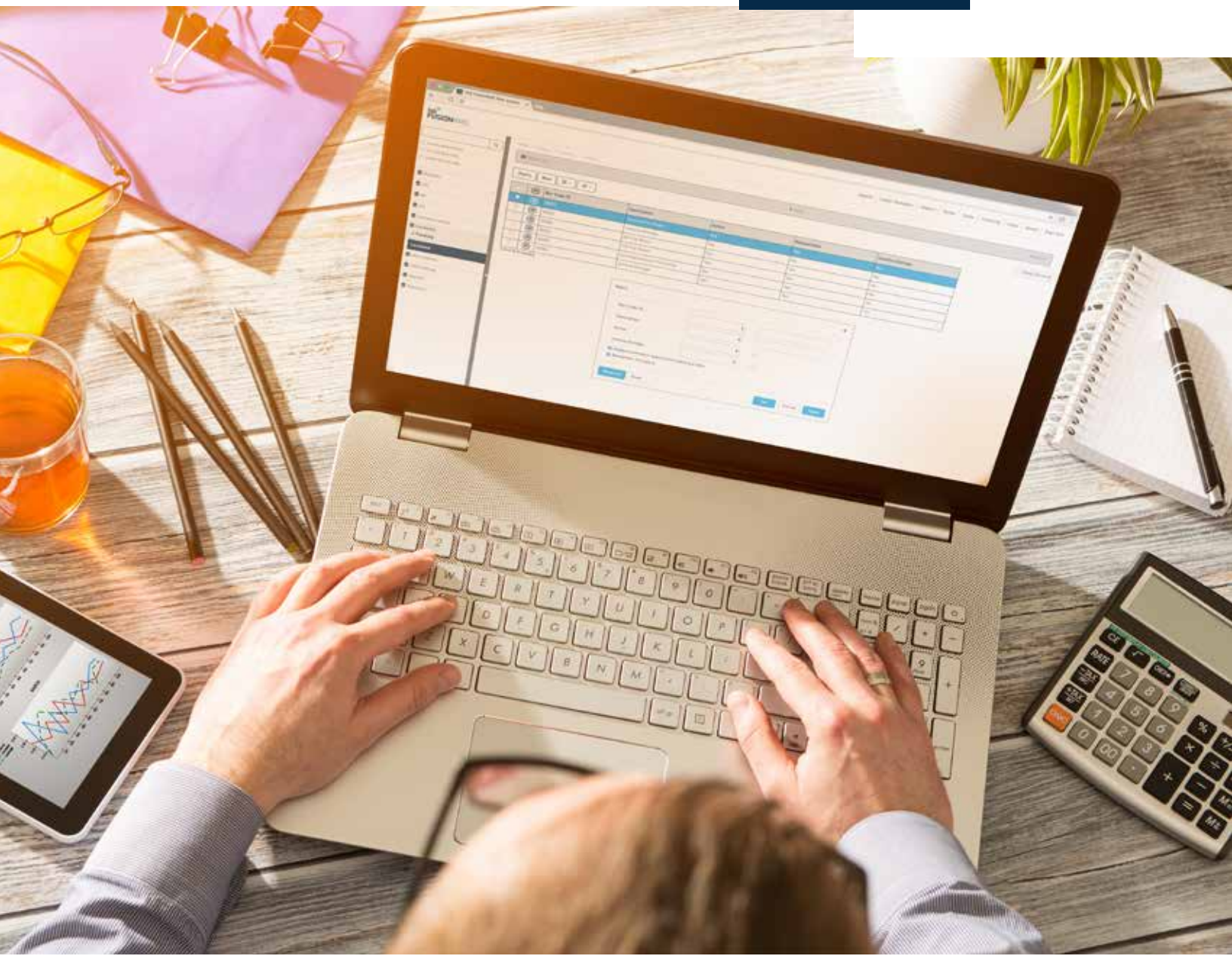
tab FUSIONRMS

Get the Right RIM Software: A Buyer's Guide



Are you looking for software to manage your information? Is your current ECM system falling short when it comes to handling records?

We have helped countless customers get the right software for their RIM needs, and we have distilled that experience into a helpful guide for buyers.

