



E-mail communication making an impact

In recent years electronic mail (e-mail) has become a more widely used form of intra- and inter-organizational communication, surpassing hard copy letters and memos, according to the *Information Management*

Journal. In fact, in 2003 there were 24 billion e-mails sent per day in the world, with 40 percent attributed to North America. It is estimated that over 36 billion messages will be sent daily in 2005.¹

Much of the expansion of e-mail communication has come from companies and their employees finding that e-mail can be very efficient and accessible. With the professional workforce becoming increasingly mobile, employees not only utilize their office PC workstations, they are relying more and more on laptops and personal communications devices for correspondence.

The convenience and mobility of e-mail communications has also lead to other contributing factors in its increase in use. With the new tools of business comes new ways of doing business and the acceptance that work and communications can be done 24 hours a day, seven days a week from almost anywhere. Workers report that they are working longer hours, mostly due to increased

communication. In fact, many have come into work on a Monday and faced an inbox full from the weekend's communication.

The bottom line is that with the ability to communicate more easily from anywhere and at anytime, electronic mail is not only growing in volume but in importance. Prior to e-mail, most communication was conducted over the phone, with a smaller percentage done in formal written business correspondence. This means that never before has so much business information been captured in the written form.

Increasingly, e-mail management issues have come to the forefront for records managers and technology providers. With the volume of e-mail records surpassing most any other type of records generated, there is a staggering amount of vital information being captured and transmitted.

Although e-mail has brought about new opportunities and efficiencies for organizations, it has also introduced new challenges. Companies have to determine how to manage their burgeoning e-mail files and set policies for retention and destruction. Also, recent corporate scandals have proven that proper management of corporate information including e-mail is critical to organizational accountability. In fact, regulatory agencies have made the issue of records management, on all levels, a priority.

It is important that companies don't overlook the emerging importance of e-mail information, but rather embrace it by managing it properly and fully leveraging its business benefits. ■

¹ According to TechRepublic "What the Sarbanes-Oxley Act means for IT managers." March 19, 2003



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E-mail as a vital record

Are you properly retaining your e-mail?

Some experts contend that e-mail is not a record in and of itself, rather it is a vehicle of communication that may contain items or attachments that should become records of the company. There is also debate afoot as to whether the e-mail itself is a record. Consider the fact that retention requirements for records,

paper or electronic, are determined by their content, not the method of delivery, meaning that both e-mails and their attachments could become corporate records. Knowing what e-mail or attachment to save as a record is often difficult and complex.

When does an e-mail become a vital record?

Today, many people use e-mail as a mix of business and casual correspondence, and this type of mixed communication can make it difficult to determine whether an e-mail should be saved as a corporate record. A record is defined as

any document that is *fundamental* to the continued life of the company. A vital record is one that is *essential* to the continued life of the company. Determining what e-mail or attachment is a vital record may involve asking yourself a few simple questions to identify what constitutes a record for your specific needs.

- 1) Does the e-mail have functional value? In other words, is it necessary for the company to perform its daily function.
- 2) Does the e-mail have legal value? This may involve checking into legal requirements for records retention at the federal, state or local levels or for any other regulatory guidelines.
- 3) Does the e-mail have fiscal value? If it is related to the financial transactions of the company it

may be recalled for tax or audit purposes. 4) Does the e-mail have historical value? If the e-mail documents a significant event or person within the company it may be archived for future research.

E-mail retention

Many companies are aware of the importance of a sound document retention and destruction policy that includes both paper-based and electronic documents such as e-mail. Consider some points as outlined in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. While most provisions of the Act focus on financial records, they were clearly not meant to stop there. For example, during an investigation, discovery requests can be submitted to IT departments. Such requests could require access to all e-mail communication.

One method of electronic storage is backup tapes. With backup tapes, generally all e-mails and attachments are "dumped" onto the tape and saved for the proper retention period. The advantage to this method is two-fold. All e-mails and attachments are saved and they do not rely upon the subjective analysis to determine whether or not they are vital records. One challenge with storing all e-mails however, can arise when the company is asked to provide e-mail records as evidence in any type of investigation. Backup tapes do not allow for the restoration of departmental or individual mailboxes, which could result in a considerable amount of time and expense spent restoring all backup media and providing the requested data.

In an effort to address the challenge concerning electronic storage of e-mail and other electronic records, many organizations have resorted to printing and filing each individual message and attachment as a means to managing electronic records in a physical format. While this may solve the problem in the short term, implementing this type of storage solution creates a host of costly long-term problems, such as the need for more storage space associated with paper file management.



