PURPOSE

The electronic information landscape is growing rapidly, and school boards/authorities in the Province of Ontario are challenged with finding effective ways to manage electronic documents and records. Many solutions can be found to address these needs, but the choices can be confusing. This document is intended to serve as a guideline for understanding how these systems can help and what to look for in an electronic document and records management system. Scanning and digitizing paper records is beyond the scope of this guideline.

Introduction

The practice of document and records management is not new to school boards/authorities, and all have some form of records management or classification and retention schedule. Technology is bringing with it a new set of challenges as it supports the generation and storage of even more documents along with increased access to information.

There are many systems on the market today that claim to have the solution for electronic document management; however, school boards/authorities need to follow some fundamental principles and guidelines to ensure that both their short- and long-term goals are met. Many definitions and acronyms exist for these systems and although many can be used synonymously, we will use the term "electronic document and records management system" (EDRMS).

Before we begin, it is important to understand the distinction between a record and a document. A record is a document with corporate, evidentiary, and/or archival value and is essential for the school board/authority. Documents are containers of working information. Documents become records when they are "declared" to be official records in EDRMS.

EDRM systems are designed to manage unstructured information, such as word processing documents, multimedia, and email. The management of structured data, such as student information systems and financial information systems, should be done through these programs themselves, and school boards/authorities must also ensure that planning is in place for preserving structured data in accordance with their retention schedule.

This guideline addresses considerations for a new EDRMS and is broken into four sections:

1. **The Ideal EDRM System**
2. **Technology Considerations**
3. **Best Practices**
4. **Standards and Guidelines**

1. The Ideal EDRM System

The ideal EDRMS should permit a school board/authority to:

- ensure that the school board/authority meets its legislative and regulatory requirements, including the necessary protection and support of authentic and reliable records in the event of litigation or investigation;
- provide continuity of operations in an emergency or disaster;
- conduct its business in an orderly, efficient, and accountable method;
- organize, securely store, and quickly retrieve the requisite records;
- store records in accordance with the school board's/authority's retention schedule, ensuring that expired records are destroyed in a legally acceptable manner;
- keep track of what it has done through trustworthy audit logs, and provide a reliable and durable long-term historical record;
- support school board/authority policy, procedures, and processes;
- enable amendments to retention requirements.

2. Technology Considerations

Smooth Integration between Document and Records Management

School boards/authorities should consider one system for all document and records needs rather than trying to differentiate between a document management system and a records management system. This means that school boards/authorities should consider document management systems that include or offer retention management capabilities.

Single Repository

Only one repository for electronics records that is easily managed and kept up-to-date should be available for users. All records created are stored in that repository rather than being kept in various systems or on different network drives. In other words, there should be one single repository for email, records created using standard desktop applications, faxes, and scanned paper mail. Ideally, the system should also be able to support pointers to all paper-based records.

Classification Scheme and Retention Schedule

This schedule sets the foundation of a good EDRMS implementation. The classification scheme describes the records and documents created and used in schools and school boards/authorities. It also:

- standardizes terminology;
- provides a structured approach for filing;
- reduces the number of records when searching;
- simplifies the retention schedule development; and
- provides guidance on how to describe computer directories.

The classification scheme can be applied to all records, regardless of format, and helps in identifying which recorded information must be retained.

The retention schedule is a procedural document approved at the senior level and is viewed as a board-wide authority for records disposition. It removes individual decision making and uncertainty about when to destroy documents and records. The retention schedule is developed from the classification scheme and takes into consideration the value of the records.

The goal of a classification schedule is to achieve a level of "controlled flexibility" that meets the needs of individual schools or departments while at the same time keeping overall management of the records in the hands of the records professionals. These plans should be developed in close consultation with the business units. Developing these plans should begin well before the "technical" implementation of the system. They should be flexible enough to easily allow the addition or deletion of categories. For more information on school board/authority classification schemes and retention scheduling, please refer to the PIM taskforce guidelines.

Well-defined Metadata

Metadata is information (or a profile) about a record that allows it to be easily retrieved and which gives it reliability and authenticity. It allows school boards/authorities to easily apply retention rules to the information. It is important that boards define their metadata requirements for records which may be captured automatically or entered manually, and they should ensure that the metadata is not easily separated from its record.

Ease of Use and Few Changes to Standard Business Processes

The EDRMS should be easy to use and should not drastically change how users perform their day-to-day tasks. In other words, they should be able to integrate the new system into their daily work routines with few disruptions.

3. Overcoming Challenges Using Best Practices

Implementation challenges with a new EDRMS can be overcome using "Best Practices." These have been divided into three key categories: functional; organizational and cultural; and technical.

Functional

- **Create a framework of standards and records procedures**
  EDRMS repositories contain high volumes of records, as previously mentioned. In order to control all this information and to ensure its retrievability and integrity, boards need to develop tools or adapt the existing tools to manage the records. These should include a classification scheme, carefully designed metadata, records schedules, procedures for policies on access to documents/records, and guidelines on which documents are to be filed in the repository (these are especially important for email messages, which are sometimes of a transitory or temporary value). In addition, they need to develop conventions for the naming of documents, for entering metadata (for example, when to use capitals), and for the naming of folders. While doing this, school boards/authorities should gather feedback from users to ensure that these procedures and standards meet the users' needs. In addition, these procedures must be endorsed by senior management to ensure their successful implementation.

