

How to rebrand records management to encourage support and collaboration

Far from the stereotype of the filing clerk, recordkeeping professionals are experts at mitigating risks to information, security and privacy.

BY JANET KNIGHT AND KATE CUMMING

Recordkeeping professionals have skills that should be valued greatly by their organisations. They know the business intimately and promote the capture of information that can support, enhance and protect the business and its employees. They manage that information to meet not only immediate needs for access but to support longer term rights and entitlements and legislative obligations. They deal with complex issues including privacy, security and access, rights management, and administrative change. And they face considerable challenges in building recordkeeping into each new wave of technological innovation adopted by their workplaces.

Yet, despite this challenging role, records management is often subject to chronic underfunding and understaffing and is rarely seen as of strategic importance to business. The stereotype of the filing clerk persists and recordkeeping professionals struggle to gain a place at the table where strategic decisions that impact on them are made.

This paper will examine the battle recordkeeping professionals face in overturning stereotypes and securing strategic influence in their organisations. It will suggest three key strategies that can be adopted by recordkeeping professionals, records and archival authorities and relevant professional associations that may assist recordkeeping professionals to collaborate better with key stakeholders, including ICT, and to gain recognition and support from senior management.

REALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS

The Digital Recordkeeping Team at State Records NSW is responsible for encouraging NSW public offices to create and manage accurate and usable digital records to support Government business and mitigate information risk.

We work with a range of recordkeeping professionals from different organisations so we have firsthand knowledge of the level of knowledge and expertise in the sector and the level of pressure they are under.

Realities

Generally recordkeeping professionals (in the NSW public sector and elsewhere) are a dedicated bunch. In most cases they passionately believe in the importance of recordkeeping to their organisations. They work hard – very hard – to do their very best to ensure it is managed well.

Story snapshot

- Despite playing a key role in business, recordkeeping professionals are often overlooked when it comes to systems design and strategic planning.
- RIM professionals need to offer assistance and support in order to secure collaboration with ICT and other key stakeholders.
- Different audiences require different approaches to communication. Change the language and message to suit the target audience.
- RIM professionals keep up with technological innovations and see them as tools that can help bring about continuous improvement.



Recordkeeping professionals are responsible for an extensive range of duties. Their average duties include:

- writing policies and procedures regarding records management
- developing tools such as classification schemes, file plans, thesauri and retention and disposal authorities, and maintaining these over time
- training staff in policy, procedures and tools
- managing storage arrangements for hard copy records



- implementing and managing records and document management systems and their associated storage requirements and upgrading systems when required
- disposing of time-expired records
- facilitating access to organisation records which, in many cases, will include dealing with or assisting with FOI/GIPA enquiries, subpoenas, discovery orders, etc.
- monitoring records and compliance with organisational requirements.

» THEY FACE CONSIDERABLE CHALLENGES IN BUILDING RECORDKEEPING INTO EACH NEW WAVE OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION ADOPTED BY THEIR WORKPLACES ‹‹



Many of these responsibilities are complex and challenging. New digital methods of doing business are increasingly adding to their workloads.

Examples:

Social media applications often have no native recordkeeping functionality so it is up to the recordkeeping professional to determine what needs to be captured to support the business and the best way of capturing these into corporate systems.

Recordkeeping professionals are trying to negotiate and fight for contractual clauses in cloud computing arrangements to protect the records and ensure their safe return.

Many business systems are replacing traditional recordkeeping but the requirements to retain records have not changed so recordkeeping professionals are struggling to build recordkeeping into business systems, integrate them with EDRMS or define and export what is required.

Recordkeeping professionals also have to decide the fate of complex legacy systems when they often have had little involvement in their design.

Mobile technologies add additional challenges as records may not be transferred to corporate systems.

These issues are often up to records managers to resolve because they don't even make it to anyone else's radar – until it's too late.

Added to that, recordkeeping professionals often have to struggle with the complexities that come from administrative change. The large scale rearrangement of government departments and realignment of business units impacts significantly on the operation and management of information.