This resource will explain and highlight some of the important factors you need to consider when it comes to RIM software, and how those factors will impact your buying choices.

Once you have had a chance to go through this document, please feel free to contact us to discuss your findings.

Top of Mind:

The Hybrid Environment

It is a fact that today, a larger percentage of an organization's records exist in electronic formats. At the same time, the increased ease of printing and copying has helped paper file collections grow rather than shrink. With both the physical and electronic world growing, few organizations' records exist solely in one world or the other.

So what does that mean for your software selection?

Simply put, the relative success of any electronic RIM solution depends on the ability of that solution to facilitate the sound application of RIM principles and methodologies.

Understanding Your Technology Options

The most common technologies selected for RIM practices are Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems, Records Management Software Systems (RMS), and portals, such as Microsoft SharePoint®. It's important to understand how each system views and interacts with information and how each may impact your initiative.

ECM systems focus primarily on managing general content—from creation through collaboration and destruction. Portals focus on making electronic content available to others with similar needs.

Records management software focuses on managing documents that are considered to be official business records. RMS systems are not concerned with content or the dissemination of that content, but rather with the management of records and meeting an organization's requirements for the lifecycle management of records.

Understanding each technology's differences and how their features merge into a single solution will help you understand how to best meet your records management objectives. You may even discover that you need several products, not just one, to meet your needs.

Take a Deeper Dive:

Get our resource

Comparing Records Management Systems, Enterprise Content Management Systems, and Enterprise Information Portals »

Content vs. Record:
Know the Difference

Be sure you understand the difference between “content” and a “record” since what your organization tracks will impact your RMS selection:

Content is data or information of any kind and can be changed and shared frequently.

A record is an official version of the facts, such as a contract, an offer letter, a purchase order, etc., and its integrity must be maintained. A record also has very specific lifecycle and management requirements.

Remember, the technology you select must be able to distinguish between content and records and must be able to handle your unique lifecycle requirements for records.

First Things First:
Establish Your RM Requirements

One of the biggest challenges in managing the hybrid environment is addressing media-specific needs without losing sight of general legal and business requirements. Such requirements apply regardless of media format, and the laws that mandate them make little allowance for the specific challenges introduced by your media choices. Here are a few examples of these requirements:

- Requirements to retain records for a minimum number of years.
- Requirements to safeguard information against unauthorized access, alteration or deletion in order to mitigate the risk of non-compliance with privacy legislation, Sarbanes-Oxley, or contractual obligations.
- Requirements to retrieve records in response to litigation, audits, incident response and other time-sensitive scenarios.

In meeting these and other requirements, it is critical that an organization be able to provide evidence of reliable standards and due diligence processes. Such evidence takes the form of established records management governance tools, which may include:

- An information management policy, records retention policy or other corporate-level policy directive stating requirements for the management of recorded information.

Such a policy should also include executive endorsement of records management program activities and outline responsibilities at the departmental and individual level.

- Detailed procedures, guidelines and other documentation defining standardized workflows for such tasks as file creation, classification, retrieval, location tracking, and disposal.
- A functional records classification, which divides records into categories based on the different business activities for which they provide evidentiary and informational support.
- A records retention schedule which assigns standard time periods for keeping record categories based on documented statutory, regulatory and operational requirements.
- Information security protocols which assign sensitivity risk levels and identify appropriate security safeguards for mitigating that risk.

Developing these standards is a critical first step in records management program development, not to mention an indispensable precursor to the selection, procurement and implementation of an electronic solution.

It's also critical to understand the risks of non-compliance—financial, business and legal. Those risks should also guide your implementation decisions. After all, it is you and your organization—not your vendor—on the line to ensure compliance. You are ultimately responsible for making sure your vendor implements a RIM software solution that supports compliance with controls designed around your business processes.

Be sure to clearly define your requirements for procedures, processes, reporting, audits, security, retention and disposition. Then you'll be ready to determine which vendors can or cannot help you meet your compliance initiatives.

Buyer's Tip:

When examining vendors' products, be sure they can be configured without an endless stream of costly, customized development work to reach your goals. The vendor should be able to provide a viable solution out of the box with minor configuration. Finally, document and validate your decisions, assuming you have the ability to make configuration choices about the system you select.

