

Seven Best Practices for Email Records Management

This white paper discusses seven best practices for organizations to consider when implementing email records management. It offers several considerations for evaluating email records management strategies and addresses the challenges to fully integrating email into a records management environment.

Intended Audience

This white paper is intended for IT, Enterprise Content Management and Records Management professionals in organizations that are concerned about their control, retention, disposition and liability over information contained in email.

Email in a Records Management Context

If your business is conducted by email (and whose isn't these days?), then the content of these email must be retained and managed like any other record. In many cases, it's the email itself that must be retained as a record, sometimes it's the attachment, often it's both, but the message is clear: email are records and need to be managed as such.

However, the 2011 AIIM State of the Industry Survey offers some startling statistics:

- 66% of records managers have concerns about information accuracy and accessibility, particularly with regard to email
- 15% delete all email over a certain age, whereas 16% keep them indefinitely. 27% have no policy
- 31% describe their management of email as “chaotic”
- 39% are still filing important email in personal Outlook folders
- 18% automatically capture email to document or records management systems
- Since we have a lot of experience in the SharePoint world, it's interesting to note that only 20% of companies store email in SharePoint.

There is a big gap between knowing what needs to be done, and actually doing it. Organizations need to get a handle on email in a way that meets compliance and legal requirements within tight financial constraints. And importantly, they need to do it without negatively impacting employee productivity. Employees are already being asked to do more with less, so any additional responsibilities and requirements must be easily integrated into their daily work processes, habits and applications.

Regarding email records management, organizations need to address two important questions:

- How do you align email management practices with corporate records management strategy, while keeping end users happy and deployment costs low?
- How do you balance the needs of IT and the Records Manager with the needs of the user?

7 Best Practices for Email Records Management

This whitepaper discusses seven best practices for email records management that Colligo has developed over the past several years through working with organizations worldwide to implement successful email records management strategies.

1. Understand the scope of the problem.

As a very first step, you need understand the scope of the email problem in your organization. This means understanding all the places where emails are being stored today. The usual suspects include .pst and .ost files, Exchange Public Folders, Exchange Managed Folders, and file shares. These really are the skeletons in the closet that must be addressed early on in the planning phase.

But not only do you have to figure out where email is being stored, but why are they being stored there? Are some groups creating project folders in Exchange where they share email? Are some users storing everything in a PST so that they have access to all their email when they are travelling? Are users archiving PST files to their file share because they hit their PST size limit?

Understanding the scope of the problem comes down to doing some serious detective work to figure out the where, the why and the how.

2. Build a business case

Building a business case means understanding the costs associated with your current email strategy, the cost of eDiscovery and the legal consequences of not managing email properly. This information and data is part of the business case needed in order to get the resources to create and implement an effective email records management strategy.

eDiscovery becomes even more expensive when you need to search multiple repositories. Deploying an effective email records management strategy that reduces number of repositories to search will subsequently lower eDiscovery costs. Also, deploying a strategy that reduces the amount of email you need to store and search, will again lower costs, and provide more effective legal holds and better compliance.

If you need further ammunition to get the resources to implement effective email records management in your organization, here are just a few high profile court cases related to lost or mismanaged email that resulted in multi-million dollar settlements:

- In 2006, if Morgan Stanley had been able to locate and produce all their email in one case, they may have avoided a \$15M fine. In this case, Morgan Stanley was heavily punished by the judge for consistently failing to produce email records during the discovery process. On several occasions, employees at Morgan Stanley found tape backups of email records related to the case even after the company signed statements stating that they had turned over all relevant records. Morgan Stanley had no consistent process in place for managing the flow of information in email, and this significantly affected the case.
- In 2005, during a lawsuit by AMD over monopoly allegations, Intel executives' "lost" email significantly affected their defence - executives thought all email were being backed up by IT, even deleted email. Some employee email was lost because workers failed to move messages from their "Sent" folder into other folders and it was automatically deleted, while other email were lost because Intel failed to notify hundreds of employees to retain email related to the case. This suit was settled for \$1.25B.
- In a 2007 patent lawsuit between Qualcomm and its rival Broadcom, the judge was very critical of Qualcomm's inability to easily identify all the relevant email records related to the case. The court felt so strongly about enforcing the rules of eDiscovery that it ordered the 14 lawyers who had worked on the case for Qualcomm to appear at a hearing to explain each one why he or she should not be sanctioned personally. This suit was eventually settled for \$891M.

3. Assume every employee is creating records and every email is a possible record.

This is such an important concept, that it's better to think of it as a mantra than simply a best practice. Assume that everyone in your organization creates records and every email (and attachment) is a possible record.

The fact is that you simply do not know beforehand what email could turn into a "smoking gun." You have to consider that every email could be a "smoking gun." And remember, a deleted email or an email that couldn't be found, can be just as damaging.

So a good mantra for your email management strategy is: "Everyone creates records, every email is a possible record." And this mantra affects every part of your email management strategy including the design of the system itself and what tools and processes you use to implement it.

4. Deploy a three zone email management approach.

A three zone email management approach is a framework recommended by DocuLabs, Gimmal, and many others in terms of how to handle email in a records management context.

