

Why You Should Consider Electronic Records Management (ERM) – The Top Ten Reasons

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Summary: Electronic Document and Records Management Systems (EDRMS) are computer based systems designed to store a wide range of electronic documents and file types. These systems can store documents/files created from a variety of programs including Microsoft Office applications, Adobe applications, e-mail, video files, audio files and many others. Numerous organizations have started scanning their paper documents to store them electronically and an EDRMS offers the ability to save these documents in a location that is secure, searchable, easy to use and can manage the lifecycle of the document automatically (retention). Image Advantage Solutions Inc. has had experience working with a wide range of electronic records management systems in various professional environments and has developed *The Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Consider Electronic Records Management (ERM)*.

Top 10 Reasons:

1. Save employee(s) time in finding and accessing needed documents
2. Easy to distribute documents throughout an organization and to the public if needed
3. No more lost files
4. Version Control - everyone is accessing the most current version(s) of a document(s) with the ability to see how a document changes over time
5. Greatly improves decision making processes in an organization
6. Reduces paper records filing costs and makes it possible to move documents off-site freeing up valuable floor space
7. Makes it possible to easily back-up documents in case of disaster (flood, fire, theft, etc...)
8. Saves on wear and tear of paper records
9. Makes it possible to easily comply with Government and ISO Standards
10. Increases the ability to securely store confidential documents

1. Save Employee(s) Time in Finding and Accessing Needed Documents

EDRMS often provide a wide range of searching capabilities that make it very easy to locate needed documents within seconds compared to minutes, hours or even days to locate paper records. EDRMS allow you to search on keywords, titles and/or metadata tags and also full text searching of the text inside the actual documents. This allows users to search an entire document repository of an organization quickly, thoroughly and efficiently.

2. Easy to Distribute Documents Throughout an Organization and to the Public if Needed

Electronic documents/files are much easier to share with colleagues, clients and/or the public because they can be accessed through a network connection, email or a website in a controlled and secured manner. Paper documents often require printing, photocopying, mailing and/or storage costs to distribute so EDRMS can offer a number of cost saving alternatives to sharing documents. The stages needed to complete the distribution of hardcopy documents is also time consuming so there are also savings in employee time and costs as well.

3. No More Lost Files

There are a number of studies that discuss the high costs associated with lost documents and having them replaced. An EDRMS allows documents to be stored in a central location where everyone accesses them from the same place using the same file classification system. With proper file classification it is easy to know where documents are supposed to be stored, and even if a document is incorrectly classified it can be easily found and moved to its proper location using the advanced search functionality.

4. Version Control - Everyone is accessing the most current version(s) of a document(s) with the ability to see how a document changes over time

Version control provides an “orderly” process that standardizes how documents are updated/changed. This offers a number of benefits including accountability, ability to view previous changes quickly and easily, and also makes it possible to go back to a previous version of a document if a mistake was made during an earlier change.

5. Greatly Improves Decision Making Processes in an Organization

With it possible to locate needed documents in a timely and complete manner, it helps improve the day to day operation of an organization and the ability to make correct and well-informed decisions.

6. Reduces Paper Records Filing Costs and Makes it Possible to Move Documents Off-Site Freeing Up Valuable Floor Space

The cost of commercial property and the requirement to store documents for extended periods of time for legal, administrative and archival requirements means that paper based document storage competes with staff for floor space within an organization. Storing documents as electronic files in an EDRMS can greatly reduce the amount of storage space required for paper documents. Many organizations are required to keep certain document types as paper for legal reasons but these can now be moved to a less expensive and less valuable location.

7. Makes it Possible to Easily Back-Up Documents in Case of Disaster (flood, fire, theft, etc...)

EDRMS make it possible to back up electronic files in a redundant fashion that can be kept in a number of locations, including off-site, to protect the irreplaceable data from any disaster. The data could be reinstalled onto a new server within a couple hours to have an organization up and running again.

8. Saves on Wear and Tear of Paper Records

Most organizations have a certain collection of hardcopy documents that have a very high historical and/or archival value (by-laws, minutes, maps, contracts, agreements, etc...). Digitizing the vital documents and storing them in an EDRMS reduces the requirement to access the hardcopy file so it can be protected and stored in a location that extends its lifetime.

9. Makes it Possible to Easily Comply with Government and ISO Standards

Organizations that use closed systems to create, modify, maintain, or transmit electronic records have the ability to employ procedures and controls designed to ensure the authenticity, integrity, and, when appropriate, the confidentiality of electronic records, and to ensure that the signer cannot readily repudiate the signed record as not authentic. The combination of numerous security controls, audit trails, archiving and disaster recover options ensure that an organization is able to authenticate the validity of information stored in the EDRMS and demonstrate compliance with regulations and requirements.

10. Increases the Ability to Securely Store Confidential Documents

An EDRMS provides a wide range of opportunities to control and protect sensitive and/or confidential documents. Most EDRMS allow access to documents to be controlled at a number of levels ranging from a folder level all the way down to a document level. The type of access to a specific document or groups of documents can range from read-only access to the ability to make alterations to the document all the way to being able to delete documents. Paper documents stored in a traditional filing cabinet or filing room have the same level of security for all documents, for example, if you have access to the cabinet you have access to all items in it. An EDRMS also has an audit trail on all documents so it is easy to see who viewed a document, who made changes to a document, who deleted a document, etc... and when they did it.