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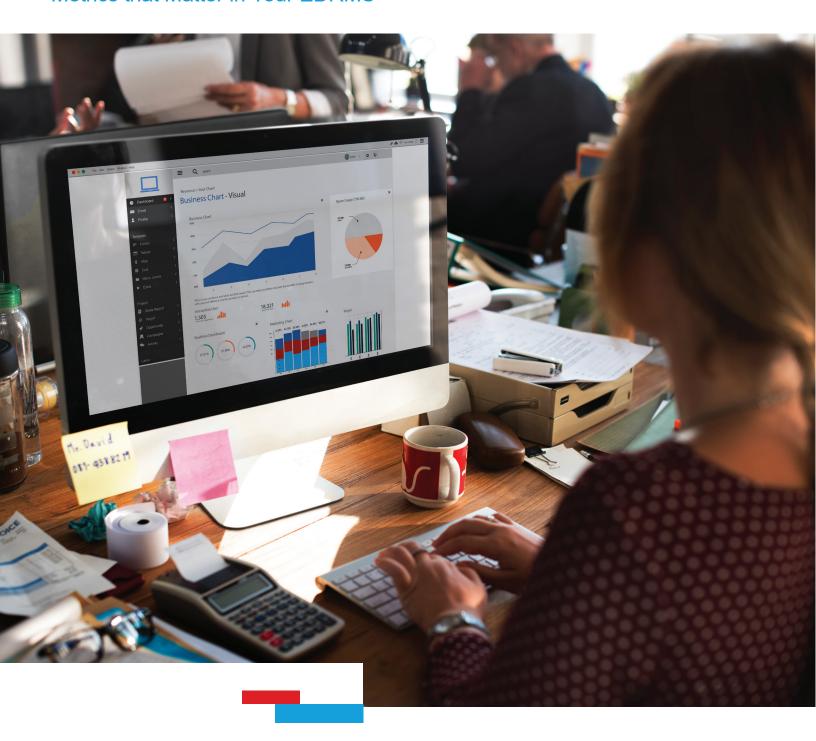
Go Beyond Counting:

Metrics that Matter in Your EDRMS

Executive Summary

In order to manage the growing volume of electronic information, businesses are increasingly using sophisticated electronic documents and records management systems (EDRMS). Effectively deploying and maintaining an EDRMS represents a significant financial and human resource investment for most organizations. As such, RIM staff and executives need to monitor the performance of their electronic Records and Information Management (RIM) program and understand the return on investment of the EDRMS. But understanding the true performance of an electronic RIM program, and demonstrating its value, is something that many organizations struggle with.

Metrics can be used to provide clear, accurate, reliable pictures of the impact of a RIM program – when they are carefully created and managed. This is where the work gets tough. Often, metrics are produced because an organization has a standard set of questions to ask about the use of software, not because of their link to business objectives. These metrics may provide important information about how the EDRMS is being used. They do not, however, show the full impact of EDRMS or concretely demonstrate its business value. And yet we continue to fall into the trap of thinking that because we have "always" used these metrics, they must be the right ones.

A contributing factor to the challenge of producing truly valuable metrics for RIM activities is that the "why" of measurement is often overlooked. Too often, metrics are not evaluated for their link to business value. Instead, metrics are gathered because they are easy to obtain. By choosing to use metrics that are simple to generate rather than metrics that are concretely linked to business objectives, RIM programs fail to demonstrate their successes.

Before deciding on metrics, it is crucial to understand the benefits and value of what is being measured, which will also allow you to determine how and when your metrics should be managed. Not only will you have a set of metrics which truly show the value of your program, but your metrics will also:

— Improve strategic planning by allowing you to determine if you're solving the "right" problems for your organization, and planning accordingly;
— Improve your ability to report effectively to senior management on your successes and challenges, and argue strongly for increased funding as needed;
— Reduce inefficiencies in your RIM program by ceasing to measure items that do not provide value;
— Increase the effectiveness of your RIM program and the use of your time and funds by allowing you to understand when to stop an activity and move on to another – either because it is not successful or because you have achieved your goal.

In order to generate metrics linked to business objectives, it is important to start by determining the RIM program's objectives, establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and then understanding why those KPIs move or change. Metrics which measure those changes can then be established, which will necessarily be linked to business objectives and provide true value to the organization. Consistent monitoring of those metrics over time will demonstrate the extent and type of EDRMS use, and the impact of your RIM program.

Metrics are essential to planning and supporting RIM programs, and demonstrating their value. EDRMS allow organizations a new and exciting opportunity to gather truly useful and meaningful metrics, but these must be linked to business value, and often require creative thinking to identify and collect. Furthermore, RIM managers can creatively apply analysis done in other domains to use the EDRMS to tease out information about how an organization does business – and position the RIM program as essential to providing a window into bottlenecks and potential efficiencies in the organization. A creative approach to EDRMS metrics can add a new level of business analysis to your RIM program.