As illustrated in the graphic, zone one email are the regular email that everyone gets every day. Some are records, some could be records, but most are probably of the “read-and-delete” variety. In zone one, unless the employee explicitly indicates otherwise, these email are automatically deleted after a set period of time, usually 90 days. This auto-delete policy will cause resistance from staff that are used to keeping email in their Inbox indefinitely.

Zone two email are defined as email with corporate value but which have yet to be declared as records. This zone is like email purgatory, in that some action needs to be taken on them in a set amount of time, usually one year. Either they get declared as records, or they get deleted.

Zone three email are defined as records that need to be moved into an enterprise records repository and have some kind of policy placed on them for retention, disposition, eDiscovery, etc. These are email records that need to be managed properly.

The corollary to this three zone email management best practice is to block alternative storage options (with auto email deletion on Exchange, removal of PST and EPFs, company policies, etc.) and make Zone two readily accessible and easy to use.

In the three zone email management approach, zone one storage is usually Outlook/Exchange, whereas for Zone two and three we recommend using SharePoint (if you have deployed SharePoint) or your existing ECM or records management system, rather than a standalone email archiving solution or Exchange Managed Folders. Keeping email records together with other content types is a recommended strategy that SharePoint is capable of providing.

5. Leverage your Existing Microsoft Investment

If your organization is already a Microsoft shop, with an enterprise agreement for Exchange, SharePoint, and Office, you already have almost everything you need to create an effective email records management solution.

In the current economic environment, both CIOs and CFOs are looking to control IT costs and provide demonstrable evidence of ROI on existing IT infrastructure investments, such as the investment already made in the Microsoft solution stack. Making the recommendation to leverage your existing Microsoft investment by utilizing what you already own not only makes good financial sense, but is also a good career move.

Falling out of this best practice is the suggestion not to deploy an email records management strategy that creates separate repositories for email versus other documents. Having two separate repositories will not only impact your eDiscovery costs, but it'll create two processes that your employees will have to learn (with two separate interfaces) for creating records.

SharePoint is a central repository that can handle email, documents and pretty much whatever other content types that you'll need to store as a record. And with SharePoint, you'll gain the added bonus of providing records management and collaboration on a single platform.

SharePoint 2010 has gone a long way to becoming a viable platform for records management with its improvements to the Records Center, its in-place records management capability, new Enterprise Managed Metadata features, improved scalability, and so on. Combined with 3rd party Outlook integration tools, like Colligo Email Manager, organizations are able to create a robust and cost effective email records management solution on SharePoint.



6. Create a process that works the way your users work.

It's no news to anyone that employees really don't like change. They don't like being forced to use a new tool or application or to follow a new process that is unfamiliar or complex. They don't like it and they will rebel. So, creating an email records management process that works the way they are used to working is a key best practice that will pay dividends for your organization.

Almost everyone lives in Outlook these days, so why not make it the main interface to the email records management system? By combining SharePoint with a third party Outlook integration tool like Colligo Email Manager, you can leverage the familiar user experience of Outlook with its drag-and-drop capabilities and standard folder tree structure, to easily move email into the records management system. Another important feature is the ability to view SharePoint right inside of Outlook, so that users don't need to change to a browser – or “context switch” – in order to access SharePoint.

Another important point for this best practice is to automate the process as much as possible. The less your employees need to interact with the system, the better. So ensuring that they can easily or, even better, automatically capture the metadata needed to drive compliance, eDiscovery and records management requirements is important. This could include auto-extraction of metadata or automatic appending default metadata on items saved to a particular folder. And if you can't automate it, make it simple.

7. Tag tag tag

Most users spent a significant amount of time everyday searching for (and not finding) information. Effective content tagging, whether it's for email or other types of content, is what drives effective search, eDiscovery and general findability.

When it comes to tagging email, automate whenever possible and if you can't automate the process, then keep the interaction as light as possible. Use techniques like drop-down menus, pick lists, type-a-head, enterprise managed metadata (EMM) and term stores, in order to make tagging easy.

In terms of SharePoint, take advantage of SharePoint's extensive taxonomy/folksonomy capabilities. The more time you spend on setting up a proper taxonomy on the back-end, the less time your users will have to spend wondering how to tag something properly on the front-end.

Tagging really is the “carrot” for your users – do this well and you'll reduce the amount of time they spend searching for information. For the Records Manager, effective tagging can drive your organization's retention/disposition processes and make eDiscovery much easier and efficient.

Conclusion

While there are certainly many best practices for email records management, this white paper has covered some of the key lessons that we have learned from the field and the issues constantly encountered by our customers.

The bottom line is that email is an integral part of the modern work environment and organizations need to have policies, procedures and tools in place to appropriately handle, retain and dispose of email. To do otherwise is to expose your organization to potential litigation, liability and other unpleasanties. While this may seem ominous, accepting this exposure is the first step towards creating an email records management solution that meets the needs of both your organization and users.

To Learn More

For more information or to obtain a trial of Colligo Email Manager, go to www.colligo.com. For pricing information or to request a quote, please contact sales@colligo.com or call +1 (866) 685-7962.