Know Your RMS Criteria

Are there technology standards you must work with —and if so, do you know why?

Understanding the rationale behind a standard can better enable you to select a vendor that helps you meet it. Also, keep in mind that while a solution itself may be compliant, the ways in which it is implemented could create non-compliance with legislative mandates or initiatives, like the Public Information Act or HIPAA. Technology systems do not make an organization compliant; they simply support compliance controls.

Start by measuring your RIM best practices against your compliance objectives. You will need to consider:

- Document/record life cycles and taxonomy: where they come from, what types you have, what buckets you put them in, and the retention and disposition rules you must follow
- How you manage the "chain of custody" on physical and electronic items
- Levels of auditing/reporting required
- Type of security required from a system, application, record/item and user perspective

In other words, in order to determine if an RMS system is right for your organization, you need to know what can be done—by whom, on what, and when.

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Build RM Requirements into the Electronic System

The documented standards described on the previous page may be used to defend the integrity of records and the reliability of information management controls in the event of a legal challenge or other high-risk scenario. But such a defense also depends on the ability of an organization to demonstrate that standards actually have been implemented. In the hybrid environment, records management governance requirements must be applied to both paper and electronic records.

Buyer's Tip:

In selecting electronic records management software, look for tools that can be configured and customized based directly on your organization's records management governance tools. Just as a manual environment requires that workers follow standards to the letter, so too should those standards be built into actual software functionality and user interfaces. Look for software solutions that facilitate compliance with standards via the following features:

- Categorization of records based on corporate-level file classification schemes.
- Application of records retention schedules to both electronic content stored on the system and paper files tracked via the system.
- Additional indexing of individual files and records based on more detailed metadata standards and taxonomies.
- Assignment of responsibilities and system access levels based on roles defined in corporate policy.
- Automated processing of records based on tasks and workflows defined in records management procedures.

Offer One-Stop Information Shopping

A comprehensive records management program adds value to business by managing both electronic records and physical holdings such as paper files. In selecting software solutions to support this program, your final goal should be a single user interface that searches and retrieves both paper and electronic records using a variety of relevant indexing fields. Possible indexing fields should include:

- Basic content descriptors, such as file numbers, file titles, subject keywords, company names, personal names, and relevant business functions/activities.
- Origin descriptors, such as individual creator, departmental 'owner', and the date on which the record was created or last updated.
- Records retention and disposition indicators, such as file creation date, file closure date, record class code, schedule number, and legal hold status (to be used as needed).
- Any specialized data descriptors unique to the particular industry or business activities which records support.
- Possible examples of these descriptors may include a well identification number (for the petroleum industry), policy number (for the insurance industry), or legal counterpart (for law firms).
- Hyperlinks to relevant electronic folders and documents stored either on the system or a repository with links to the system.
- Information describing the current location and sign-out status of relevant physical records.

Buyer's Tip:

Different software vendors offer different approaches to meeting this need. Some enterprise content management software includes optional modules for physical file management. However, never assume that a product which effectively manages electronic documents will necessarily meet records management requirements applicable to all formats.

If your organization's current content management software does not meet all your needs, there is still hope. With the right configuration work, many document management solutions can be successfully integrated with more specialized software products which are specifically designed with the management of physical records in mind. End users generally don't care whether an overall retrieval system consists of a standalone product or an integration of different software. What does matter is the sum of those parts, which should offer "one-stop shopping" functionality for searching and retrieving both paper and electronic records via a single interface. Given the hybrid nature of many files, anything less would give only half the picture, introducing any number of legal and operational risks, not to mention wasting valuable work time.

Buyer's Tip:

You may even elect to engage your potential vendors to help with this process. By working with the vendors, you'll be able to establish expectations and ensure that no critical technology issues are missed.

What's more, you should make sure that the vendors you look at are flexible and that their products can be tuned to your process rather than forcing you to change how you operate. Ask:

- Do the vendors' solutions mesh with your technology environment, your infrastructure, and your restrictions?
- What about support?
- Do they require a different environment than you have in place today? Do they offer IT training for administration?

