

# Positively RIM

Records & Information Management is much more than a strategy for business. It is one of the glues that hold society together, and it has serious moral, ethical, and societal aspects. As such, it can elevate and ennoble the endeavors of humans. RIM can be a powerful force for good. -- Gordon E.J. Hoke, CRM

21 October 2009

## The Disney World According to GARP

Last week, I high-tailed it down to Orlando for ARMA International's 54th annual conference and expo. About 3500 other record-heads joined me for the official introduction of GARP, the "Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles" that have been brewing for over a year. I see GARP, and an accompanying maturity model for evaluating compliance to this new standard as a significant contribution to the burgeoning field of information governance. Both GARP and the model appear on [www.arma.org](http://www.arma.org).

This initiative coincides with the business community's spike in interest in information governance, as evidenced by a spate of news reports and recent acquisitions by leading ECM vendors. Conference speakers touted GARP as a way for records/information managers to say to top management, "You want info governance, and we've had it all along."

Indeed, GARP is not a novelty as much as a codification of long-evolving recordkeeping ideals. GARP distills Records & Information Management (RIM) best practices into eight categories:

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About Me



Gordon E.J. Hoke

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Comprehensive in nature, GARP is likely to extend the value of RIM in the eyes of executives with responsibility for compliance, finance, operations and information technology.

Fewer than 10 years ago, the stereotypic records manager was a basement-dwelling librarian safeguarding boxes of paper. RIM stock rose rapidly after 2002, thanks to a rushing embrace of digital records, a cry for help from corporate defense attorneys, and a multiplication of electronic records volume and media that has challenged existing information systems and schema.

The key issue switched from storage to controlling and exploiting large amounts of content/data. Over the last few years, the unit cost of digital storage plummeted while the number of available media skyrocketed. The key question switched from, “What are the practical limits of storage?” to, “How can we control and use the information we are acquiring?” Recent case law adds the question, “Who is responsible for and in control of the rapidly expanding information within many organizations.”

Records management practitioners have dealt with these issues for decades, if not centuries. In classical RIM governance, every record has a custodian at all times, and records without a reason for being are disposed. GARP neatly packages this discipline and offers it in a readily usable format.

As information governance ascends in importance, that is, as organizations seek better control and value from their data, records managers should find themselves in the calm eye of the hurricane around them.

Among the vendors on the expo floor in Orlando, nearly 100 offered products and/or services related to document and content management. Many of those -- also stalwarts at AIIM -- reflected a growing sophistication and appreciation for how ECM serves records management programs in large and midsized organizations. They clearly understood how their software solutions support organizations that ascribe to GARP. Lamentably, the booth staff of several other leading ECM vendors appeared clueless about how their products related to RIM.

I noted two technical areas that promise significant advantages over the next several months. The first (previewed by IBM and referred to by other vendors) was software for content analysis using textual and syntactical analytics for 1) auto classification of potential records and 2) building taxonomies. Potentially, this removes the human factor in deciding which documents are records and need to be preserved. This

tactic will be useful when the accuracy of the software matches the acceptable level of risk in an organization.

The second involved improved techniques for taming MS SharePoint 2007. Compared to last year, the vendors showed greater understanding of the RIM issues SharePoint raises, and they offered better tools to contain, control, and cure its viral growth. SharePoint, however, may be a moving target, as the 2010 version should include significant changes. Also, a potential SharePoint competitor with its own set of problems and challenges lurks on the edge of vendors' radar screens: The Google Wave, now in beta.

The relationship between ECM vendors, as associated in AIIM, and RIM practitioners, as associated in ARMA, has matured significantly over the last few years. "Records management" appeared as buzz words at AIIM's conference in 2002. Many content managers saw RIM as a technology to add to their tool belts along side imaging, workflow, report management, forms processing, and others.

Seven years later, AIIM gives ever more energy to RIM, and many of its leading vendors recognize that acquiring vast quantities of information and easing its manipulation is only part of the challenge. Information needs organization and governance. With its release of GARP, ARMA declares that it is a prime source for organization and governance.

Businesses that seek to glean the maximum value out of their acquired information need look no further.

Posted by Gordy Hoke at [11:49 AM](#) [1 comment](#) 

10 September 2009

## "In Search of Objectivity" or "Listening to Those We Often Ignore"

Last week, an unexpected overlap “slapped me upside the face”: A prime challenge of corporate Records & Information Management matched current events, political opinion and social tumult.

