

Elephant in the Room Email Management*

*Applies to other stuff too, but mostly emails

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Overview

- Emails – The Bane of Our Existence
- Email management – An oxymoron?
- Different strokes for different folks - a roundup of different approaches

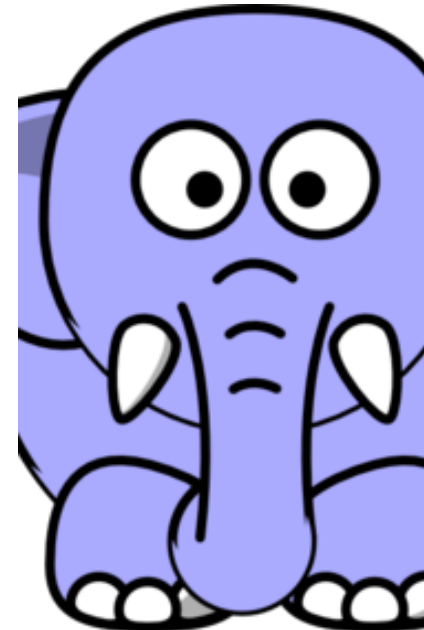
In the beginning...

- Emails were developed as a means to do communicate “wirelessly”- the ability to exchange messages between computers and be available 24/7 ***
- Ray Tomlinson is credited as the inventor of email. In 1971, he developed the first system able to send mail between users on different hosts, using the @ sign to link the user name with a destination server
- It wasn't until after about 1995 did emails take off and start to become widely used
- And now, 25 years later.....we're STILL using emails

***Emails were not intended to write the equivalent of War and Peace and go on and on and on...but look what happened!!*

The elephant is still in the room!!
And had babies...chats, Teams/Zoom,

And getting bigger by the minute!



By the numbers.....

How many emails are in YOUR Inbox?

Sent Box?

*How many gigabytes or terabytes are on
agency servers?*

Email Management – An Oxymoron?

The nature of emails themselves are problematic (as are chats and IM – same category of messaging) when it comes to “managing” them

Trying to manage INDIVIDUAL types of messages is an issue (To add to the fun, each email message has a unique identifier and metadatayep, EACH ONE)

And then when multiple messages become a string and it's now a conversation?? Yikes

Other issues with “messages”

To add to the fun, each email message has a unique identifier and metadatayep, EACH ONE)

Hard to apply consistent metadata and index “messages” or chats, or social media – not like a document or form

Often used for other purposes than a “quick message”

When emails are used as a “delivery system”

Here’s where more trouble can start:

Multiple copies of attachments are sent out, increasing the volume and numbers of copies distributed

Hard to index attachments (some systems just can’t)

AND, I’m just going to point out here....

Emails are often used to deliver REALLY BAD THINGS

Malware!!! (Malicious software)

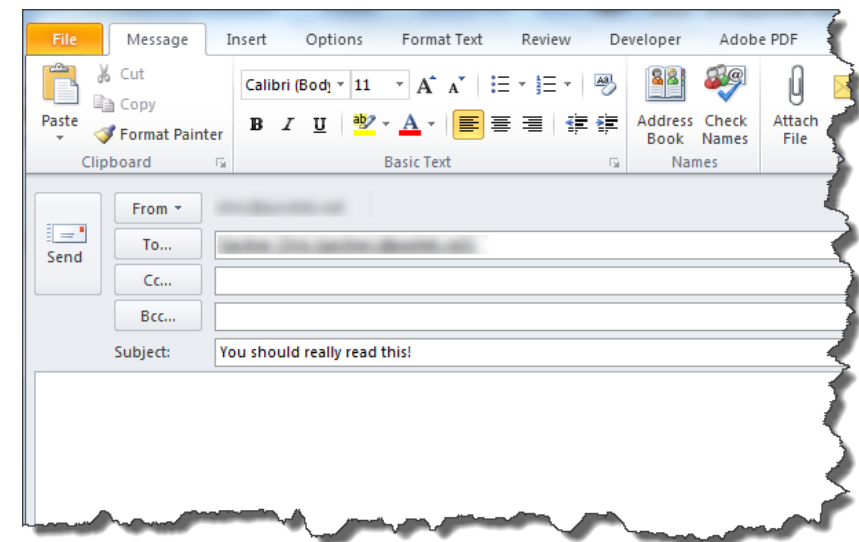
- Viruses, worms and ransomware



Subject lines are generally NOT helpful

Ever been the recipient of an email that doesn't even come close to what the subject line is??