Working with your IT team, you can find answers to these questions and increase your chance for success.

Understand your people, process and environment

Since you'll ultimately be implementing a technology solution, understanding your environment from an IT perspective is key. That doesn't mean you need to be a technology expert. Simply engage your IT team, the people directly involved in the process of implementing and then maintaining the technologies you choose to deploy. Work with them to "map" your environment, understand the requirements of a complete RIM approach for the organization and define the specific technologies you need. Getting your IT team involved at this stage can also help you gain early buy-in from them.

Address the Unique Needs of Paper Records

For all the talk of a paperless office, many organizations have a very real business need for paper records.

It is important, then, that the unique storage and distribution needs of paper records not get overlooked. To address these needs, many integrated software solutions offer modules to support day-to-day physical file management processes. Examples of those modules include:

- Bar code technology, radio frequency technology and other tools that automate the sign-out and location tracking of physical records media;
- Electronic ordering of inactive physical records stored offsite; and
- Design and printing of physical file labels, incorporating such established file management strategies as numerical indexing, bar coding, and color coding.

Buyer's Tip:

Where a particular software product does not include these capabilities, it may still allow for customization so that it can interface directly with specialized physical file management software products. These products are especially helpful where an organization has already implemented electronic content management software, turning an otherwise partial solution into a comprehensive toolkit for managing the hybrid file across its entire life cycle.

Develop Electronic Support for Real-World

Records Retention

Identifying and applying records retention requirements can be an involved process, and many organizations are looking to electronic records management solutions to automate that process as much as possible. Software vendors have heard the call. Most of today's systems have the capability of automatically flagging a record for disposal when it reaches a certain age.

This works fine for records whose retention periods span a fixed number of years after files are created. In some organizations, the majority of records retention periods may even work that way. But effective solution developers know that this is only part of the records retention picture. Retention periods for many paper and electronic files are event-based, meaning that the retention period does not even begin until a predefined event triggers closure of the file. Common examples of retention events include:

- Termination of an employment relationship (for a personnel file)
- Termination or expiry of an agreement (for a contract file)
- Completion of an annual internal audit (for annual accounting files)
- Project closure (for project files)
- Decommissioning of a plant or facility (for some engineering files)
- Corporate dissolution (for articles of incorporation and other core governance documents)

For some files, the retention event may not occur for any number of years. Calculating disposal dates based on when files were created runs the risk of destroying records before their retention period has begun, much less ended. In the best case scenario, your organization's staff is forced to review lists of possible destructions that have to be delayed. In the worst case scenario, electronic records are automatically deleted and paper files sent to shredding facilities too soon, contravening internal policy and breaking the law.

As a direct alternative to both nightmare scenarios, make sure that event-based retention is built into the design and configuration of your RM software. In its simplest form, this includes:

- Naming of specific retention events in the actual retention rules applied by the system
- Data entry points for users to inform the system when the event has actually occurred
- Calculation of the retention period based on when the event actually occurs
- Sending of notifications to record "owners" when the event-based retention period has indeed lapsed
- An opportunity for the user to further postpone disposal where there is a legal hold or other valid business case to retain the record further.

Make Sure You Get What You Need

You have defined your requirements, weighed the technologies, understood how various solutions meet requirements and worked closely with your vendor(s) during the evaluation. The next step is to validate that the solutions you are interested in will truly meet and deliver against expectations.

That simply means that it is time to validate the specifics. Consider how retention or disposition will work; how processes will be configured; and how legal holds, security, access and reporting/auditing will work. Then put the rubber to the road by running some of your typical users through scenarios using the actual solutions you are evaluating—to prevent surprises at implementation time. You may find that some customization is required. At any rate, seeing is believing, and any vendors worth their salt will be happy to prove their solution will work.

As diligent as you might be, you are only human, and it is likely that something somewhere may be missed. How you deal with these issues is what truly matters, so plan in advance with your vendors how they will fairly and equitably accommodate unanticipated issues. Remember, you're paying for a solution within the bounds of your agreed-upon scope and shouldn't expect your vendors to provide endless revamping based on requirements that are unclear or in flux. Bottom line: Understand early on the extent of each party's responsibilities and define and agree upon the change process for future issues. This is a practical and straightforward way to formalize long-term relationships with your vendors.

