records. Other differences from the 1997 version include expanded requirements for audit, more functionality for user-defined metadata fields, and additional email requirements.

Each mandatory requirement has several subparts, and each subpart specifies particular functionality. Required functionality reflects the way basic electronic record keeping practices work in government. This is important because such practices collectively form a model, a construct, for how the records management software must work. All records management software--whether for paper or electronic records, whether for DoD use or not--must be configured to mirror an organization’s underlying model of recordkeeping practices in order to work at all.

NARA has endorsed the U.S. DoD 5015.02-STD as an “adequate and appropriate basis for addressing the basic challenges of managing records in the automated environment that increasingly characterizes the creation and use of records.” Records management vendors can be certified as compliant with the DoD 5015.02-STD after verification from the JITC. This is accomplished after the vendors have built test case procedures, have written detailed and summary final reports on 5015.02 certified products, and performed on-site inspection of software.
2. Records VS. Non-Records

Organizations should clearly think through what information will be considered as ‘records’ and what information will be considered as ‘non-records’. Often this basic framework is overlooked and must be considered.

Per the DoD 5015.02 standard, a record is defined as – “The information, regardless of medium, that details business transactions.”\(^3\) That means that according to this definition, records include all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, and other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics. An Agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business makes or receives them. The records are preserved or appropriate for preservation by that Agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the value of data in the records. Once an entity determines what should be classified as formal records, then the Records Manager can ultimately create an RM Handbook describing the policies and procedures for managing all records – both electronic and physical.

A. Characteristics of Records

Regardless of the definition variations and interpretations, the underlying hallmarks of a record are the same. A record requires authenticity, reliability, integrity, and usability.\(^4\)

- **Authenticity**: the record is a “true” item – an accurate representation of a transaction or activity, as purported by its creator at the time of creation.
- **Reliability**: the record can be relied upon to be a trusted source of the information it contains.
- **Integrity**: the record has not been and cannot be altered. It is complete in form and data.
- **Usability**: the record can be repeatedly retrieved throughout its lifecycle and used as an authoritative source of the information contained within it.

If an item fails any of these criteria, it is not a record.

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B. Vital Records

A Vital Record is a type of record that is defined as any recorded information, regardless of format (i.e., electronic, paper, photo, database, magnetic tape), that must be protected in the event of an emergency or disaster because of severe consequences if the record is lost or destroyed. They are records that, if lost or destroyed, would be both costly and time consuming to recreate - if they can be recreated at all. They can be active (currently used by an organization) or inactive (in storage).

C. Non Records

Non-records are items, regardless of media type, that do not contribute, describe or provide evidence of the activities of an organization. An example of a non-record is an email from one co-worker to another about lunch. Other examples of non-records include: documents that can be altered and have not been finalized, such as document drafts; museum and archival showpieces; voicemails, instant messages, or junk emails that have no connection to the organization’s activities; and employees’ personal documents, such as letters or notes stored in an organization’s filing cabinets, desk drawers or computer network.\(^5\) (Note: although the artifacts above are often considered non-records, ANY of the above aforementioned artifacts could become a record due to content or if considered as evidence in a court of law. Example, court precedence indicates that even a napkin with written words on it has been considered a record.)

Additionally, criteria and eligibility to become a record is dependent entirely upon the content and context of the item, not the form or medium of the item. For example, many organizations classify all emails as records, and protect them as such through classification and archiving. This common desire is misguided and can be costly. The decision that all emails are records results in unnecessarily saving thousands of emails that do not meet the definition of a record. Managing this unnecessarily consumes much of an organization’s valuable IT and personnel resources.

Instead, organizations should evaluate items for their content and context, and protect them as records only if the definition and criteria for a record are met. The remaining items are non-records and can be disposed of in accordance with policies that are laid out by the organization.

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3. Declare
When a record is stored in a RM system and records retention policies are applied to it, it is considered declared. A record continues to maintain its content and metadata, but at the time of declaration a records management object is created, which may or may not be stored in the same repository and has its own pertinent metadata.

4. File Plan
Each organization has many diverse topics under which it accumulates records. The breakdown of these topics from the general to the very specific is known as the File Plan. A File Plan is a document containing the identifying number, title, description, and disposition authority of files held or used in an office. This concept is very similar to the way in which a librarian would use the Dewey Decimal System.

When applied within the records management application, the file plan allows for records to be organized in a way that allows for users to control the life cycle of records, maintain relationships among records and participants, and to provide for filing in a logical manner.

5. Taxonomy
Taxonomy, sometimes referred to as categorization, is a group of coordinated, but mutually exclusive controlled vocabularies or facets used to consistently organize information throughout an enterprise. Taxonomy is sometimes used when describing the structure of the File Plan.
6. Records Metadata

Records metadata is structured information that describes, explains, locates, or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use, or manage the record. The records management application, for example, could automatically populate data fields while maintaining the ability for authorized users to manually enter in metadata when deemed appropriate.

Once an item has been declared a record and is stored with the proper records retention rules applied, a new object is created which belongs independently to the records management system. This new item is called the Records Management Object. The metadata that is applied to this object, which describes this object, is the records management metadata. Typically this information includes the record series, disposition date, retention schedule, date created etc.

