SMALL BUSINESSES' DIGITIZATION PROGRAM GUIDE: HOW TO PLAN, EXECUTE AND ELEVATE YOUR COMPANY RECORDS AND INFORMATION

Successful Records and Information Management (RIM) takes planning, organization and a comprehensive strategy that covers the entire physical and digital records lifecycle. This includes record creation, active use, secure storage and planned destruction. Done well, RIM helps limit information risk, manage costs and lay the foundation for better data analytics to drive your business growth.

WHY DIGITIZE NOW?

Slower processes. Frustrated customers. Inefficiencies. These are the outcomes of mismanaged information.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that storing paper in premium-priced office space isn't always worth the cost. As such, many small businesses are re-evaluating how much square footage they really need.

Collaboration through digital document sharing is supported across all functions, from construction to R&D, HR to marketing. With the right offsite storage solution, you maintain access to your information whenever you need it while streamlining your records retention schedule.

WHERE DIGITIZING STARTS

Before you begin your RIM digitizing project, assess what you want to achieve:

> **Searchability/Shareability:** Records are typically spread across many systems, applications, format types, departments and locations. This can make them challenging and costly to manage. Controlled digital record repositories make it easier for you and your employees to access any file at any time.

> **Process Productivity:** Records management processes can be hard to keep under control especially when records aren't in digital format. To help alleviate this issue, determine what work processes can be made easier or more efficient by digitizing paper records.

> **Office Space Usability:** Physical filing cabinets full of papers not only take up expensive office space, but also slow down document retrieval. Digitized records free up valuable real estate and increase information access.

SCANNING AND DATA CAPTURE'S BIGGEST DRIVERS

RECORDS SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE

While a "keep everything just in case" mentality is well intentioned, it can often be expensive and hinder operational efficiencies. To determine what to keep and what to dispose of for legal, compliance and business reasons, an enforceable records retention schedule is a necessity.

In our short guide, Getting It Right from the Start, The Basics of Records Retention Schedules, we outline how to create a solid retention schedule for your company.

Once you know what you're keeping and where it's kept, you'll be in a better position to make a scanning project effective. Iron Mountain can help you determine the best records management approach, without scanning every document in your archive and everything incoming. We can help you identify which documents are used infrequently for closed-box storage and which are used frequently for open storage.

7 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL DIGITIZING

1. ASSESS THE SITUATION

An initial assessment of any records management digitizing project includes identifying:

> Where your records are

> Whether your records are tagged properly

> What technologies are used to create and store records

> What technologies and quality control processes are in place for digitizing

> How different departments and locations handle records

Part of the digitizing process also includes taking inventory of any business processes that have already been digitized to see if there are any lessons learned to leverage. If you don't have any existing paper-free processes, select a small trial, assess its results and then apply it to larger projects.

In addition to the initial assessment, you'll also need to review your policies to identify and resolve any compliance weaknesses.

All of this can add up to a stressful and arduous process for your team—remember, Iron Mountain is here to help.

2. DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Digital transformation doesn't happen at the flip of a switch or the click of a mouse.

Successful digitizing projects need clearly defined goals at the outset. Whether your digitizing project is large or small, decide what you want to achieve. Think of what digitization means to your business as a whole, and to different functions, and how you will measure the impact.

3. EXAMINE MANUAL AND PAPER-INTENSIVE PROCESSES

Look at how the current processes you have in place actually work—not just what's going right, but what's going wrong. You need to find out where paper:

> Enters the business

> Becomes part of a process

> Clogs up the workspace

> Restricts access to information

> Creates a bottleneck

To be truly transformative, your digitizing effort should be bigger than just scanning the right documents. It also needs to reduce or stop the continued flow of paper into a process.

4. PRIORITIZE APPROPRIATELY

Scan based on the importance of each document and how soon you may need access to it. This helps eliminate the need to use paper as part of a business process. It will also allow you to create indexed records in a common, searchable format.

5. BRING PEOPLE WITH YOU

In order to achieve change, you'll need to convince senior stakeholders and those who use information daily for their jobs of the value of digitization. Work closely with both decision makers and record users to ensure you create and deliver a purposeful plan with a strong business case.

Depending on the structure of your organization, here are the groups you can involve:

> IT

> Finance

> Compliance

> General counsel

> Procurement managers

> Department managers

Complete a process audit that includes lower-level team input before speaking to senior stakeholders so they can clearly see why a slow or cumbersome process needs digitization.

6. PLAN AND EVALUATE

Depending on the size of your company, you may have hundreds of processes that touch digital records. Due to the many moving pieces, the rationale for a single system that services multiple processes across multiple sites is clear. Working with Iron Mountain will give you direct access to the latest best practices for digitizing with the guidance of a trusted advisor.

7. CONTINUE THE PROGRESS

The pandemic has underscored the fact that to stay competitive, businesses need to be prepared for a dispersed, mobile and even global workforce.

Digitizing gives you and your employees rapid and secure access to information–allowing everyone to do their jobs from anywhere faster.

Invest in digitizing today to start evolving alongside the future of business processes.

TIPS FOR PREPARING YOUR PAPER DOCUMENTS FOR SCANNING

A good majority of documents are now born digital. However, if your project includes scanning legacy paper records manually, you'll need to consider the following as you plan:

> Identify illegible documents for separate processing

> Sort documents into batches by size, color, date, document type and other predefined categories

> Save binding materials for later re-assembly

> Carefully unfold and smooth out paper documents

> Remove staples, paper clips and other fasteners

> Tape torn documents, using non-yellowing, matte-finish tape

> Align all pages to the same orientation so that the top of every page faces the same way and the front of every page faces the same way

> After scanning, log the documents that were scanned

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