- **Communicate records policy and procedures**
  After developing the above policies, procedures and standards, communicate these to the rest of the organization. These communications should focus on the following points:
  - educating users that documents created or received while conducting business are records and therefore need to be managed as such
  - educating users about the risks and costs associated with poorly managed records
  - educating users that work-related documents need to be stored in the EDRMS repository regardless of their format.
- **Remove access to local drives or network drives**
  This point is critical. When communicating with users, the project team should state clearly that all records are to be stored in the EDRMS repository in order to avoid competition with other previous records containers such as email inboxes, paper files, and folders on local or network drives. During the transition period, users should retain read access to the documents on the local or network drives in order to ensure a smooth and painless transfer process. However, this access should not allow users to add new documents or modify existing ones on these local or network drives as one runs the risk of having incomplete files or problems with version control. Also, all stakeholders must work together to define the scope and mandate of the different information platforms used within the organization, such as the intranet or extranet, in order to determine which links exist or need to be established among these repositories.
- **Automate records and metadata capture**
  To reduce the impact of changes to the daily work procedures during implementation, the project team should make sure from the start of the project that records and their associated metadata are seamlessly integrated into the records creation process. For example, when capturing a word-processing document, the user should follow the same steps to create a document as before, the only difference being that when the users prepare to save the document, they are presented with the EDRMS instead of a local or network drive, and they choose the folder from the classification plan in which to save that document. When adding the document, the majority of the metadata should be automatically captured. The same is true for email messages. Users should file any email messages that contain actions or decisions.

Organizational and Cultural

- **EDRMS strategic direction**
  When implementing the system, boards should establish an overall information strategy involving all professionals working with information to ensure proper coordination and streamlining of activities and to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts. With regard to the EDRMS system, the organization should ensure that:
  - documents received or created while conducting the day-to-day business of the organization are records and must be managed properly;
  - professional archivists and/or records managers are responsible for centrally managing policies, records, and procedures for records management; and
  - departments manage the creation, modification, and retrieval of records (if possible, with the assistance of the records manager).

- **Training and communication**
  Training is key in any system implementation, but is especially important if the new system involves a change to procedures and policies; if so, such changes need to be clearly communicated to the users. If possible, the organization should include a training/communication professional in the project team from the early stages. This person should do the following:
  - conduct user needs analysis for training;
  - develop appropriate materials for both the tool and the policies and procedures;
  - hold regular information sessions;
  - provide classroom training on the tool and on the policies and procedures; and
  - group users according to their level of comfort with technology.
- **Implementation**
  Implementing an EDRMS system should use a team-based approach involving all stakeholder groups within the school board/authority. This not only ensures buy-in into the system and project, but also ensures that the needs of all groups and processes are met.

Technical Strategy

- **Strategic technical direction**
  The technical and hardware requirements for EDRMS must be included in the overall current and long-term Information technology strategy from the earliest stages of the project.
- **Testing**
  The critical technology must be installed, configured, and rigorously tested prior to the rollout of the EDRMS.
- **Central point for user support**
  A central contact point with a consistent email address and telephone number must be identified in order to provide ongoing support to users both during and after the implementation phase.

4. Standards and Guidelines

There are a number of standards and guidelines that schools boards/authorities should refer to when establishing their EDRMS.

International Standards Organization

ISO 15489 - 1 Information and Documentation - Records Management Part 1 - General
ISO 15849 - 2 Information and Documentation - Records Management Part 2 - Guidelines
The ISO standard provides guidance and recommended procedures on managing records, which includes ensuring that adequate records are created, captured, and managed.

Canadian Standards Board - Electronic Records as Documentary Evidence (CAN/CGSB-72.34-2005)

The publication is intended to help both the public and private sectors to meet one of the evidentiary requirements for acceptance of electronic records in legal proceedings. It is a standard that all organizations should look to implement in order to protect their electronic records, the central core of their electronic commerce activities.

US Department of Defense - Electronic Records Management Software Applications Design Criteria Standard (DoD 5015)

The DoD 5015 certification, also known as the Design Criteria Standard for Electronic Records Management Software Applications, was established as a mandatory requirement by the United States Department of Defense. It has been endorsed as an "adequate and appropriate basis for addressing the basic challenges of managing records in the automated environment that increasingly characterizes the creation and use of records." Records Management vendors can apply to be certified as compliant with the standard, and certification indicates that the product has undergone inspection and testing.

Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment (IDA) - Model Requirements (MoReq)

The Model Requirements (MoReq) is a comprehensive specification of the functional requirements for the management of electronic records. Although developed for use in Europe, the MoReq specifies a model of how file classifications, records, documents, retention schedules, etc. relate to each other. It is applicable to both electronic and hybrid files (i.e., files containing both electronic and paper records). MoReq is not a technical specification for an EDRMS-only for what the EDRMS should do-and is useful for creating Requests for Information or Requests for Proposal.

Summary

School boards/authorities need to take a concerted and organized approach to electronic document and records management. Although the impact on boards of acquiring and implementing an EDRMS is quite large from both a financial and resources perspective, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the need to do so.

This document is intended to provide general guidelines and to highlight factors to consider when making this investment, and is in no way intended to be a comprehensive strategy. It is intended to be used in conjunction with other resources and best practices available.