



## Information Protection in a Down Economy

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We know that just about all businesses are not doing as well as they were 2-3 years ago. As a result there have been concerted efforts to cut operating expenses where ever possible. Staff positions are often not being replaced when people leave or retire. Often these steps actually result in efficiency improvements which mean you are "doing more with less". During normal times, there is less thought given to re-engineering business processes. It is usually in times of stress that workflows are examined and improved. It is not unusual in these times that staff members who are engaged in records and information management are either not replaced or their roles are incorporated into another job category. This is bad business. The information manager should be charged with the task of reducing the costs and improving the efficiency of storing and retrieving critical information instead of getting sacked. The return on investment of this approach will far exceed the saved salary and benefits.

It has been extensively reported that the many organizations have inadequate records and information management programs. A recent AIIM survey reported that at least 30% of all records are completely unmanaged in the participating organizations. Legacy information is normally stored on a variety of media, paper and electronic. There are an unspecified number of internal and external locations at which this information is stored and it is common practice to keep most records "forever". There are many other statistics reported in various studies. Perhaps the one that is difficult to dispute is that professionals can spend up to half of their time looking for internally generated information and external publications. Any improvement in the information retrieval process will certainly improve efficiency and facilitate the speed in which business decisions are made.

In order to harvest the information efficiency improvements, there must first be a records management policy in place. This is the foundation on which subsequent improvements will be made. The second step is to identify and categorize existing records and assign retention times. This facilitates the organization of information making it easier to find and share. The retention schedules should be applied immediately to all newly authored records. A retention designation of permanent is not acceptable. All records need to be examined periodically. Things change; organizations are bought, sold, partitioned and reorganized frequently. Once they are tagged as permanent they fall into a black hole and incur ever increasing maintenance costs regardless of their media. The record pile in the black hole will continue to increase with time making it very difficult to find useful information. Legacy records can be tagged and examined for possible



destruction as time permits. If there is a large backlog of legacy records in external warehouses this is a good place to immediately reap benefits by reducing monthly fees.

The long term storage of electronic records is more complex than for paper. Technology is changing almost daily and the ability to retrieve and read an electronic record in the future must be carefully planned. One possible solution is to print and store them as paper records. This approach could work, but again there has to be a plan to be able to find them in the black hole.