From Vendor to Partner
How the Right Records and Information Management Provider Can Transform Your Program
There was a time when the only question you had to ask potential records and information management (RIM) vendors was “How much to haul away these boxes?”

In today’s age of complex regulations, high litigation risk, and the evolution of information governance, such a transactional approach to records management is no longer enough. You need a partner who can help you create and execute a holistic program and a set of policies that gives you complete management and control of your organization’s information.

Your partner in records management should have the knowledge and expertise to help you govern physical and digital records in a legally defensible manner, while providing secure, certified offsite and digital solutions throughout the entire document lifecycle.
Enforcing Proper Metadata Application and Information Governance

The key to an effective RIM program is to integrate procedures into everyday workflow so that managing information becomes an “in-line” process, rather than something that happens outside the workflow by a records manager or admin. The automation of document-level metadata is key to this integration. A best-in-class technology solution should automate the application of metadata by assigning a unique identifier to documents; applying the correct document type and classification based on a user’s department or role; associating the correct retention term and tracking a document’s lifecycle and eventual destruction or archiving; and tracking and releasing legal holds.

Ask Potential Partners:

1. Can you help us establish an information taxonomy for our organization that addresses our document types, user roles/departments, and compliance-mandated retention schedules?
2. Does your system automate the attachment of metadata to documents as they are created or input?
3. Can it track the record lifecycle at the document level and mark them for destruction at the end of their retention terms?
4. Does your system allow the placement of multiple legal holds on individual documents to prevent indefensible destruction — and can those holds be automatically released upon their expiration?

What Is Metadata?

Metadata describes context, content, and structure of records, and their management through time. Essentially, metadata is information that allows you to retrieve, use, and manage other information. Metadata will be unique to your organization’s program and should be discussed with your records management partner.
Bringing Past Records into Compliance

If your organization hasn’t been diligently enforcing policies on an ongoing basis, you may have a large quantity of records that have fallen out of compliance. Documents held beyond their retention dates can compromise your organization’s defense against litigation and unemployment claims, and combing through them in response to a legal need will create unnecessary expense. As part of a more robust governance program, you should deal with this backlog. The right partner can help you turn this chaos into order.

**ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:**

- Do you provide auditing or survey services to determine our current level of compliance, with regulations such as GDPR, HIPAA, FACTA, Sarbanes Oxley, and FERPA?
- Do you have a full understanding of the specific regulations our organization is subject to?
- Can you help identify documents which have gone past their retention dates and are due for immediate destruction?
Secure Storage, Retrieval, and Destruction

Securing sensitive data is essential for maintaining your organization’s reputation and client trust. Meanwhile, regulations surrounding the disposition of personally identifiable information (PII), such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), are likely to become more prevalent and more onerous in the future. The right partner can help you keep records from all facets of the business secure.

ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

- Can you provide role-based access to sensitive records and documents, and maintain a documented and auditable chain of custody?
- Do you provide secure off-site storage that adheres to International Safe Harbor Privacy Principles and is PRISM Privacy+ certified?
- What other external security assessments and certifications do you maintain?
- Do your methods for physical record shredding and digital document destruction adhere to industry-standard security measures, including NAID-certified destruction?
- Does your physical and digital security adhere to SSAE 18/SOC standards?
- Do you conduct security and privacy training internally and certify that employees have the proper understanding and expected compliance?
- Do you perform internal audits to test your standards (policies, procedures, processes) and regulatory requirements?
- Can you secure physical records during transfer to and from storage, including GPS tracking of vehicles?
- Do you seal files in tamper-proof pouches and strap boxes with tamper-proof straps prior to delivery to maintain HIPAA compliance?
Ensuring Secure Management and Storage of Digital Records

Digital media creates its own risk because of the ease in which it can be searched, shared, and stored inappropriately. Yet organizations may be overlooking critical records embedded in email, text, collaboration tools, and IoT devices, and may not be considering retention schedules and how to properly destroy digital records. A holistic RIM program should incorporate the legal and compliant destruction of media files, as well as the destruction of computer hard drives and CPUs as necessary.

ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

- How do you handle digital records, from declaration to proper disposition?
- Can you describe how digital records are safely stored and backed up?
- Is all digital information encrypted while in transfer and at rest?
- Are you able to apply the same metadata and legal holds to digital records as physical records?
- Can your vendor sync with an HRIS, ECM, or HCM system to properly maintain records stored there, including flagging missing or expired records and controlling access?
Monitoring the Performance of Your RIM Program

To assess and improve your program, you should be able to monitor your program’s performance against policy by incorporating feedback loops. Establishing the right KPIs — and tracking them regularly — is critical to the success of this process and can reduce the need for interruptive audits.

ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

What levels of client support do you provide?

Do you hold regular business reviews with an account manager to discuss program performance?

Which KPIs do you track (for example, storage volume, scanning and retrieval rates, and the percentage of documents marked for destruction in a given timeframe), and how do you send reports?

Do you send regular or on-demand reports of inventory up for destruction?

Is information kept up-to-date in real time and do you have self-service options for review and reporting?

What additional reports can you provide to help our organization monitor the program’s performance, control costs, and assure compliance?
Disaster Mitigation, Prevention, and Recovery

Protecting your business records from fires, floods, and natural disasters is as crucial as safeguarding them from unauthorized access. As a baseline, your partner should offer advanced security and fire suppression technology in their offsite storage facilities to ensure your records are always protected, as well as provide offsite tape vaults and underground vaults for more specialized secure storage needs. However, consider ease of retrieval for your employees. If your vendor makes it difficult or costly to retrieve records stored offsite, your employees may keep them at the office, increasing risk of unauthorized access or that they’ll be destroyed in a fire, flood, or other disaster.

ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

- Do your facilities help prevent and mitigate disasters?
- What site-hardening features do you provide?
  Are all your records stored in secure fire-proofed and climate- and humidity-controlled spaces located outside of flood plains to prevent unplanned destruction or damage?
- Is the offsite record center monitored 24/7 by an afterhours police/fire/burglar alarm monitoring company? Are they set up with motion detection and glass-break devices?
- Can you help us identify and protect essential records — those needed for business continuity?
- Do you have proven incident-management procedures in the event of an unplanned event to get us back up and running as soon as possible, or to mitigate it all together? Do you test these plans? Can you provide a copy for our review?
Optimizing the Cost of Records and Information Management

Your RIM program should mitigate risk, first and foremost, but it must also be cost-effective. Your partner in records management should be able to retrieve physical records in secure digital form to reduce duplicate retrievals and rush charges, while still allowing authorized users to share them across different physical locations. Other cost considerations include assistance in eliminating non-record digital information from your company’s backup servers and the ability to retrieve physical records on a document level.

ASK POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

- How do you charge to store and access offsite records? How does it vary by type of physical storage (vaults, etc.)?
- Do you provide regular reports on cost-related KPIs (for example, amount of records destroyed per month)?
- Can you provide visibility into how individual users are requesting documents, including how often and at what priority level (typical turnaround, next-day, or same-day delivery)?
- Do you offer best practices for reducing non-essential records in digital and physical storage?
- Do you provide cloud-based software for easy, secured access when records are needed?
- What are the vendor service level agreements in terms of turnaround time for standard deliveries, rush deliveries, resumption of business following an outage, etc.?
Conclusion

Records and information management programs have gone far beyond just storing and retrieving boxes. You need a partner who can provide the tools and services you need to build an effective, holistic program, with adaptable policies, that is scalable as your information grows and compliance needs change.

By asking the right questions, you can find the right partner that can support you and your business as you grow.

Contact us today, for a free assessment and take control of your documents to reduce risk, optimize infrastructure costs, and increase revenue.