Perceptions

Despite this eye-popping range of complex responsibilities, recordkeeping professionals are often undervalued, poorly remunerated and under-resourced. A recent NARA records management compliance survey showed that in the US NARA Federal public service there is approximately one full-time equivalent person with assigned records management duties for every 1460 Federal employees.¹ While statistics are not at hand on the percentage of recordkeeping staff to organisations in Australia, it is undoubtedly low and the impact of the financial crisis may see it reduced even further.

The range of responsibilities recordkeeping professionals juggle mean that they need to collaborate with key stakeholders. Yet in many organisations recordkeeping professionals face difficulties in obtaining this cooperation. Senior managers and business managers often fail to recognise what recordkeeping professionals can bring to the table and leave them out of strategic decision-making. Many recordkeeping professionals also report difficulties in securing collaboration with information and communications technology (ICT)² staff.

The lack of such support jeopardises good digital recordkeeping outcomes and business enhancement.

Example:

Recordkeeping professionals need to be involved in systems design to ensure recordkeeping requirements are built in to meet business obligations, yet new ICT projects are frequently implemented without their knowledge, let alone their consultation or engagement.

Attitudes of senior management in NSW to recordkeeping have been measured in the past.³ In August 2010 State Records conducted a survey of ICT staff in the NSW public sector to determine their attitudes to records and recordkeeping, to see if it was consistent with perceptions. In October 2010 we conducted a further survey to determine compliance with our *Standard on digital recordkeeping*⁴. ICT and recordkeeping professionals were required to complete the survey together. We published in *Informaa Quarterly* in February 2012 describing our findings and the survey reports are available on our website.⁵ The findings of these surveys, along with our experiences inform some of the conclusions in this paper.

TOP 3 POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Like any complex problem, the solutions are also complex. There are also a number of players and variables that can affect the outcome so it is difficult to generalise. However, in the remainder of this paper, we have isolated what we think are three key strategies that can help recordkeeping professionals, records and archival authorities and relevant professional associations to rebrand records management to bring them enhanced support and better collaboration with key stakeholders.



Understand your business and focus on risk

Recordkeeping professionals

The key thing that recordkeeping professionals can bring to their organisation, to senior management and to ICT is knowledge of the business. They need to know what new information is being created, its purpose, where it is located, how it is managed, whether there are requirements for its management and what risks it poses including the potential consequences if risks were realised. This requires skills in business analysis from a records perspective⁶. The unprecedented volumes of information mean that they need to focus on areas of highest risk. They also need to pay attention to new proposals for technological innovation and try to secure involvement in key groups.

Examples:

The records team at Sydney University keep informed about just what new technological initiatives are underway at the university through formal and informal networks and offer their services to ICT and the business to build in recordkeeping solutions. When there are new key projects of high risk to the university their team will, at setup, provide advice to the business on the recordkeeping and privacy issues. They also work with relevant ICT personnel to implement the more suitable and user-friendly interface to the university's recordkeeping system.⁷

Endeavour Energy has an Enterprise Architect group which meets to consider all proposals for ICT projects within the organisation. This group uses a tool the IM staff developed (adapted from our *Checklist for assessing systems*⁸ for their recordkeeping functionality) and now recordkeeping requirements are built into all technology projects at the requirements and design phases. This 'normalises' recordkeeping requirements. Project managers need to justify any departures they make from the standard requirements to this committee. While there is some cost in meeting these additional requirements, it is seen in balance with the costs associated with implementing ICT solutions that do not meet organisational needs for information.

Professional associations can make members aware of new challenges and emerging risks in the industry.



■ Records and archival authorities

Records and archival authorities need to understand Government business from a broader perspective. We also need to keep abreast of new directions in government for both ICT and RIM, what the latest drivers are and who the key players are. We need to be keenly aware of risks arising from changes to government policy and highlight these to senior levels of government and senior managers in departments.