Or the subject line is one thing, but email goes off into multiple tangents and only the first sentence related to the subject line?



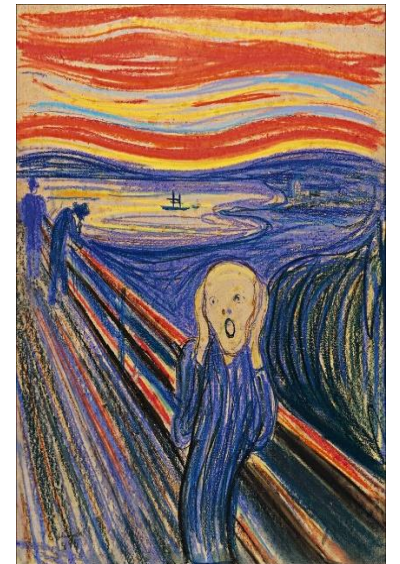
Not all emails are created equal

Most emails probably fall under a “transitory” type of message

Many agencies still use emails for “the conduct of government”, and not a lot of differentiation between the two types

An email will often bleed over (start out “transitory”, then oh by the way the topic changes in the next paragraph and changes the entire conversation and meaning of the message)

It can be hard to distinguish between the two, and it takes a lot of training and education for users to understand the difference (and for them to even care)



And yup, they are considered public records

As are chats, instant messaging, texts, social media etc....

All used as a form of messages and communication, and by definition

ALL ARE CONSIDERED PUBLIC RECORDS

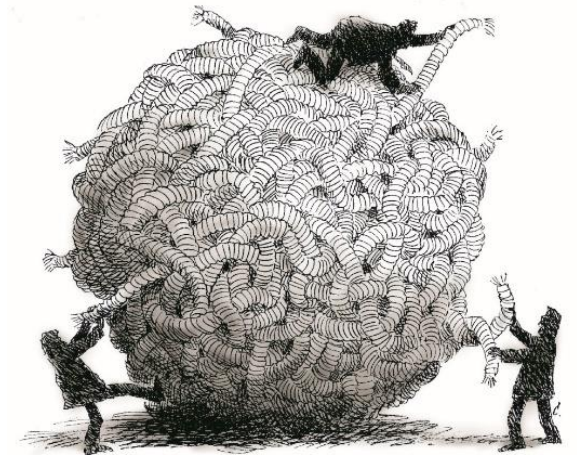
And just as a reminder, you are **NOT REQUIRED** to even use emails or any other types of messaging if you choose not to!!!

BUT you are required to abide by public records Requirements, regardless of what you **ARE** using



Everyone knows there's an email problem (or chats, or social media, or insert name here...)...and it's really an nasty one

To solve a problem that has been going on for awhile (like 20 years now) you have to **RETHINK** it and take a different approach



Managing emails has been a problem for a long time now

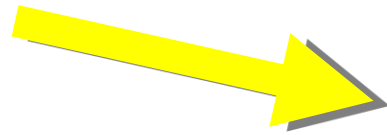
- It's like using a horse and buggy on the interstate
- Not effective, not efficient, can be a bit messy
- And it's painfully slow going!



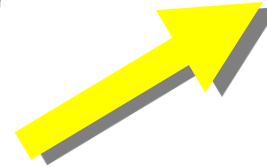
Email Management Cycle in a Nutshell



Create/receive
an email



Consider **CONTENT**
and **CONTEXT**
(What's being said
or done? Is this
evidence of a
business
transaction?)
**Should it stay or
should it go?**



If GO, get rid of it!
Hit delete and also delete
from the delete folder

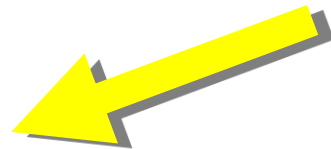
Work with IT to enable/configure
actual destruction
NO "archiving", NO journaling,

GET RID OF IT!