First the RIM part: The Records Director of a large financial services corporation called to ask for help implementing an enterprise RIM program. Apparently, the program is well written, comprehensive, and ready to deploy. But that is only half the battle. The implementation is beyond the RIM staff's resources. Gaining acceptance, investment, and full participation is daunting. Rolling out the new program requires, among other things, advocacy, diplomacy, education, training and – above all else – effective communication.

This RIM program will only meet its goals if it receives universal endorsement or, minimally, grudging participation. Clearly, top officers and directors need their records managed, but so do the mail clerks, couriers, and temp workers. Everyone needs to pull together.

Knowing human nature, I am sure some people will resent and resist participating in RIM. Some won't want to be bothered. VIPs may feel they are exempt. Many will find the change unsettling, difficult, and offering scant improvement for seemingly painful effort.

For a successful launch, the Records Manager and staff will need to interpret their efforts to all participants in the language of the staff

members. But at least as important, the RIM staff will have to listen to the conflicting views. The RIMmers will have to consider the issues their efforts raise and evaluate the objections. They may need to use carrots and sticks to get cooperation, but most important, they will need to listen to the concerns and fears of workers at all levels of the corporation. Constructive criticism and program adjustments may contribute to success.

How does this overlap with current events? Last week I attended a family reunion. There, relatives from the generation before and after mine asserted opinions that they declared The Political Truth. My problem was that they based their conclusions on information from sources from only one end of the political spectrum. Their exposure to the day's news and its interpretation all came from the same brand of talk radio, cable news, and print journalism. In fact, a single man owned most of their news media.

These relatives asserted their right to claim objectivity without exposing themselves to dissenting opinions. They claimed to know what the other side supported, but that "knowledge" all came through reading/listening to their one-sided favorites.

I assert that there is value in hearing both sides of an issue. No one gets it right all the time. We need to challenge our views by considering them in the light of opposing conclusions. Without abandoning our values, we need to consider how the advocacy from "the other side" relates to what we hold dear.

Information and reasoned opinion – as opposed to demagoguery – are always valuable. They enhance and inform our thoughts and actions. They may even contribute to or temper our strategies and tactics. It is important and valuable to listen to those who hold opposing values or practice divergent thought processes.

When rolling out a RIM program, RIMmers cannot afford to roll over objectors and their objections. RIMmers need to listen, consider, possibly adjust plans, and in all cases, give full credence to those who don't want to change their records management practices (or lack thereof).

Successful RIM is dependent upon full cooperation and participation in an organization, from top to bottom and everywhere in between.

Technology people, Legal people, Finance people, Operations people, and those from other departments may all make valuable contributions to a RIM program during both construction and implementation.

RIM professionals are subject matter experts, but they are not know-it-alls. They need not be spineless or appeasers, but they do need to listen to and consider all opinions. When RIMmers listen, their programs improve.

Posted by Gordy Hoke at [11:28 PM](#) [0 comments](#) 

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19 August 2009

## The Unobserved Need

Last week I traveled to rural Indiana to research a case study of a mid-

size manufacturing firm. While the subject is interesting in its own right, it is symbolic of a huge, unobserved need.

In the U.S. alone, there are close to 100,000 small to mid-size businesses. Different numbers define this SMB group, but I see it as organizations with between 100 and 1,000 staffers. Outside the business world, there are thousands of non-profits and governmental units with similarly sized staffs.

The vast majority of these organizations suffer from a vacuum or near vacuum of records management. Worse, most don't recognize the resulting risk. In the SMB world the discipline of Records & Information Management is a little known concept. Record keeping systems (or lack thereof) grow in reaction to operational needs, not RIM concerns.

But these small and mid-size organizations expose themselves to serious risks:

- Those without disaster recovery plans gamble with their very existence
- Without intentional records retention and destruction, they risk crippling legal judgments
- Poor records management puts them at an operational/competitive disadvantage
- Demonstrating regulatory compliance poses a risk for many modest organizations, even though they are generally less regulated than large corporations. (Smaller businesses that

supply or serve large organizations usually have to comply with their customers' regulations, a requirement generally beyond their rudimentary or absent RIM program)

- The list goes on....