Examples:

Current priorities should include ensuring key players in Government are aware of the information management and recordkeeping issues which occur with administrative change.

In addition, as shared service arrangements are implemented across NSW, we need to highlight to senior management the need to retain some staff with sufficient skills internally to maintain strategic control and supervision so that corporate responsibilities for recordkeeping are met.

Records and archival authorities also need to get involved with new developments in ICT infrastructure and whole-of-government systems at the design phase so recordkeeping is included.

Example:

State Records worked with Department of Premier and Cabinet to determine recordkeeping strategies for the HR data managed created within their new whole-of-government e-Recruitment system. Now there is clear guidance when records can be retained within the system and when long-term records need to be exported to an agency's recordkeeping system for ongoing management.⁹

■ Professional associations

Professional associations have an education role – to offer focused professional development to assist practitioners in managing these new challenges and make them aware of emerging risks. Workshops, lectures, case studies and discussions on listservs can all help practitioners to find out about how to align more closely to business, identify and mitigate risk, manage administrative change, etc.



Communicate widely

■ Recordkeeping professionals

Recordkeeping professionals need to hone their marketing skills and communicate key recordkeeping issues and risks to senior managers, relevant business managers, system owners and ICT.

Senior management are vital to target with communication strategies. Opportunities must be seized to present short, sharp bites of information about recordkeeping problems and potential solutions. Drivers and business directions identified as part of your business analysis can be used as leverage. The focus should be on risks, and how they can be mitigated, and on how return on investment can be achieved.

Senior managers need to be made aware that the profession has changed and that any residual stereotypes they harbour about records management (think filing clerk!) are incorrect. They need to understand that recordkeeping professionals need to be aligned with key information stakeholders, including ICT, to make any real difference.

Senior managers need to have more realistic expectations of the complexity of both ICT and records projects in the 21st century. Recent reports in Australia¹⁰ have laid the blame for failures and cost blowouts of technology-based business transformation projects firmly at the feet of ICT professionals. Likewise, recordkeeping professionals are often blamed for

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failed projects they partake in eg, EDRMS rollouts and digitisation projects. While some of these may be the fault of poor planning and management, often the staff become scapegoats for what one writer described as “underfunded, under-resourced projects expected to be delivered in unrealistic timeframes.”¹¹ Senior management need to be aware that projects with chronically poor resourcing will rarely result in business enhancement.

It is also vital that recordkeeping professionals identify the right ICT professionals to help them further their objectives and target these people in communication strategies. While trying to secure collaboration, it is best to offer assistance and support rather than present ICT with further problems.

Example:

If ICT staff are worried about ensuring that systems have appropriate security, recordkeeping professionals can supply information regarding recordkeeping requirements for security and access. State Records' ICT survey results pinpoint some key concerns and shared problems.

Knowing more about ICT projects and the deadline pressures ICT staff face can also help recordkeeping professionals to isolate critical ways to assist their colleagues. Stereotypes will be toppled and then ICT staff may be more willing to reciprocate with assistance and advice. Using plain English rather than jargon can help to maximise collaboration opportunities.

Examples:

The team responsible for recordkeeping at NSW Police are gradually building up relationships with their ICT staff. For their accounts payable records, records staff introduced a digitisation project and successfully integrated SAP and TRIM so that the accounts payable process could be captured and sentenced in TRIM. This project has streamlined a time consuming business process and is likely to save the organisation money and time. Disposal can be applied so that records are not retained longer than necessary and storage space is freed up. One of the intangible benefits of this project is that it has raised the profile of the records team. Now some ICT staff seek them out for further integrations. The records team have also been actively approaching other teams introducing new systems to offer recordkeeping solutions.¹²



RM professionals need to be committed to continuing professional education to cope with new challenges in digital recordkeeping.

WE NEED TO COMMUNICATE MORE WITH SENIOR LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO BRING ABOUT WIDESPREAD CHANGE ...