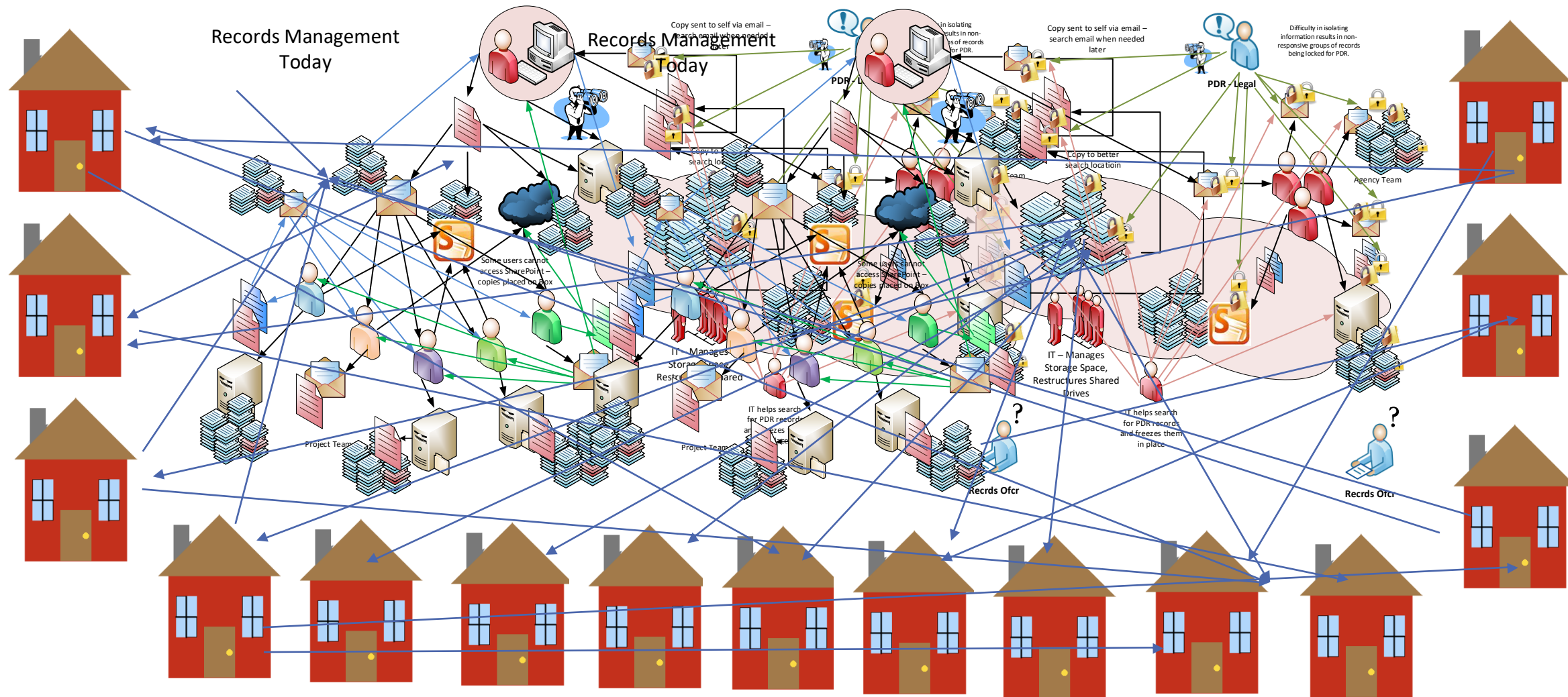
Copies lingering somewhere
(including back ups) can be subject to
discovery and disclosure!



If STAY, properly identify/file/store
apply retention



And with COVID....It was bad enough.....



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It takes a lot to manage

The basics are just that, basic. Read the email, make a decision, do something with it – right?

This is all really, really hard to do – sheer volumes of emails often bring the process to a screeching halt, and everyone is busy, busy, busy and can't be bothered

And NOBODY, but NOBODY wants to do the routine housekeeping or be responsible for managing the retention of their emails

Relying on the human factor in managing emails is a huge part of it, and so far results have been pretty dismal (again, it can be done, but boy - is it a LOT of work)

It takes a LOT of training and discipline to get everyone to buy into and sustain manual processes (chocolate helps)



So what's an agency to do?