The Rise of Digital Information and EDRMS

In today's work environment, digital records are a given for most organizations. Be it documents, emails, presentations, spreadsheets, PDF or other formats, digital information holdings are increasing at exponential rates, and are increasingly likely to constitute the official record of business, rather than simple convenience or transitory information. Of course, with the ease of replicating and sharing information afforded by technology, convenience and transitory copies abound! In order to identify the informational wheat and dispose of the digital chaff, businesses are increasingly using sophisticated electronic documents and records management systems (EDRMS) to get a handle on their electronic content.

Effectively deploying and maintaining an EDRMS represents a significant financial and human resource investment for most organizations. As such, RIM staff and executives need metrics about the system to monitor performance of the electronic Records and Information Management (RIM) program, and understand the return on investment of the EDRMS. But understanding the true performance of an electronic RIM program, and demonstrating its value, is something that many organizations struggle with.

Metrics – What and Why

Demonstrating the value of RIM has long been a challenge for the industry. "Senior management does not understand why RIM is important!" is a **common refrain among colleagues and in professional literature – and the truth of this is demonstrated when organizations cut or underfund their RIM programs (usually without understanding the consequences). And just as a record is a record regardless of format, the challenge of demonstrating the importance and value of RIM does not disappear simply because of a move to electronic records.**

Why Are You Measuring?

Because RIM programs usually represent a significant human and financial resource investment, it is normal for senior management to request evidence of the value that investment provides to the organization – often in the form of metrics. And metrics can indeed be used to provide clear, accurate, reliable pictures of the impact of a RIM program – when carefully created and managed. This is where the works gets tough. Often, metrics are produced because an organization has a standard set of questions to ask about the use of software – how many people are using it? How much do licenses cost? How many staff members are required to maintain it? Management expects to see this information because that is what they are used to seeing about software. And these may be important pieces of information about how the EDRMS is being used. They do not, however, show the whole picture of an EDRMS' impact. They often do not even concretely demonstrate the business value of your EDRMS. And yet we continue to fall into the trap of thinking that because we have "always" used these metrics, they must be the right ones.

A contributing factor to the challenge of producing truly valuable metrics for RIM activities is that the "why" of measurement is often an oversight. Too often, metrics are not evaluated for their link to business value. Instead, metrics are gathered because they are easy to obtain. By choosing to use metrics that are simple to generate rather than metrics that are concretely linked to business objectives, RIM programs fail to demonstrate their successes.

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Failure to make the link between metrics and the business value of what is measured hinders the ability to rely on those metrics for convincing demonstrations of the business value of RIM efforts. For example, an oft-touted metric in organizations with EDRMS is number of users. This is an easy number to generate from the system, and easy to compare to total employees. But it provides no true insight or value on its own. If 90% of your employees are users, it may be that only 10% of executives use the EDRMS. Depending on the organization, this may or may not be a problem – but by getting excited that users have increased from 85% to 90%, you may miss the fact that executive use has decreased from 15% to 10% - and you certainly cannot quantify how much of your business records still reside in unmanaged repositories. A much more useful metric would be percentage of official records managed in the EDRMS versus stored in unmanaged repositories (such as email). While this may be a more difficult metric to obtain, it is much more valuable than the number of users, as it is linked to your business objectives.

Understand the Benefits of What Is Being Measured Before deciding on metrics, it is crucial to understand the benefits and value of what is being measured, which will also allow you to determine how and when your metrics should be managed. Not only will you have a set of metrics which truly show the value of your program, but your metrics will also

— Improve strategic planning by allowing you to determine if you're solving the "right" problems for your organization, and planning accordingly;
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How To Get There

While metrics may be well developed in other domains (especially on the IT side), they are still evolving for RIM activities. RIM managers are often challenged when it comes to measuring things that matter. This is because the things that matter have not been identified. Valuable metrics cannot be produced if success has not been defined for your organization. To get good metrics, start by forgetting about the metrics!

1. The first step is to define the RIM program's objectives. Make sure they are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. For example, employees at your organization may collaborate heavily through email attachments, resulting in heavy internal email traffic, challenges managing versions, and difficulties in determining official copies and responding to eDiscovery requests. Using an EDRMS would allow employees to collaborate on documents in the system rather than via email. An objective might be to reduce the amount of internal email traffic by 15% per employee this calendar year by using the EDRMS for collaboration instead.

2. Now, define the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for each objective of the program – the Measurement in your SMART objective. (Note that these are not metrics – but we're close!) In this case, there are two aspects to measure: email traffic, and EDRMS use for collaboration.

