

# Preparing for Tomorrow with Strategic Enterprise Services Today

One *Fortune* 100 corporation decided to employ strategic enterprise services to better manage the retention, disposition, and access to business records and operational data.

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**M**ost corporations are inundated with digital data generated by business applications, desktops, laptops, handhelds, partners, the Internet, e-mail, and other sources. Whether it is high-volume business transactions (accounts payable and receivable, checks, statements, reports), documents, spreadsheets, e-mail, forecasting models, images, web pages, XML from the web and corporate intranet, or legacy system transactions, most of this data is not carefully named, categorized, or intelligently managed. It resides on multiple systems, databases, and media and, after its creation and initial use, it is not always known where it resides, who owns it, what it is worth, or even when it was created. All these factors make it difficult to understand the data and whether it represents “an official business record” that must be preserved for regulatory purposes.

A non-proactive approach to manag-

ing data results in many pitfalls. After initial creation, business records and operational data are exceedingly difficult to find and use, for instance, to substantiate the data and documentation for a warranty matter addressed many years later. The inability to find needed data easily is also costly. Maintaining ever-increasing volumes of data bears a high price, especially in administrative costs. This all hap-

pens in the mist of technology refresh cycles that are causing systems and media to become obsolete rapidly, resulting in needed data residing on media, backup tapes, or technologies that are no longer accessible. Unfortunately, many corporations continue to apply recordkeeping practices based on traditional paper records, neglecting the criticality and complexity of intelligent digital information management.

Progressive organizations are addressing these issues through a comprehensive program for records and information management (RIM). They have realized that today’s business is mostly digital and tomorrow’s may be all digital. Their business users must be supported, and both records and non-records must be accessible. Business records must be preserved for legally specified durations, and production data (non-records) used to run the business must be intelligently retained and disposed of when no longer needed.

## At the Core

### This article

- ▶ Provides the vision for comprehensive enterprise services for records and information management (RIM)
- ▶ Presents a case-level snapshot of the strategies and challenges taken in developing these services
- ▶ Provides tips for readying the organization, planning, and phasing of large-scale RIM projects

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## Intelligent Information Management: The Business Imperative

One such progressive company, a U.S.-based *Fortune* 100 manufacturing and distribution company, relied on paper-based records management practices – until a forward-thinking leader from the technology organization convinced executive business management that the company could not continue to be an industry leader if it did not excel in all aspects of electronic records and information management. In this company's case, enterprise systems were in place to run the business, but no data was ever archived or destroyed. A “full system backup” mentality was in place, and the strategy was to add hardware and storage.

This approach was bleeding the IT budget and running counter to critical tenets of business strategy: operational excellence, cost reduction, and cost-effective regulatory and legal compliance. The company's executives realized they could do a better job with records and retention management, including disposing of unneeded data, safeguarding vital information assets, minimizing compliance risk, and archiving operational data to increase system performance and decrease costs.

The business imperative was to revitalize the corporate RIM program by defining a three-year investment plan and strategy to:

- Equip the company with the capabilities for operational excellence in electronic records management
- Archive and place enterprise resource planning (ERP) data and legacy system data under retention management
- Safeguard all required information for complete legal and regulatory compliance

IT management responded to this business imperative by closely collaborating with the RIM organization, key business sponsors, and its technology

organizations to implement an enterprise-wide program in digital data archiving, retention management, and records management for both structured and unstructured data and documents.

Maintaining ever-increasing volumes of data bears a high price, especially in administrative costs. This all happens in the midst of technology refresh cycles that are causing systems and media to become obsolete rapidly, resulting in needed data residing on media, backup tapes, or technologies that are no longer accessible.

### Bringing the Parts Together

The result – the Enterprise Services for Records and Information Management (ES-RIM) program – was chartered with digital data preservation, long-term data access, operational data archiving, and the implementation of leading practices in records and reten-

tion management. Data archiving and its associated retention management were deemed necessary for increasing operational efficiencies and reducing costs – two ancillary, but key, goals of ES-RIM.

