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Businesses can benefit from electronic records

While many of us are getting ready for the holidays, it's also the time of year that businesses review the past year's progress and set new goals.

A key area that allows businesses to accomplish all these objectives relates to the management of information. Scanning hard copy records and managing them in a document management solution can increase personnel efficiency, improve information security, provide a sustainable practice and cut business operations costs.

Business information is created extremely fast and can be a challenge for most companies to organize and manage effectively. But managing information can't be ignored. When information management is neglected, staff waste time searching for information, privacy can be compromised and record retention is ignored, all costing companies time and money.

Centralizing the hard-copy records and existing electronic documents into a virtual electronic-filing cabinet is gaining popularity in Northeastern Wisconsin. Hard-copy files are scanned into an electronic format which allow e-mails and electronic documents to be quickly filed for easy retrieval using key words, phrases or unique searchable fields.

The document-management solution is available to authorized users assigned a unique,



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user name and password in the system which is accessible using the internet.

Imagine logging into a Web site that not only houses and manages all of your hard-copy files, it also manages document-retention periods for all your business information. This is the type of technology that is available to business owners today.

Electronic document management provides a number of benefits:

- Increase efficiency: Rather than walking

to the file room, searching for the file and returning to your desk, you can find the information within a few seconds at your desktop.

With this extra time, personnel can spend their work days on more important, revenue-generating tasks rather than costly administrative tasks.

- Reduce costs: How much time do you spend each day copying, searching, retrieving and recreating lost or misplaced documents?

It's safe to say that no matter what industry you're in, or how organized your office is, countless hours and resources are wasted and these expenses can impact an entire organization.

As information grows within your organization, the burden for efficiently managing that information grows.

- Increase security: No longer does information security mean a lock on the door or file cabinet. Imagine controlling information access using permissions defining a person's ability to view, print, or e-mail a document or group of documents. Now, you can control and audit this activity with document management. Also, a hosted document management system means your data is hosted via the Internet with strict security controls so if a disaster would strike at your business, your data is safe from

harm's way.

- Sustainability: Electronic document management solutions offer businesses an opportunity to not only work efficiently but work smarter from a sustainability perspective.

Companies are becoming more aware of their carbon footprint. Consider how much paper will be saved when information is filed electronically versus printed just to file or scan. By reducing the amount of paper you use, you're doing your part to promote a smarter and eco-friendly model for business operations.

The transition to electronic records often includes a paper purge. When deciding what to keep, talk with trusted advisors and your legal and accounting staff before tossing anything.

Once you know the items that are safe to throw away, be sure to shred everything. For smaller shred jobs, an office shredder may work, but for the larger jobs, speak with a company that not only specializes in secure destruction, but will recycle your paper waste for you as well.

“Once the transition has been made with your records, in the new year you can spend your time deciding what to do with all your new-found office space rather than searching for lost documents.”

Eric Haas is president of A.R.M.S, a commercial records center in De Pere.