Endeavour Energy has successfully secured the support of both their senior management and ICT. As a result ICT and records staff are aligned and highly collaborative and upcoming projects are being well supported. They are now seeking funding to bring about business transformation. They are initiating a specific forum, the IM Design Authority Business Working Group, where stakeholders (including records staff) can collaborate. In this forum information management staff can advise on governance frameworks for information and they can also highlight and seek resolution for information management issues.

Records and archival authorities

Records and archival authorities have traditionally spent a significant proportion of their time educating recordkeeping professionals to embrace the new challenges that face them: guiding, training and mentoring. While this is important work, our attention can no longer be solely focused at this level. We need to communicate more with senior levels of government to bring about widespread change and the kind of support that recordkeeping professionals need so they can collaborate with key stakeholders in digital recordkeeping effectively.

Examples:

At State Records, we communicate with chief executives once a year through a newsletter, bringing significant issues to their attention. This has had some success in capturing their attention in the past, though often it can result in more work for the recordkeeping professionals!

We are also trying to collaborate more frequently with the Information and Privacy Commission, the Audit Office, the Ombudsman's Office and the team at the Department of Finance and Services who direct ICT policy and strategy.

We are not always reaching the right people and even when do, we may not always succeed, but we are learning along the way and more recently, senior staff in key organisations have been approaching us!

Records and archival authorities also need to embrace strategies to communicate with the ICT profession in better ways.

Example:

The Digital Recordkeeping Team at State Records is engaging with EDRMS and product vendors. We have been advising HP and Objective Corporation (the two major players in EDRMS in NSW) and other vendors. We are happy to provide advice as it can result in better software outcomes that help our clients and bring about better recordkeeping.

We have also been targeting ICT professionals in agencies, with web information to assist them, and forums and workshops on shared issues.



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- 2 The term Information and communications technology (ICT) professional is being used in this paper to describe people involved in engineering and/or maintaining systems to manage information assets. It is in common use as a term in NSW government. For example, there is a NSW Government *ICT Strategy*. It is important to note, however, that ICT professionals cannot easily be grouped as they can hold varied and unique roles. A business analyst is entirely different to an IT support desk officer and a recordkeeping professional's interaction with each of these roles is likely to be different.
- 3 State Records NSW commissioned the Taverner Research Company in October 2002 to conduct a survey of NSW Government Chief Executives' attitudes to records and records management and report on the findings. The report was called *View from the top: Qualitative research to investigate chief executives attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Recordkeeping* (not available online).
- 4 State Records NSW, *Standard on digital recordkeeping*, 2008, available at: <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/government-recordkeeping-manual/rules/standards/Digital-recordkeeping>
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- 6 The *Manual for Designing and Implementing Recordkeeping Systems* (the DIRKS Manual) provides a workable methodology for business analysis for recordkeeping. It can help you to know what records your organisation creates, which are the critical, vital and high risk records you need to focus your attention on, and what the long term requirements are for records.
- 7 On State Records *Future Proof* site, there is a podcast of a presentation by May Robertson at the NSW Records Managers' Forum which explains how she aligned with ICT and business managers. See *Delivering recordkeeping projects in collaboration with ICT and business professionals*, 8 Nov 2010, <http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au/the-future-proof-podcast-series/#episode13>
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- 12 For more information about the accounts payable project see Case study: *NSW Police Force business process digitisation program for accounts payable*, 2012, available at: <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping/government-recordkeeping-manual/guidance/guidelines/managing-digitisation-programs-and-projects/digitisation-case-studies/case-study-nsw-police-force-business-process-digitisation-program-for-accounts-payable>
- 13 Anthony Wong, the then President of the Australian Computer Society, suggested in his presentation *Are records and information managers becoming ICT professionals?* RIM Professionals Australasia InForum Convention, 11-14 Sep 2011, Darwin, that the Skills Framework for the Information Age might provide a common reference model. Paper available on the members only part of the RIM Professionals Australasia website at www.rimpa.com.au

We also need to adapt our language and our message to specifically target different audiences. Traditionally we have talked about best practice and compliance. However, in times of financial hardship these concepts do not cut it – so we need to talk about the risks and consequences if recordkeeping requirements are ignored.