Let's take a look at the different approaches:

1. Keep everything forever, no retention (or until server crashes)
2. Put a single retention requirement on everything
3. Develop a folder structure and plan where users manually file and drag and drop which folder or bucket to put their emails in, apply retention to those folders
4. Use M365 or whatever email service being used and combine with the above and attempt to utilize the retention tools made available (if any and depending on licensing levels). Or combinations of all of the above applied haphazardly to different departments within the agency

AND there is one more....#5 wait for it.....bet you can't wait....I'm making you wait....

Option 1: Keep everything

A lot of agencies have used the “keep everything approach” as a default (also referred to as “hoarding”)

- It’s “easy” - no retention, just keep it all
- Volumes become problematic and searching becomes really difficult due to sheer volume



Another set of problems when keeping it all

- Servers get full, systems get slower
- More space requirements
- Costs more in the long run
- Costs more in time spent in processing any public records requests
- Catch here is that if you are keeping it all, it's all subject to discovery and public disclosure requirements

Volume matters

You can have the best, coolest, sexiest search/discovery tool
EVER....HOWEVER

- IT STILL TAKES MORE TIME FOR ANY SEARCH ENGINE TO SORT THROUGH A GAZILLION EMAILS IF THERE IS A PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST (and a good many requests include the statement “any and all emails”)
- Then, it still takes a HUMAN so much time to review and sort through THOSE results afterwards
- And some of those humans are attorneys that you have to pay more to also spend time reviewing and sorting....

Option #2: Apply a single retention

There have been agencies that implemented a policy of keeping everything, but applying single 6 – 7 year retention to it all

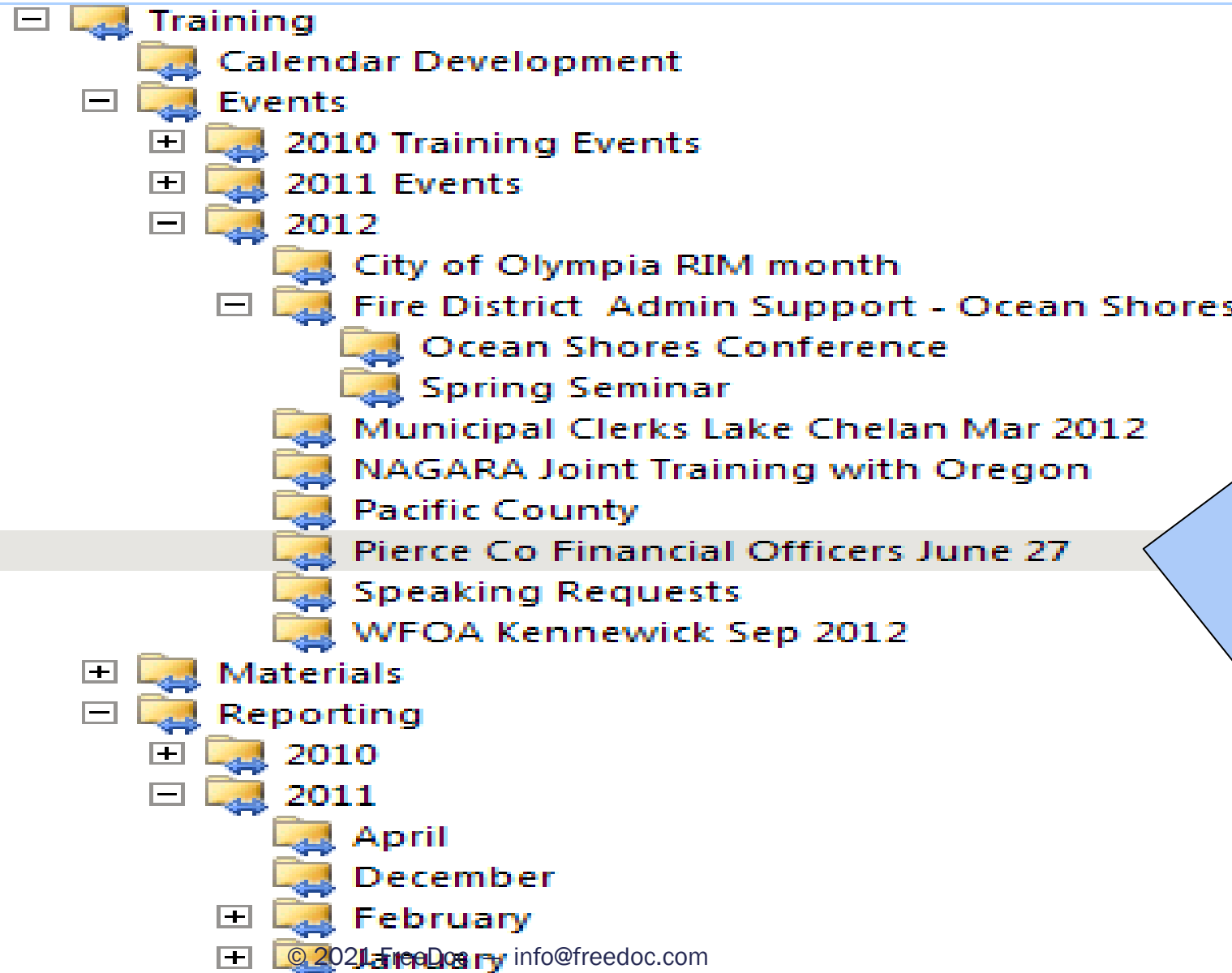
- At least retention is applied, but the same thing happens as Option #1 - volumes add up fast, and cause problems with server space and functionality
- Same issues with Option #1 with volumes and searching
- Same catch as Option #1 that comes with discovery and public disclosure rules
- Still not actively “managing” information, a different version of hoarding

