



“Ask the CRM” - Bob Dalton, CRM

Question:

Our department has recently reviewed the new retention requirements for our business records. Now that we have a retention schedule what are some of the steps we can take to implement it?

Question was recently asked by an administrator during a review of their department’s filing system.

Response:

While you now have a retention schedule in place, you may need to:

- Secure the support of management and if possible someone with the authority to pave the way with staff members who may not be helpful in your pursuit of implementing the schedule and may be perceive you as destroying their records.
- Always check to insure:
 - No legal requirement to retain the records being reviewed for destruction.
 - Audits have been completed for financial records.
 - If appropriate, performance audits are completed.
- Try to secure a dedicated room to store and review the records prior to destruction so the client doesn’t have clutter in his area. You probably already have the clutter in yours. If you have a collection that is off-site at a commercial records center you may be able to arrange a room to view the records at their site. Remember to check if the vendor charges to use their room.
- Order supplies in advance that you may need prior to the review (replacement boxes, markers, barcodes, labels, scissors, tape, etc).
- Try to identify and locate transfer notices, paper indexes, electronic indexes and an index of holdings at your outside commercial records center. Make copies for your own use in the review process.
- If you have a records management database, create a listing of records that are due for destruction for each client/department. Annotate those records that may be over due for review. If you suspect an error in the retention period, write a comment on the index that the record may require retention for longer period of time I have found a client appreciates your input as the specialist in records retention matters

There are no specific rules on how you implement a retention schedule. However, there has been one constant, the lack of consistent review of records past their retention period. I am sure that many of you can relate to this problem with records stored in a variety of locations. So the review of records that are currently in storage would be an excellent place to start. Areas where you can start are:

- A storage room that the department maintains.
- An internal records center.
- The company contracted commercial records center.

Here are a few things that I have found to work effectively with any records review:

- If you have a large volume of boxes due for destruction, select the easiest and smallest collection for the initial review.) This allows you time to get your destruction processes tweaked so you can work more efficiently as the review process continues.
- Phase the review of large collection of records. If you cannot get the approval to destroy a large amount of files or boxes, arrange to review them in small doses. You will have a better chance of getting the cooperation of the reviewer if they do not perceive the task as overwhelming. The smaller the amount of records the client has to review the better.
- Try to have the client set aside specific time for review and management of their records. Emphasize time management.

- If the primary reviewer cannot or will not do the review, see if some other person with the authority to approve the destruction would be willing to perform the task.
- Review all boxes in storage to insure they have an appropriate retention period assigned and insure that your indexes and outside commercial vendor's database reflects the correct retention. Once you have destroyed the backlog of older records, the annual review and destruction program will be much easier.
- If you have an onsite records center and/or special areas to store records, do not let them become a dumping ground for non-records. Insist on control of the environment to insure the protection of the records from unauthorized use and review.
- Take before and after photographs of storage areas and use them successfully in presentations to management to emphasize potential risk to the organizations. Also mention the total number of boxes and/or total volume of documents destroyed, filing cabinets emptied (space saved). If you know the cost per square foot of storage space then list that in your presentation. Businesses/agencies are always looking for cost savings.
- Celebrate when you have completed the records review and destruction of those records that have reached the end of their assigned retention.

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Note: My thanks to Barbara Werelius, Records Manager and Guru at Tacoma Public Utilities, and the Puget Sound Chapter of ARMA for her assistance in the development of this article. Other articles by Mr. Dalton can be reviewed and copied at his BLOG site: askthecrm.blogspot.com