E-mail as a vital record *cont.*

Another potential solution to the electronic records management dilemma is a single records repository for both paper and electronic records, including e-mails and attachments. A repository helps standardize records management processes companywide, allowing users to easily manage records in various formats. Utilizing a repository allows a company to collect and store all related records into logical folders and associate these folders with existing archived records. The folders are retrieved using key words or indexes. An integral database is used to search for folders containing specific indexing information. The records are easily accessed for customer service audits, compliance, investigations or routine business.

E-mail communication on the rise

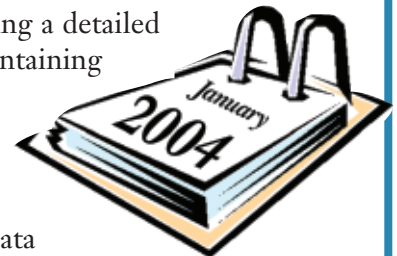
Companies must acknowledge the importance of e-mail retention and the role that storage plays. Doing business via e-mail is expected to increase not only in number of messages, but also in size per message due to attachments. In fact, according to an article on the TechRepublic website, dated March 2003, many companies will experience e-mail storage growth of more than 50 percent in one year. ■

Tips on e-mail retention

1. Meet to develop simple rules. IT managers, records managers, auditors, corporate attorneys should all have input. Decide on:
 - a. what constitutes a record
 - b. an appropriate retention period
 - c. how the record will be stored
 - d. who is responsible for filing the record (sender vs. recipient)
2. A 30-day cycle is recommended. Removing old e-mails from the server forces the user to determine whether or not the e-mail is a vital record.
3. Broaden your e-mail management policies. Limiting the physical size of the mailbox is not a retention rule. Doing some extra work upfront to develop retention rules and train people in how to use them will mean less storage space problems down the road for the administrator.

SYSTEC Solutions: Kick off the new year with tidy records

A records inventory is an important step in managing your vital records. Having a detailed listing of the volume, scope and complexity of your records is essential to maintaining productivity within your organization. Whether you need to purge, merge, image or destroy records, reducing the number of files in your inventory can reduce your overhead costs for storage and maintenance. Your SYSTEC representative can identify duplicate records or recommend files for inactive storage. We'll conduct a physical document or file inventory and collect the data into an accurate database of your entire file system, bringing your file system to the next level of control.



For more information on how SYSTEC can help you better manage your information assets, contact us at 1-877-7SYSTEC or e-mail us at info@systecgroup.com.



Records inventory keeps you up-to-date

Records and files, electronic and paper, are an organization's lifeblood. Keeping records up-to-date, properly managed and easily accessible is fundamental to keeping an organization healthy. Many companies are incorporating annual records inventories as a part of their records management practices.

A "records inventory" is a detailed listing of the volume, scope, and integrity of an organization's records. It can offer an opportune time to purge, merge or archive records. An inventory of records should be done at least annually, following your records retention schedule or as a specific situation requires.

Why inventory my records?

There are many reasons for doing a records inventory. Storage space is one driving force behind an inventory. As file cabinets fill up with paper documents or electronic storage space becomes minimal, purging, merging or imaging inactive records, or destroying archived records based on your retention policy can keep your record inventories up-to-date and in order. An inventory can also provide a check to see if all files are complete and all vital elements of a record are included and up-to-date. A records inventory can even save your company money. In one instance, a Chicago-based company was able to reduce the amount it was paying in corporate insurance by proving that its personnel records were complete and current. An organization may be called upon to provide its records in a legal audit or investigation. Without a current inventory, the gathering process can be time consuming and costly in administrative hours.

There are other ways an organization can benefit from a records inventory. Keeping records current will provide a more efficient work environment. The storage media will not be overburdened

with inactive records. By performing an inventory and compiling a report, an organization can benefit by realizing deficiencies in its record keeping, in both records content and records retention, and implement improvements. An inventory can sometimes even initiate a review of records retention policies within the organization.

Records inventories are neither easy nor inexpensive, but in this knowledge and information age, no organization can afford to leave this critical organizational asset to chance. Only through a comprehensive inventory can records and information management performance be at its best or be measured and evaluated so that it can be continually improved. ■

STEPS TO CONDUCTING A RECORDS INVENTORY

1. Define the goal of the inventory. Is it to reduce storage, prepare to merge or purge records, or identify specific records management problems?
2. Define the scope of the inventory; it should include all records, paper and electronic, and supporting documents.
3. Decide on the information to be collected (the elements of the inventory). Materials should be located, described, and evaluated in terms of use.
4. Prepare an inventory form or database to suit your needs.
5. Decide who will conduct the inventory. Contact an outside vendor or train personnel internally.
6. Perform the inventory under management's direction, keeping everyone informed at every stage.
7. Conduct the inventory, verify and analyze the results.



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