

white paper:

# Five tips for getting the most out of your records digitization pilot

Setting yourself up for success



## Introduction

Pilot programs are a great way to ensure the success of your digitization program. However, poorly planned pilots can waste time, deliver misleading results and hamper the success of your project.

This white paper provides five tips to ensure that your digitization pilot achieves your goals and sets you up for success.

1. Choose wisely
2. Manage project scope
3. Measure twice, cut once
4. Evaluate the outcomes
5. Toot your own horn

### Tip #1: Choose wisely

Which records do you choose for the target of your pilot effort? The key is to consider a wide range of variables related to the records themselves and the business groups that capture and retain them. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Variety of business functions.** By including multiple groups with varying business functions you can:
  - Obtain a more comprehensive, reliable sample of the organization's recordkeeping reality
  - Draw on a wider range of lessons learned, which can then be applied across the organization
  - Mitigate the risk of failure due to shifting priorities or sudden resource constraints. Is one of your pilot groups scaling back its participation? It's okay -- you still have the others!
- **Record volume.** Balance is everything when it comes to deciding how many records to include in your pilot. The number of records should be manageable given available resources, yet still big enough to:
  - Produce impressive results in terms of cost savings, space utilization and business efficiencies
  - Provide a credible test case for your digital records management solution.
- **Record complexity.** Record collections in your pilot should offer just enough variety to both challenge and inform implementation activities. Examples of these variables include:

- Mix of "official records" needing digitization, and more transitory materials which might need to be purged before digitization begins
- Records in different physical media, formats and sizes, from letter-sized paper to large scale graphics to plastic film
- Different digital formats for upload to, or cross-reference with an integrated system, from structured data files to electronic documents, slide decks and digital photos

- **Impact.** Look for departments that will have easily demonstrable outcomes following your pilot. Start with groups that have experience with the legal, financial and operational motivations for improved records management. Possible signs of this experience are departments with:
  - Strictly regulated business functions, such as online financial transactions, environmental protection and health/safety
  - Greater probability of litigation, including recent court cases and settlements
  - Activities subject to frequent audit, both internal and external
  - Higher profile functions with public accountability requirements and/or reputational risk

### Tip #2: Manage project scope

Throughout your pilot, you will face many opportunities to add participants, record collections, process steps and software features. We usually recommend that you don't!

Assuming you have developed a reasonably comprehensive solution and have identified the pilot scope clearly, scope creep will impede on your ability to meet the original objectives of the pilot.



One of the goals of your pilot project should be to learn which concepts and procedures worked well, and where adjustments need to be made for a full roll-out of the project. By adding extra participants, records, or processes to your pilot, you detract from your ability to effectively meet this goal by overstressing your limited pilot resources. You do not give your pilot its best chance for success if you are unable to give it the focus or resources it requires. This will leave you unable to fairly assess which concepts and procedures worked and which did not.

It is also important to keep in mind that the pilot itself is not the “be all” or “end all” of records digitization. There is still a lot of work coming. Any managers or staff eager to digitize their records will still be interested after the pilot is concluded, the proof of concept is established and useful adjustments are made.

If anything, an enhanced records digitization solution will be available to them thanks to the lessons learned during the pilot. By letting the pilot conclude before making additions, you can ensure that enhancements are applied consistently and to the widest population possible.

### Tip # 3: Measure twice, cut once

One of the goals of any pilot project is to look for possible adjustments in the program itself, which could include cutting process steps, tools and areas of scope which aren't effective or can't be cost justified. But no such decision should be made lightly. Just as effective carpenters double check their tape measure, key decisions during or after the pilot should be based on objective and repeatable data. Look for clear and quantifiable trends before you begin digitizing. For example:

- **Source document condition.** How long are source records retained? Under what conditions have they been stored? Are they faded, worn, damaged or otherwise compromised? A thorough sampling of in-scope documents beforehand will reveal critical information about their durability and clarity, all of which will need to be addressed as part of the digitization process. Ultimately, questions of condition can help decide which source records are digitized at all.