TAB Can Help

At TAB, we can help you get the right RM software in place, whether you have an existing ECM solution or not. Our comprehensive knowledge of records management and its application to RM software tools gives us a tremendous advantage over a company that only sells software without understanding records management. We take a holistic approach, looking at your entire records situation, paper and electronic, before determine how any software will fit into the organization. We look what your business issues are, which workflows need to be solved, and then customize a solution to fit your organization's requirements. If you would like to know about how TAB can help you be more efficient by deploying RM Software, please contact us.

Summary:

'Required functionality in an RMS

If you know you need a records management system to manage the full lifecycle of your records (regardless of format) while ensuring their integrity, here are some specific features the ideal system will have:

- **Integration** of both electronic and physical records management into one system with a common user interface.
- **Unlimited Flexibility:** No one knows your records better than you. The system should be designed to help support your team in meeting your most complex recordkeeping objectives.
- **Scalability:** No matter what size your organization or how many locations you have, regardless of the number of records you track, from single departments to the entire enterprise, the system should grow with you.
- **Ability to Consolidate all Records in a Single System:** Records need to be tracked, whatever their form. The system should simultaneously manage physical and electronic records in an efficient, accurate system and easily track the disposition of records throughout their lifecycle.
- **A Powerful Database:** Make sure the database structure makes sense for you. It should be an industry standard such as Microsoft SQL, as well as easy to administer, maintain and scale.
- **Simple to Use:** The user interface should comply with standard Windows operating systems which is the industry's most popular format. This ensures a comfortable look and feel, designed to make the product approachable for users of all skill levels.
- **A Configurable Workflow:** The system should feature automated document routing capability, configurable to your specific requirements, and paired with powerful centralized tools. This will offer greater efficiency for database and retention setup specific to active and inactive records, complete with user settings and menu items based on security rights.
- **Bar Code Tracking:** The system should use the latest bar code tracking technology to instantly locate any paper record and provide a complete audit trail of its usage.
- **Robust Security:** You need a comprehensive and intuitive system designed to complement and respect existing IT security conventions.
- **Flexible and Compatible Imaging: T**he right solution should support most industry-standard scanners, from desktop to high-speed production scanners, as well as the full range of image indexing, image controls, viewing and access technologies. This will allow you to immediately reduce your file room and storage costs and provide remote access to any number of users.
- **Search Functionality:** Full text search of electronic records designed to quickly take you to the documents you seek is critical.
- **Reporting:** The system should offer various reporting options to provide overall feedback, compliance and audit information as well as granular views of your records management environment.
- **Retention:** Robust retention management features for citation maintenance and legal holds is critical.

Finally, when evaluating products to meet your needs, consider whether they meet both your physical and electronic records management needs in an integrated fashion. The ideal system maintains the connection between paper records and their electronic counterparts. Such a system allows you to:

- **Integrate both electronic and physical records management in one system with a common user interface.**
- **Define document types and their retention and disposition requirements, and determine if they have to be managed physically, electronically or both. This enables a paperless system while ensuring compliance with regulations.**
- **Co-exist with ECM and/or other systems so that documents and records can be made available for online workflow processes and collaboration, while still maintaining the lifecycle management requirements of the official record.**
- **Integrate established and well-designed physical records management technology that makes it easy to maintain order in file rooms and document repositories, while filing and accessing physical or electronic documents quickly and efficiently.**
- **Easily manage corporate retention schedules and allow updates without extensive programming changes through the program vendor.**

Does the system provide the following?

	Y	N
Document imaging and electronic tracking		
Paper file tracking		
PC file management		
Property and evidence room management		
Document routing and reporting workflows		
Paper and electronic versioning		
Paper and electronic audit trail		
Web access to information		
Multiple retention schedule management		
Automatic generation of bar codes for tracking		
Bar code tracking		
Processing history report		
Pipeline report		
Retention report		
Missing documents report		
Productivity report		
File history report		
Compliance report		
Requestor exceptions report		
Audit report		

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