A Fortune 500 company, becoming aware of its lack of RIM, simply hires a records manager to launch a program (and, yes, there are Fortune 500 firms that do not have a single, dedicated records manager.)

SMBs typically diffuse their records management responsibilities among existing staff and departments, but those efforts are uncoordinated and may be uninformed. Within a single organization, one section may discard important records while another retains meaningless documents in perpetuity. It's the Wild West out there, where stationmasters set their own time..

Ironically, some of these SMBs currently have tools they need to, at least, make improvements. Their corporate attorneys may have valuable advice on regulatory compliance, if only they would ask. One or more departments (or the whole enterprise) may own document or content management software that contains unused tools for RIM. Their IT departments may have credible disaster recover/business continuity programs that could include records, if only they were aware of the need.

Sadly, few small and mid-size organizations know their needs, so their risks continue unmitigated. The need for education is great, but few

address it. ARMA's priorities focus on large organizations with sophisticated RIM programs or the challenges of subtle, new technologies: for firms still seeking their first records inventory, considering big-versus-small record buckets or the possible advantages of RIM in cloud computing are meaningless.

SMBs personify the work-a-day, blue collar, grind-it-out side of RIM. It may be as unglamorous as a midsize manufacturing business in rural Indiana. But the need, and the potential rewards, are as great as any at the largest, highly-staffed, multinational, corporation.

Posted by Gordy Hoke at 1:54 PM 0 comments 

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22 July 2009

## RIM Underpins Society

Last Thursday at Paddington Station, I had tea with Andrew Griffin, UK Director of the International Records Management Trust ([www.irmt.org](http://www.irmt.org)). Andrew had recently returned from Sierra Leone, the West African democracy only two years removed from a devastating civil war. Sierra Leone ranks dead last in the United Nations 2008 Human Development Index.

In Sierra Leone, Andrew is a ghostbuster. He advises the emerging government's anti-corruption task force to rid the national payroll of phantom workers: deceased, retired, or fictional people drawing real salaries. Good records management discourages this kind of fraud.

The new government, led by President Ernest Bai Koroma, is in a race

against time. It needs to build effective, functional bureaus that win the confidence of the citizens before drug cartels and factional forces exploit any state failures.

The state of records management in Sierra Leone is abysmal. You may be amazed to see the graphic evidence on a video at the Trust's Website [http://irmt.org/video\\_ghostBusting.html](http://irmt.org/video_ghostBusting.html) (You may be disturbed by the images of record mismanagement, but I predict that you will enjoy the reggae-inspired soundtrack.)

When I see the situation in Sierra Leone, I realize how absolutely foundational RIM is to society. Americans, for example, take for granted that their birth certificates, college transcripts, Social Security benefits, credit histories, and stock portfolios are safe, accurate, and accessible. But what if they weren't?

- What if I couldn't prove that I was born in the USA and, hence, had a right to citizenship?
- What if I couldn't produce my academic credentials on demand?
- What if I retired from work but the Social Security Administration had no record of my earnings?
- What if I sought a loan but my credit history had vanished?
- What if my stock certificates – all held by my broker – disappeared?

These things do happen, but it is the aberration, not the norm, and there is often redress in court available in developed nations. Fraud and negligence are punishable offenses. And victims of bad records

management often have backup systems or fallback positions to cushion losses.

In contrast, Sierra Leone's annual per capita income is \$530 US according to the World Bank and as low as \$150 US by other estimates.

Most families live on the edge of economic ruin, Griffin told me, and any interruption of income can be disastrous. Good records management stabilizes payrolls, starting with government workers. By reducing fraud, it ensures money is available for legitimate civil servants. The widespread poverty creates a strong incentive for fraud, so efforts to combat deceit must be similarly aggressive.

The IRMT, working with the government's ghostbusting task force, already has saved over a half billion Leones (about \$154,000 US) each month since February. The project identified over 600 ghost workers and retired employees still drawing salaries. Now the government can afford to pay 600 real people working for the common good.

Griffin reports that, although these are great achievements, the key has been "getting the records straight" and ensuring that there are up-to-date personnel records to maintain a clean payroll in future. "With reliable records and record keeping systems, and reliable data against which to audit the payroll, irregularities and fraud should be a thing of the past," he notes.