Often records are searched for, so it is common that some fields be configured as mandatory upon record declaration. Another use for adding metadata would be to add certain properties to content upon ingestion so the system can automatically apply RM policies based on rules configured to those properties. This method provides seamless automation of records and document management with very little manual user interaction.

7. Retention Schedule

A retention schedule is the organizational policy that details record types, record series and indicates the length of time a record is to be maintained as well as disposition instructions. It is commonly accomplished by legal research that documents current requirements and considerations for records management and document retention. It commonly consists of:

- Company/industry specific record classes and categories
- Criteria for a class of documents/artifacts becoming an active record
- Length of time each class of documents/artifacts should be retained as an active record
- Reason for its retention
- Final Disposition Method
8. Holds
Holds are the suspension of records’ retention periods due to litigation, audits, or investigations.

This is an important aspect of a records management system as records could be edited or disposed of prematurely if this capability is not included in the planning stage. If a record is changed, that record is no longer a valid legal document and sanctions, penalties and fines could result depending on the type of document.

9. Disposition
Once the life of a record has been satisfied according to its predetermined period and there are no legal holds pending, the record is authorized for final disposition. Disposition may include destruction, transfer, or permanent preservation. The Federal Records ACT (FRA) defines disposition as those actions taken regarding records no longer needed for the conduct of the regular current business of the agency. These actions include:

- The transfer of records to Agency storage facilities or Federal Record Centers (FRCs).
- The transfer of records from one federal agency to another.
- The transfer of permanent records to NARA.
- The disposal of records no longer needed to conduct agency business, usually by destruction or, occasionally, by donation of temporary records to an eligible person or organization after the authorized retention period has expired and after NARA has approved the donation.

A. The Disposition Authority
The Disposition Authority is the authority figure besides the records manager who is responsible for liaising with the RM to set up the policies on that category/document set. For example, the CFO is usually the Data Owner for ALL the Finance related documents and they cannot be disposed of until their signature is received.
10. Destruction

In records management, the primary type of disposal action is destruction. Methods of destroying records include selling or salvaging the record medium as well as burning, pulping, shredding, macerating, or discarding it with other waste materials. Once records are destroyed, a physical proof of destruction needs to be created by the entity carrying out the destruction process. This certification is called the destruction certificate. The destruction certificate can be in any medium i.e. paper, email, electronic document or database entry etc.

Step 5: Choose a Software Platform

While an organization’s records management requirements might not be as detailed as the DoD5015.02 Standard, organizations can implement a platform that utilizes any combination of the criteria outlined above in order to obtain a solution that fits their exact needs.

RM software applications can alleviate many of the problems associated with manual record status and declaration. In addition, they can automatically help manage vital records, records ‘holds’ and even retention schedules. These applications provide a framework for the intake and protection of records and ensure that they are maintained for their appropriate time in the information lifecycle.

Alfresco Records Management and Documentum Records Management, e.g., are both DoD5015.02 certified products that can handle both electronic and physical records management and work in conjunction with the enterprise content management environment. For additional insight into how to get started with using an ECM tool like Alfresco Records Management, please refer to the Armedia blog “Alfresco Records Management – An Approach to Implementation Part I” by Deja Nichols.

Conclusion

As we have discussed in this whitepaper, there are many items that need to be considered when implementing a records management solution within your organization.

The key to implementing a new records management system into your organization is to follow a few simple steps:

- **Research Existing RM Policies and Best Practices** - Research NARA or other records management organizations to understand what “best practices” are for a records management system.
- **Identify the Key Stakeholders Within Your Organization** – Understand the different types of records that your organization deals with and who within your organization is responsible for their management. Incorporate these key people into your process.
- **Participate in an ECM Charter** – Understand the role that records management plays within the whole of your organizations enterprise content strategy.
- **Create an RM Handbook** – Identify what your organization’s policies and procedures will be for various types of records, including what qualifies as a record, how they need to be stored, and how long the record needs to be kept.
- **Choose a Software Platform** – Once you understand the items in Steps 1 – 4, you can accurately choose a Records Management application that fits your organizations needs.

The guidelines and concepts that are outlined in this whitepaper should provide you with a good understanding as to the items that need to carefully be thought about and discussed ahead of a new system being implemented.

For more information, read about Armedia’s Record Management Services at www.armedia.com/records.php
About Armedia

Armedia is a technology firm, focusing on information and content management solutions. Armedia has industry-acclaimed expertise, services and products in Content Intelligence, Big Data Analytics, Case Management Enterprise Content Management, Mobile Technologies, Open Source. Armedia has experience providing these services on various platforms, including: Alfresco, Drupal, EMC Documentum, IBM FileNet, Microsoft SharePoint and the Apple iPad. Armedia has also won many industry and business awards, including: Stevie Website of the Year, InfoWorld 100, multiple Inc 5000, Pacesetter, Atlanta’s Best Place to Work, Atlanta’s Best and Brightest. Armedia’s mission is to provide world-class solutions to its clients and assist them in achieving tangible returns on their technology investments.

Armedia is a GSA Schedule IT-70 holder, and is CMMI Level 3 appraised. Armedia has offices in Atlanta, GA; Huntsville, AL; Newport News, VA; and Vienna, VA.

For more information visit Armedia’s website at http://www.armedia.com/