Setting the course for the three-year program, it became evident that focusing on critical business scenarios was required, rather than plunging into the technology hype fostered by vendors selling compliance wares. From these scenarios and assessment, a business case was developed that drew distinctions between strategic business and operational needs, presented an end-to-end view of both, and established priorities. The following facts quickly emerged:

- The investment would be significant.
- While compliance was the driver, business value was the trophy.
- Records management coupled with retention management would offer a complete solution.
- The solution had to be enterprise-wide and global.
- The enabling components had to fit and function within the strategic technology direction.

So with the business case in hand, clearly defined business drivers, and executive sponsorship, the company launched its ES-RIM program. Currently, the program is in year two and, so far, has presented significant findings.

### Organization and Process

As the saying goes, “The hard things are easy and the soft things are hard,” especially when it pertains to RIM. Soft, in this instance, refers to the broad organizational and process issues of implementing new rigor around the day-to-day handling of electronic data. In response, the approach applied addressed the interplay of organization, process, people, and enabling technologies.

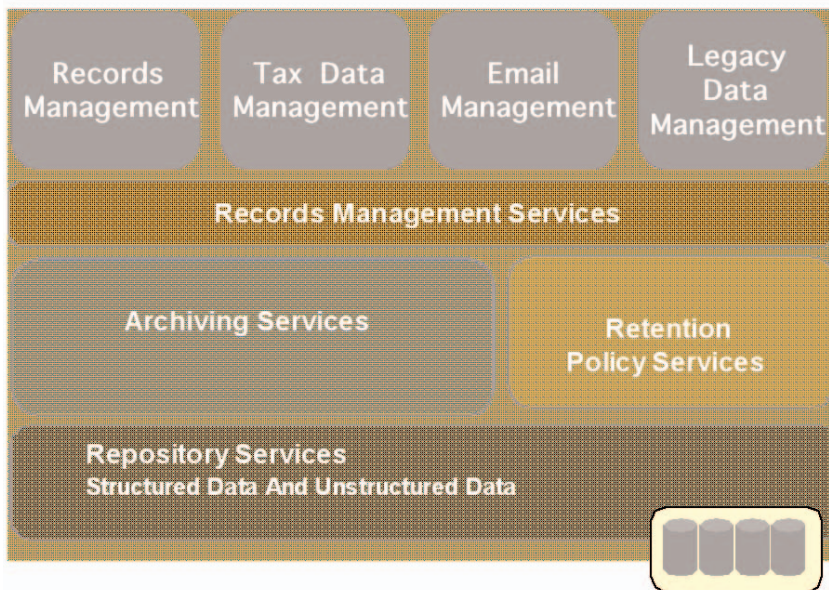
Working closely with the RIM, legal, finance, tax, and technology organizations, a discovery was performed. This point-in-time assessment resulted in an accurate picture – not of the problem, but of the current business context: the tasks performed, tools employed, and interactions among people and groups. An understanding was gained of the organizational practices, challenges and issues, and priorities and opportunities for RIM. Using this assessment as a launch point, an operational concept was defined. This was an expression of the future illustrated through “day-in-the-life-of” descriptions of how work would be performed. It provided ways to think of RIM in the context of work, identified the business and technology operations roles required, and, as a side benefit, defined a common vocabulary. It also firmly established the need to manage both structured and unstructured (content) data and archive operational data.

On the path to better business understanding of the future, a visual prototype was developed and demonstrated. This helped gather business, functional, and technical requirements. These requirements, plus the discovery and operational concept, provided the impetus to address the “hard” issues – those of architecture and technology.