Sierra Leone is just one example of the Trust's vital work. Trust consultants have contributed their insights to 33 developing democracies in Africa, Asia, Central America, and the Caribbean

islands. Several projects are reported, with accompanying videos, at the Trust's Website. This is important work, contributing to freedom, peace, well-being and democracy around the world.

The IRMT addresses RIM needs in developing democracies in several ways. The trust's work in education is, potentially, even more significant than its project work. But that is a subject for a subsequent posting. Stay tuned.

I invite you to share your comments and experiences.

-- Gordy Hoke

Posted by Gordy Hoke at 3:34 PM 1 comments 

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05 July 2009

## Daily Value

For those of us trying to whip a Records & Information Management program into shape every day, we may view records as objects, challenges, obstacles, risks, clutter, detriti or worse. It's hard to stay objective about records' real importance and value.

But sooner or later, reality or exigency enters our lives, and we re-connect with the real value of the "stuff" we manage daily. (I wonder if jewelers lose their appreciation for the beauty and clarity of their stones? Do art dealers start thinking of a masterpiece as "that canvas in the antique frame"?)

I travel outside the USA irregularly enough that, when an international

trip approaches, I always have to pause to muse, “Where’s my passport? Is it up to date?” This isn’t usually a critical issue. However, when my college-age daughter was bussing around Scotland on her own, with no determined touch-points, I wanted to be able fly there immediately on Fatherly Airlines should trouble beset her. She returned, hale and hearty, but if she had needed me, I didn’t want to have to search for my passport.

Birth certificates, property deeds, proofs of insurance, receipts, certificates of deposit: these are all records with real personal impact for most of us. Professionally, the records we manage may be as insignificant as the number of ants in an anthill, but frequently the records are vital to somebody – some faceless anybody who depends on the effectiveness of our programs for health or fairness or justice.

In recent months I have had conversations with fine records people at Medtronic, St. Jude Medical, and Boston Scientific, three firms that make implantable medical devices. People’s lives depend on the consistent effectiveness of those companies’ products. Imagine the calamity when, say, a cardiac pacemaker is recalled because a weakness has come to light. Are the records of the recipients of the particular model in question 100 percent accurate? Are they 100 percent retrievable in a readable format? They better be because lives are at stake.

Clearly RIM controls, with regular audits, help us bring our programs’ error rates down close to zero. But there is a human factor here too. As leaders, we can not afford to get jaded about the value of what we do.

We can impress upon our staffers that our work is vital, whether a record series is or is not.

But there is always that complacency issue, the boredom, the routine, that is our enemy. That risk is always with us. Our challenge is to continually strive, to battle to find ways to stay fresh, to recognize that each record is important to someone.

And when I figure that one out, I'll turn my attention to the quest to make love last over decades.

-- Gordy Hoke

Posted by Gordy Hoke at 4:27 PM 1 comments 

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24 June 2009

## Innovation, from Within

Historical objectivity is always difficult. I never give full credence to, for example, the American Film Institute's lists of movie superlatives because they always seem skewed toward recent films. That's not surprising. Can anyone born after 1940 really appreciate the impact of Charlie Chaplin's silent films?

Fully recognizing my historical subjectivity, I nonetheless suggest that Records & Information Management is evolving rapidly. Is there any need to rate the change as the fastest ever? Is there any need to compare the relative profundity of Rembrandt and Warhol?

The previous post here discussed changes to RIM imposed by external

forces: technology, law, and economics. Now let's consider how RIM changes within an organization can address those forces. The key is neither a technology nor a tool. It is not a strategy or tactic. It is not an instruction or directive. It is a culture of innovation.

No one knows the next force that will require significant changes. No hardware, software, training class, or taxonomy will necessarily prepare a RIM program for its next great challenge. But a culture where innovation is encouraged, valued, rewarded, and applied is most likely to stay afloat in a sea of change.

Tom Koulopoulos, in his 2009 book [The Innovation Zone](#): How Great Companies Re-Innovate for Amazing Success defines innovation as, "... a process of change with measurable value."

For a RIM program, this suggests that the procedure for change must be built into the program's governance. Innovation needs to be encouraged, and its consideration, evaluation, adaptation and application should be part of the RIM process.

I have previously written that every worker participates in records management through defined roles. ("Everyone is a records manager.")

Today I suggest that the invitation, no, the expectation that workers innovate be written into every job description. The assumption that most workers are the experts in how to improve their own jobs is part of a culture of innovation.