- **Source document format.** Even if a document is in pristine form, its particular dimensions can introduce other challenges. What percentage of physical records identified for scanning are of oversized or irregular format? This can require manual, flatbed scanning or even specialized scanning equipment, increasing costs and labour, and potentially swaying key decisions about which departments and record collections to include in the implementation (both the pilot and full implementation). It can also affect procurement methods related to a project, such as in-house versus outsourced digitization and purchasing vs. rental of special equipment.
- **Retrieval rate.** How often are records retrieved, referenced or used? As much as possible, use real world data about record retrieval frequency to prioritize records for processing, as well as to inform decision making about how best to prepare, file and index the newly digitized records.
- **Record collection quality and organization.** No matter how high resolution your image capture or how fast your retrieval tools, digital records management cannot succeed if you simply move a bad quality filing system onto an electronic platform. In considering departmental collections for inclusion in your pilot, take a careful, objective look at the organization and quality of the record collections. Some may require upfront work before they can be integrated into the digitization process. Project schedules and resource plans depend on upfront knowledge about any such needs.



— **Digital authenticity and physical disposition.** What will happen to paper source documents after they have been digitized? Most legal jurisdictions allow electronic copies to stand in the place of original paper records provided they were digitized in the normal course of business and there is a reasonable assurance of the integrity of the electronic record and the system on which it is retained. There are therefore two questions to consider before determining what happens to the paper post-digitization:

- Do your digitization process and electronic records management system all ensure an authentic, reliable record which meets legal admissibility requirements?
- Are any records subject to any exceptions to the general rule that allows digital copies to replace paper? While they are rare, some laws do require certain records to be retained in their original, physical form. Even if none of these laws apply, your records may include seals, embossed stamps or other authenticating features which simply do not carry over into the digital realm. All of these factors must be weighed before you decide what happens to your source documents after digitization.

## Tip #4: Evaluate the outcomes

Throughout the pilot project it is important to be continually analyzing for potential improvements. But once you are finished with the pilot project, the analysis should continue. This means taking a cold, objective look at your approach and its outcomes. Without this objectivity, you will miss critical information that can only be gained by experiencing the risks, technical limitations, practical challenges, and human factors of a records digitization pilot.

A comprehensive post-mortem analysis is critical to identifying these lessons and adjusting plans for implementing the full roll-out of the digital records solution across your organization. Your review should incorporate input from management and staff, including surveys, focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews, and direct observations or audits of in-scope record holdings before and after the pilot.

Here are some directions and questions to consider when reviewing the outcome of your digital records pilot:

- Were staffing resources sufficient to provide the necessary level of user support and stay on schedule? What level of scaling or other adjustments are necessary before you begin full implementation?
- Do digitized records provide an accurate, reliable representation of the source records, or are there errors and integrity issues, either in record images or the indexing of those records? Are there gaps in the process and procedures that need to be remedied, or are tighter controls necessary to ensure compliance with existing processes?
- Did key implementation tasks, such as hardware/software installation, record scanning and indexing occur within the scheduled timeframe? If not, what technical, administrative and human factors contributed to the delay? Can those delays be prevented, or was the original schedule unrealistic?
- Were any particular steps in the digitization process especially prone to problems, such as delays, backlogs, missed document pages or inaccurate indexing data? Recurring problems should be embraced as valued indicators of room to improve, either in the allocation of time and resources to the different steps, or in the overall design of the process itself.
- Was the content and delivery schedule for system training sufficient to meet the needs of staff who will use records via the system in their everyday job duties? Given the role that digital records will play in daily life, adjustments to the training may be needed to better integrate search procedures, user interfaces and other aspects of the system and existing business processes.
- Are record metadata and other information retrieval elements appropriate given the different business needs which drive users to locate and retrieve documents? Too little metadata may mean missing key concepts which staff use in searching for documents, making for slower or incomplete searches. Too much means increased data entry burdens moving forward.

## Tip #5: Toot your own horn

In order for the pilot to fully meet the proof of concept objective, it is necessary to communicate positive outcomes of the pilot as widely as possible.

On the records management practice level, what exactly was achieved? How many paper or other physical files were converted to digital format? What enhancements does the new platform offer users? Improved search parameters, faster retrieval times and reductions in physical space occupied by records media are all fair game.

But don't stop there. What are the real world impacts of improved records management for the broader financial, operational and risk management objectives of the organization as a whole? Financially speaking, what does the freeing up of office space mean in terms of hard dollars saved on leasing, maintenance and taxes? Operationally, how does faster information retrieval translate into increased output and/or revenue generation? And how can more reliable records decrease the risks of litigation, audits, investigations and other scenarios with required documented evidence?

## TAB can help

When planned right, a pilot program can deliver many benefits to your organization. TAB offers a variety of services to help you execute an effective digitization pilot, including planning, staffing, scanning, electronic document storage and change management. Get in touch to learn more.

### UNITED STATES

888-822-9777

### CANADA

800.387.6212

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