**Architecture First, then Technology**

Driven to build a far-reaching business solution aligned with the strategic technology direction, the next step, *design*, clearly maintained a business focus rather than a product or technology focus. A business architecture was defined identifying users and capabilities. These capabilities were grouped into functions and functional interfaces (functional architecture), and the functions and interfaces were used to specify services (solution architecture). The International Organization for Standardization’s open standards for archiving, metadata, and

**Figure 1: Top View of a Strategic Services-based Solution Architecture**



records management definitions were embraced. A top view of this strategic services-based solution architecture is shown in Figure 1.

This architecture, independent of products or technology, was conceived to provide three major services: data archiving and extraction services; structured data and unstructured data repository services; and retention management services. Initially, they were to serve tax data management, records management, e-mail management, and legacy data management applications.

Several lessons were learned during the design process. (See sidebar: “Lessons Learned.”) Foremost was the need to focus on business and operational needs and not to be constrained by vendor tools and technologies. Second was to define services rather than component (point) solutions. As illustrated, the business-driven architecture process resulted in a definition of enterprise services based on key standards and processes. These services are independent of the applications (e.g., records management) and of the tools and technologies required to implement them.

**Progress, Ongoing Lessons, and the Realities**

After the creation of the business case and executive sign-off, the first year of the ES-RIM program (2006) was spent with business and technology sponsors in developing a solution blueprint and design. The implementation of essential capabilities for RIM, retention management, and ERP archiving was slated for Q1 2007 with delivery in Q4 2007. The program’s archiving aspects went into development early this year, and at the time of this writing, tools for other aspects of the program were being procured with implementation scheduled for mid-year.

The need for a comprehensive strategy cannot be underestimated. During the first year, significant organizational change took place. Although the program is on track and progressing to deliver “essential capabilities,” constant justification and re-justification have been the norm. Toward this end, education, meetings, governance functions, and presentations have been significant aspects of the program. In fact, very early, well before the first component was selected, a governance function was established for the overall ES-RIM pro-

gram. Governance teams included a broad spectrum of users, sponsors, leaders, IT staff, and consultants.

Through constant communication, all members evolved in their understanding of what was being developed and ultimately what would be put into use. Through this practice, the contrarians surfaced early and resistance was addressed. Communication also fostered a sense of ownership and contribution with each member having a say in the end result. As an added benefit, the program continues to provide the opportunity to motivate the team and maintain the momentum for an effort that is, arguably, years in its gestation. Simultaneously, the RIM organization has been updating policy and procedures and recruiting ambassadors throughout the organization at various levels of contribution.

Equally vital has been the continuous involvement and contribution of key executive sponsors. The project never lost focus, never ebbed in business leader support, and never was “put on hold” due to wavering backing of executive leadership. This is the result of consistency among the leaders involved, a sound business proposition, and a value-focused enterprise services approach that, while ambitious, was deemed the best strategic direction. For shared enterprise services, it isn’t always easy to find initial investors as entry costs can be intimidating and start up expensive. But with a valid and clear business proposition, support for the effort was steady and actually increased over time.

### Evolution and Expectation

It should not be underestimated, however; moving from a “paper records” mentality to intelligent RIM services is a quantum leap. Moving closer to actual implementation created tremors throughout the organization. A diverse set of skills are required to bring the solution into being, including application engineering, technology architecture, developers, subject matter

## Lessons Learned

When beginning a strategic enterprise services project, it is important to

- Have a strategy for creating business value
- Create business value while building operational capabilities
- Start governance early and often
- Actively engage executive sponsors
- Focus on business scenarios rather than technology hype
- Recognize the differences between real technology solutions and vendor concepts
- Implement services rather than component (point) solutions
- Apply retention management across all electronic content
- Archive ERP data
- Start early on a services and deployment model
- Understand vendor licensing agreements
- Stay aligned with key standards

experts, process control leaders, and business users. True archiving and electronic records management was not a skill set or even language that was common within this organization.

The expectation within the organization is that business value will be real-

ized rapidly from the automation of key records and information management processes. The initial capabilities deployed this year will serve the RIM and tax departments. Additional capabilities and functions are being planned for 2008. ■

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