Generating innovation is only a start, however. Similar to Koulopoulos' writing, the innovation process must add

1. Evaluation of innovative ideas
2. Storage for ideas that are ahead of their time
3. Sponsorship of the ideas with current value
4. Application of the new ideas to current issues
5. Measurement of the innovations

This last is key because innovation that can't be measured is useless.

Measurement (part of Controls) has always been a cornerstone of RIM, and innovation is no exception. Change is not a synonym for improvement. Only measurements prove improvement.

When a RIM program inculcates a culture of innovation, the program creatively responds (or even anticipates) changes in technology, law, and business requirements. It enjoys continual process improvement that spills into other areas. RIM contributes to profitability instead of being a drain on it. RIM principals become resources for the entire organization.

The "how to" of innovation is well documented and publicly available. My hope is to alert RIM leaders to the current critical need. For practitioners, it is difficult to step back from day-to-day challenges to consider building innovation into the program governance. Doing so, however, can be the difference between a program that is, on the one hand, reactive and dependent on corporate largesse and, on the other hand, creative and intrinsically valuable. The latter is better.

I value your thoughts about this. Please drop a comment below.

-- Gordy Hoke

Posted by Gordy Hoke at 10:02 AM 0 comments 

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23 June 2009

## Innovation (1)

If the roots of Records & Information Management are at least 2300 years old, why is Innovation a top RIM priority in 2009? Beyond the truism, “Stagnation is death,” the answer identifies key, even vital, roles for records managers and their programs.

Certainly, innovation is a hot topic. It is the cover story of the [June 15th BusinessWeek](#) and the focus of a fast-selling book, [The Innovation Zone](#), by Delphi Group oracle Tom Koulopoulos. In RIM, innovation takes two forms, and each is so important that it deserves its own posting.

First, external changes -- in technology, law, and business -- compel RIM to innovate. Yes, the discipline is ancient, but today’s savvy practitioners understand the imperative to create new strategies and tactics. If the stereotype of the librarian-in-the-basement were ever true, today it is as outmoded as carbon paper. The same forces that transformed the mousy subterranean records clerk into the superhero Chief Records Officer demand powerful innovation in RIM today.

The axioms haven’t changed, but the derived formulae are breathtakingly new.

Technologies and their applications evolve daily. Last week I wrote about how Web 2.0 is changing democracy. This week the news reveals

how Twitter enabled the Iranian version of Virtual Mob to invalidate a fixed election and question the stability of the government. (While the Obama administration has been officially “hands off”, it did ask Twitter to delay a planned maintenance outage so Iranians could continue to organize their protests in cyberspace.)

Within the framework of classical RIM, today’s leaders address technology-related issues that were only imaginative a few years ago.

How does one manage the records of:

- Mobile computing
- Cloud computing
- Web content
- Metadata
- Federated repositories
- Random Access Memory
- Ephemeral formats and media forms

Similarly, the evolution of case law challenges RIM practitioners to react quickly to a shifting environment. Like records leaders, judges grope and grasp to understand technology and its implications, and their opinions do not always reflect the world as we see it. Nonetheless, their interpretations stand (until reversed), and records officers sometimes need contortionist flexibility to innovate practices that conform to the law.

This hammers us when judges differ on storage/retention

requirements, admissibility, production, and the scope of data maps.

Add the spate of new laws and regulations effulging from government

executives and legislators, and only innovative approaches will enable RIM success.

The final external demand for RIM innovation comes from economics, the business climate. Records officers who want to be taken seriously by organizational leaders in finance, technology, law, operations and other areas must consider the business implications of their programs.

A decade ago, records management was simply a cost of doing business. Today it may not be a profit center, but it needs to contribute to a business' profitability. RIM should reduce risk and improve business processes, customer response, security, and more.

How do we address these changes in technology, law, and business?


The answer is innovation. We need great minds and perceptive analysts to develop strategies and tactics to manage these evolutions.

The need for innovation applies to entire RIM programs, from the Chief Records Officer to the mail clerk: Innovation knows no status.

Like Web 2.0, everyone can contribute, and the best programs are those than encourage, enable, enact and reward innovation.

Check back soon for the next posting on the needs for innovation within RIM programs.

-- Gordy Hoke

Posted by Gordy Hoke at [10:55 AM](#) [0 comments](#) 

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