3. It is tempting to jump to defining metrics at this point, but the next step is to determine why your KPIs move or change. For example, the volume of email attachments may be linked to having a new tool (the EDRMS), to educating employees about effective Information Management techniques (the benefit of sharing via links to documents rather than emails, which can be done with or without an EDRMS) or because a significant portion of the workforce is out of the office during the summer to conduct research in the field, and have limited access to email. A good understanding of the level of IM maturity in your organization as well as how it conducts business will allow you to understand why a measurement in your SMART objective is changing. This will allow the RIM program to assess whether the organization is closer (or farther) from a

goal because of your efforts, or for another reason. This is a crucial step, which is often missed; but understanding why KPIs move or change allows you to advocate strongly for your RIM program, based on demonstrable facts about the organization's business.

4. Now, set your metrics and determine where you will gather information for each objective. The metric for email traffic is straightforward: email traffic on the servers (ideally, your IT colleagues can get even more specific and tell you how much traffic is related to attachments). Measuring employee use of the EDRMS for collaboration instead of email could be done, for example, through follow up surveys or consultations. The specific way in which you will gather metrics will depend on why your KPIs will move or change. For example, in organization A where employees have strong IM techniques, reduced email volume may be closely linked to the deployment of an EDRMS, as they now have a new tool to facilitate their work. In organization B, where employees have a poor understanding of IM, however, a reduction in email volume may be due to an educational campaign on the value of version management in conjunction with an EDRMS deployment. Both organizations are measuring the same KPI, but that KPI is moving for different reasons. In organization A, improvement is due to deployment of the tool, but in organization B, it is due to employee education – even with an EDRMS, employees need to be taught how to collaborate effectively. RIM managers in organizations A and B need to plan different activities to meet the same RIM objective, and making this link between their SMART objectives, KPIs, reason for change to KPIs, and metrics will allow them to plan – and report to senior management – accordingly.

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5. Measure, measure, measure! Metrics are not static, and the way they change over time – quarter by quarter and year by year – reveals key information about your business. This is where the true use of metrics linked to business value demonstrate themselves. Showing how and why your metrics have changed allow you to respond in a focused, effective manner to unwanted changes. It also allows you to demonstrate the concrete contribution of RIM to the organization, and prove the change is due to the RIM program, rather than other unknown influences.

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EDRMS Implementation:

What Can We Measure, and Why?

While each RIM program's SMART goals and metrics will be different, there are domains of EDRMS implementation which each organization will likely want to consider measuring – system performance, system use, and business intelligence.

System Performance

Why measure system performance?

Measuring system performance can help ensure and demonstrate that the tool is functioning properly. Think of a car used for a daily commute: it represents a financial investment, and is a tool critical to everyday work. If the car fails to start one time out of four, then it is faulty and cannot reliably be used. An EDRMS likewise represents both a financial investment (in license, support, equipment, and staff costs), as well as being a tool that must be reliable. To ensure the organization is getting what has been paid for (and it is reasonable to expect that there will be questions on the value of the investment), a RIM manager needs to be able to prove that the tool is operational. Metrics on system performance will also allow you to convincingly request funds for system upgrades or increased support as needed.

System Performance – What to Measure?
In the realm of system performance, you may want to measure system uptime, the time it takes to restore or recover from a crash, the amount of storage used, and the tool's response time – the speediness with which users can perform their tasks. These may be the easiest metrics to gather and determine; your IT colleagues may well be collecting similar metrics for other systems in your organization, and may be able to provide guidance and help in this domain.

System performance is important because in order for people to use and trust the system, it needs to work reliably. That is the "why" of measuring system performance – so you can identify issues impeding the use of the system, and plan for improvements as needed.

System Use

Metrics on system use measure user adoption, and show the value of the investment. It can also be used to inform configuration decisions. System use metrics can also be used to perform qualitative and quantitative analysis to measure improvements in business processes. For example, have search times been reduced? That is quantifiable, and can be translated into cost savings. Have you reduced the effort required for eDiscovery? If you're in government, have you improved response times for Access to Information, Privacy, or Freedom of Information requests? Regardless of your industry, do staff feel that they have access to better information, for improved decision making? That is a qualitative measure that senior management should be interested in.

Why measure system use?

Measuring user adoption and effectiveness of system design will give you insight into how your users are using your EDRMS, or why they aren't. Your users are very clever – they may surprise you with the interesting and effective ways they find to maximize the value of your EDRMS. Alternatively, they may surprise you with the ways they devise to avoid using it if the system doesn't respond to their needs!

What to Measure?

