

# Chapter 17

## Towards Electronic Records Management Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

*Records are a vital business resource and are key to the effective functioning and accountability of the organization. Efficient management of records is essential in order to support organization's core business activities, to comply with legal and regulatory obligations, and to provide a high quality service to individuals. Electronic records management programme ensures that the organizational business activities are well documented, organized and managed, accessible, protected from unauthorized access and disposed off (either destroyed or archived). Credible and dependable information systems are desired to achieve this. Also, adequate skills sets are required by personnel working with and managing electronic records. The relevance of all these are articulated in this chapter.*

### INTRODUCTION

Records are documentary evidence of transactions made or received in pursuance of legal obligations regardless of the physical form or characteristics of the media. They are a class of information identified by the particular functions they perform in support of business, accountability and cultural heritage. They substantiate who did what, where, and when. It is an essential business function with responsibility cascading to every level of

decision-making. Many record keeping functions have been automated or streamlined so they are not as labour intensive (and therefore costly) as they were in the traditional record keeping environment. The advent of automated records, often called electronic records or e-records, has dominated most offices today.

Electronic records (e-records) are information generated electronically and stored by means of computer technology. Electronic records are fragile in nature due to change in hardware and software used for their storage, processing and use, making them prone to high risks. If damaged

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or deteriorated, restoration is a difficult task, if not impossible. Electronic records have short life expectancy dependent on the average service life of the hardware and software required to read and process them. As a result, creating, using and managing e-records in a digitized and globalized world are a challenging venture that must be well thought-out, planned and implemented. This can only be achieved with a well articulated records management programme in place. Though, there seems to be an international standard for the management of e-records as prepared by the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) and the World Bank for Commonwealth Countries (National Archives of Australia, 2002), records management activities generally and e-records management in particular are still issues to contend with. Most governments today have their records in electronic form. Moore (2000) stated that as much as two-thirds of the world's information was 'born digital' in the late 1990s and 2000, meaning that its original occurrence was in a digital format generated from computers. While this is true for most developed countries, developing countries are still behind with attendant problems of infrastructure, policy, technical-know-how, electricity generation and sustenance, hardware and software availability among others. As a result, most developing nations adopt the hybrid nature, where records are created and managed both in the paper and in electronic formats. Keeping records in this hybrid nature has implication for the management of e-records, as accessing and using readily available records may not be easily realized (Mazikana, 1999). This chapter will examine the electronic record management programmes from creation, use and maintenance, preservation and storage, distribution and disposition, e-recordkeeping systems requirements, the basics of good electronic records management, strategic considerations and appropriate skills sets among records staff.

## **BACKGROUND**

As the volume of records produced began to grow in earnest during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specialised facilities for the storage of records (in records repositories) grew in number and in the quality of environmental and security controls to ensure the availability as well as integrity of these primary media-centric (paper or films) records. Records with historical or permanent value are therefore, disposed, which included destruction and transfer of discrete sets of records to an archival facility and administered under careful document and audit procedures. With most of today's business information created in digital format, the rules of the records management game have changed dramatically. Research suggests there has been 30% increase in the amount of stored information (includes four types of physical media: paper, film, magnetic and optical) each year, from 1999-2002, with 92% of new information stored on magnetic media primarily hard disks (Lyman & Varian, 2003). As a result, organisations need efficient and suitable ways to capture and protect their electronic records, as well as efficient and veritable means to dispose of or destroy information and medium when there are no longer requirements to keep them.

The risks associated with poor or non formal records management programme have been well documented in the mainstream media in recent years in terms of legal and regulatory compliance risks and costs, as well as the overall effectiveness of business operations (The Association of Information and Image Management, 1991; Cohasset Associates, 2005). The discipline of records management has not been particularly exciting despite all the sensational media attention in recent years. Guided by laws, regulations and the organisation's culture and structure, corporate records management programme has traditionally been responsible for establishing proper recordkeeping guidelines, policies and procedures. For decades, the protection of sig-

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