■ Professional associations

Professional associations need to consider carefully how to encourage senior management support for the profession through education and communication.

Examples:

Initiatives like Information Awareness Month may provide an opportunity for RIM Professionals Australasia to target senior management.

RIM Professionals Australasia could develop and distribute high level promotional flyers to CEOs advocating the need for ICT and RIM to align and the benefits of doing so.

Professional associations can also change perceptions of recordkeeping through better communication. There are many missed opportunities to raise the profile of the profession and

show its value and relevance to ICT, senior management and the community.

Example:

High-profile recordkeeping and business systems failures reported in the media present an opportunity for the profession to distribute media releases promoting the value of RIM professionals working in conjunction with ICT.

We realise that the professional associations are primarily run by busy volunteers, but more visibility of the issues and risks would help the entire profession and promote collaboration.



Reinvent tools, skills, approaches and practices for the digital environment

Our final recommendation is to keep reinventing tools, skills, approaches and practices for the digital environment.

■ Recordkeeping professionals

Even some of the highly skilled recordkeeping professionals struggle with new challenges in digital recordkeeping. All need to be committed to continuing professional education and

development. They need to seek out opportunities to learn about technical issues that are relevant to their work.

Example:

Recordkeeping professionals should be able to:

- define digital records required in business systems and assess to see if systems are capable of managing these
- understand how integrations between business systems and EDRMS are achieved
- understand the process of systems migration and know what metadata and records need to be brought across.

Knowledge of these areas will certainly help them to communicate with ICT staff and offer advice of benefit to them.

Recordkeeping professionals need to ensure the tools, approaches and practices they adopt are valid for their business environment and will actually support and enhance the business rather than be an additional burden on staff. They should structure systems so that recordkeeping tools are invisible to the user wherever possible. While such strategies may cause more work for the recordkeeping professional, inevitably they will reduce the effort that has to be put into change management and increase the success of initiatives. Approaches should be monitored regularly and adjusted when needed. Recordkeeping professionals should investigate new technological developments and consider how to incorporate these to bring about continuous improvement.

Records and archival authorities

Likewise, records and archival authorities need to reinvent their tools, skills, approaches and practices. All departments, records and archival authorities are struggling to work efficiently in the tight financial climate. However, we need to make time to reconsider our approaches. It may mean we have to temporarily stop what we have always done to focus attention on areas where more innovation is needed. In particular we need to reconsider the design of recordkeeping tools for digital systems.

Example:

Retention and disposal authorities can be difficult to apply to business systems and EDRMS environments. This may require a rethink of the approach to digital disposal. Members of the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative (ADRI) are considering how to innovate in this complex area.

Professional associations

Professional associations need to keep reinventing the way they are supporting their members.

Examples:

For existing members they could fill gaps in professional knowledge and offer more opportunities for professional collaboration with ICT staff.

Professional associations can also influence professional education in information, records and archives management so that it is more cohesive with what the market needs and ensures the right people with the right skills are attracted to the profession.

Examples:

They can speak to schools and universities on career days to topple stereotypes about the recordkeeping profession.

They can encourage the alignment of ICT competencies with RIM competencies¹³.

Perhaps more shared subjects between ICT and RIM can be promoted in universities and TAFE colleges, which can break down stereotypes and barriers, reduce the language difficulties between the professions and open the doors to better communication and understanding.

CONCLUSION

None of the three recommendations made in this paper are easy to achieve. They take time and energy and require us all to rethink our approaches, realign our alliances and reinvent ourselves. However, we hope that our research and experiences will provide some insights into how we move forward, strengthen our alliances with key stakeholders, including the ICT community, and make senior management and others realise how valuable our industry and our practitioners are. IQ



About the authors

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