Metrics and analytics tools can be used to investigate how people navigate and find information in the system, and those findings can be used for subsequent design decisions and improvements. Some business units, for example, may rely on search, while some may choose to navigate through folders structure more heavily. Some consultation with your users may reveal higher user satisfaction in one group over the other. In this case, comparing design and information architecture decisions may indicate why users are navigating in one way over the other. For example:

— How is the folder hierarchy/architecture different?
— Has the page layout been altered to highlight certain information, or the search bar?
— Have custom meta data fields have been implemented for one group but not the other? If so, how are they being used?

Understanding How Your Users Use The System Investigating how various user groups are using the system will also help you manage both your assumptions about your users, and your service offerings.

— Are your end users using the system the way you need them to? Are documents of business value filed in a way that allows the organization to manage and dispose of them? Why or why not? Monitoring this over time will help understand if and why this changes.

— Are users using the tool the way you expected? If not, there may be an unmet information need in your organization, which you can address or share with management if it falls outside of your area of responsibility.

— How are your records managers using the system? Is the classification accuracy acceptable? If not, is that due to faulty RM processes, or is it linked to end users? (For example, end users may not be applying metadata or filing correctly.)

— What behaviours are staff willing to change, what are they not willing to change, and why? For example, measuring the amount of emails, and whether emails have attachments, can provide insight into information behaviors and needs. If the amount of email attachments is not reduced, this may be due to a need for further training. Alternatively, it may be due to regular use of mobile devices – and if your EDRMS does not support easy mobile access, the system does not meet user needs. In that case, changing behaviour requires a change to the tool, not increased training.

The system use behaviors that you measure will be more difficult to devise than the system performance metrics – but they will provide you with incredibly valuable information on the health of your RIM program, and allow you to strategically build a strong, responsive, forward-focused RIM program.

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Business information

Business information metrics are one of the newest, most exciting realms for organizational performance analysis. Marketing and web analytics groups make the strongest use of these types of metrics, largely though data mining of huge information sets. But with a bit of creativity (and ideally the right tools), there is a very real possibility of data mining your EDRMS, to the benefit of your RIM program and the organization as a whole.

To start, identify whether your EDRMS offers Business Intelligence or Customer Relationship Management modules, and whether you have access to them. If so, your EDRMS vendor should be able to provide support and guidance in using these modules to their fullest. If not, some creativity can still allow you or your clients to perform some very interesting analysis, and use the information to improve the way your organization works.

— If using automated workflow tools, monitor the time it takes to complete the various workflows, over time, as well as the number of started and completed workflows. Can you identify bottlenecks in the processes? Is there a marked change in completion time at certain times of year? There may need to be a redistribution of tasks, if too few resources are assigned to a particular step in the workflow. Alternatively, you may be able to identify previously unacknowledged busy times, where additional resources are required. Evidence of these trends will allow your organization to plan more strategically.
— Does your organization have a strategic plan, with specific expected documentary outputs? Using meta-data (such as document type tags) and reporting tools, you may be able to quickly generate reports that will allow management to benchmark against expected outcomes, and identify missing information, more quickly and easily than ever before.
— Use reports to validate record keeping plans. Periodically, generate reports to compare expected document types against documents identified in your system – do they match? Have users started generating new documents of business value? Update yourretention plans accordingly. Using the EDRMS allows you to proactively, rather than reactively, monitor the information created by the organization (instead of learning about it 20 years from now when someone retires!)

— Search analysis is now possible! Monitor your top search terms, and consider highlighting the most searched for documents in the EDRMS (as "best results" if your EDRMS allows), or suggest providing improved access through the intranet or other information repositories. By comparing search terms over time, you will be able to provide the communications department with important information about the resources employees are looking for – all the time, and at certain times of year. You can now help your organization be proactive in surfacing the resources employees are searching for at various times, based on the rhythm of business for your organization.

Use Metrics To Make RIM Matter

It is clear that metrics are essential to planning and supporting RIM programs, and demonstrating their value. EDRMS allow organizations a new and exciting opportunity to gather truly useful and meaningful metrics, but these must be linked to business value, and often require creative thinking to identify and collect. Conversations within the RIM industry are a great starting point to identify the metrics that are right for your organization. Online resources, such as knowledge-sharing networks for users of the same software, are another great resource to investigate how others are collecting and using metrics. Finally, look to other domains' use of metrics to generate insight into what you would like to know about your own organization. By taking a look at how other domains develop and use metrics, and applying this lens to RIM programs, truly useful metrics start to emerge.

RIM managers can creatively apply analysis done in other domains to use the EDRMS to tease out information about how an organization does business – and position the RIM program as essential to providing a window into bottlenecks and potential efficiencies in the organization. A creative approach to EDRMS metrics can add a new level of business analysis to your RIM program.