



What You Must Do Prior to Implementing an Electronic Records Management System

Technical Article

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Summary: Organizations often purchase Electronic Records Management Systems without developing a proper strategy beforehand. These systems are often purchased from photocopier dealers who have little or no experience in records management. This often leads to the system being set-up and organized in a way where it does not function properly if at all. This Whitepaper outlines the steps to properly plan and implement an Electronic Records Management System.

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to describe the steps that must be taken prior to purchasing an Electronic Records Management System (ERMS).

Steps

1. Analysis of Paper Based System

It is impossible to properly implement an Electronic Records Management System if there is not a thorough understanding of the paper based system. This analysis is often performed departmentally and typically includes:

- a. department group
- b. document type
- c. volume of documents
- d. description of paper size (letter, legal, large format, etc.)
- e. description of paper type (bond, fax, NCR, blueprint, etc.)
- f. indexing structure
- g. search criteria
- h. file retention schedule
- i. security
- j. requirement for later scanning

2. Analysis of Electronic Documents

It is also very important to know the location and types of electronic documents. This analysis is typically performed departmentally as well, along with the assistance of the IT department. This analysis usually consists of:

- a) department group
- b) document type
- c) volume of electronic documents (amount of storage required)
- d) file and program type (Word, WordPerfect, AutoCad, etc.)
- e) indexing structure
- f) search criteria
- g) file retention schedule
- h) security
- i) location (server, individual hard drives)
- j) location and size of backup files

3. Analysis of Email Requirements

Many emails are records of the organization and should be treated as such. There are two methods that can be utilized to deal with these records. 1) all incoming and outgoing emails are saved into the system (a bit big brotherish) or 2) have the users determine what is a record of the organization and only save these e-mails into the system as they would with any other type of record. If the second choice is made then there must be clear records management policy regarding the saving and retention of emails and it must be strictly adhered to.

4. Workflow

Paper and electronic documents enter and are created within an organization and then flow through it in often predictable patterns. There should be a detailed analysis performed departmentally of the workflow.

5. Analysis of Existing Computer Infrastructure

There must be an analysis of the existing computer infrastructure in cooperation with the IT Department which would include:

- a) server(s) (type, software, processing power)
- b) server(s) storage (how may Gigabytes/Terabytes)
- c) network (type, speed)
- d) workstations (number, speed)
- e) scanners
- f) multifunctional Devices

6. Backup

- How is the current system backed up?
- Is there room for expansion?
- Is there redundancy?
- Is there off-site backup?
- Is there a RAID?
- Is there SAN's or NAS's?

7. Creation of File Classification System

Once the previous steps have been completed there should be a departmental file classification system created. This is a system that completely details every type of document throughout the organization whether it be paper or electronic. The File Classification System must include:

- a) department (Primary Classification)
- b) type of document (Secondary Classification)
- c) retention
- d) security
- e) index fields
- f) scanning importance

8. Analysis of Electronic Records Management System Requirements

The requirements for an Electronic Records Management System may now be defined. It is also useful to assign a priority level to each feature to help with the final selection of the Electronic Records Management System. These features could include:

- a) ability to scan documents directly into system
- b) import all of the different types of electronic records of the organization
- c) enter and search by multiple index fields
- d) search by multiple criteria
- e) multi level folder structure
- f) integrate with Microsoft applications
- g) client server and web access
- h) viewer for different types of files including CAD
- i) batch upload of files with associated indexing metadata
- j) check in/check out
- k) revision control
- l) workflow
- m) email management
- n) ability to integrate with multifunctional devices
- o) ability to integrate with SharePoint
- p) ability to integrate with GIS systems
- q) ability to use multiple storage devices and servers
- r) Active Directory synchronization
- s) audit trail
- t) full text search capability
- u) ability to link documents
- v) annotation and redaction
- w) local support and training
- x) zonal OCR
- y) retention scheduling
- z) auto numbering

Purchase of Electronic Records Management System

The ability to purchase a suitable Electronic Records Management System for your organization is one of the most important decisions that can be made. Selecting the right system and having it set-up properly will greatly increase the productivity and capability of your organization for years into the future.

A Request for Information (RFI) should be created with a brief description of the requirements for the system. These RFI's should be analyzed by your Management and IT staff and at least five vendors chosen from it. There should then be a Request for Proposal (RFP) send to those vendors. These vendors should then be allowed to perform presentations on their systems. The presentation and proposals should then be evaluated using the Analysis in Section 8 above. The requirements could be ranked by order of importance.

Installation

The software vendor may then begin the installation of the system and the training of staff. Some new hardware may have to be added such as scanners and backup devices. The post installation duties are as follows:

- a) hardware additions to support system (scanners, backup devices, etc.)
- b) installation of software system
- c) testing of software system
- d) implementation of the file classification system
- e) assigning of users and rights
- f) training of staff
- g) defining of workflows
- h) backfile conversion (scanning of documents into the system, usually by a third party service)
- i) on-going support and training

Consultants

Most organizations don't have the records management staff with the expertise to perform all of the above steps. The use of a qualified consultant can make this process much easier and will provide a much more organized and effective Electronic Document Management System for the future.

Conclusion

The purchase of an Electronic Records Management System is one of the most important decisions that your organization will make and will affect the operation of the institution for years into the future. It is well worth spending the time and effort prior to the install to ensure the proper implementation and organization at the beginning. The benefits of such a system properly installed are great and the organization will enjoy the great increase in efficiency and security for many years in the future.

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