Option #3: Manual filing using folders

Some agencies have taken the steps to devise a plan where users manually file and choose which folder or bucket to put their emails, retention is applied to the folders

- Better than the first two options!
- However, still relies on the *individual* USER being willing and diligent enough to keep up with manually filing
- Still based on managing *individual* in-boxes and folders
- Relies on the honor system
- Works better with smaller agencies
- Takes works to develop consistent and agreed upon folder structures and methods
- Needs policing, follow-through and manual disposition actions
- Still a silo approach and disconnected from the rest of the business processes

Option #3 – Use Folders



Additional folders can be “pre-set” up to further define the content – easier to locate and search

Define “parking places” for business records

Can mirror this structure on shared drive or server for records needing retention

Option #4 : Microsoft 365 (aka O365)

While it looked like a lifesaver during the pandemic, part of the issue was in the rush to implement, so many things overlooked in consideration

What I'll point out here is that is that while M365 sounds like the next best thing to sliced bread, it's more complex than it sounds

HOWEVER, it's still emails, still video conferences, still SharePoint – no change to the types of format, just changes in how the software function

Addition of some retention features (but still a bit clunky and with limitations, and heavy on manual labor)

Microsoft 365

It's still the same Microsoft suite of products available as a cloud service

It's kind of a hybrid of stand alone silos (Outlook, Teams replaced Skype, SharePoint, and a kinda, sorta an ECM-ish product (BUT IT IS NOT a DoD5015.2 certified system)

Unless you have had some exposure to ECM types of systems or approaches it will be challenging to implement retention

Talk or consult with some ECM consultants/experts who can help you sort out HOW the application works and HOW it can to be configured for retention

In the meantime, what about the other records outside of M365?

- M365 implementation for records management is taking up a ton of time and has caused communities to pop up everywhere
 - *It is not necessarily the most intuitive of systems to configure, and unless you have experience it's quite the learning curve*
- As part of your long-range planning, you can't afford to ignore the other records also being generated outside of M365
- Pick your battles!

Square peg for a round hold

Again, due to the nature of emails, chats, etc and HUMAN nature it's an uphill battle

HEAVY Training and a TON of effort necessary to make “email management” (or chats, or any other communication platform you're using)

It can be done, however, realistically it's another version of the same old, same old and can't be considered enterprise level records management



Option #5: Stop Using Emails (gasp)

(or greatly reduce your dependency)

It's been 25 years!!! Why are we even still using emails anyway????

Emails are SOOOO old school, time to change up HOW you do business

The mission of your agency hasn't changed, it's the HOW of doing it that has changed and continues to evolve (or should anyway....)

Hear me out.....



In the beginning.....

Yes, I am a dinosaur, but I have survived the meteor hit of technology

It wasn't THAT long ago that the internet didn't even exist, and businesses bustled along in spite of the lack of technology

Man was able to walk the moon without emails....

I know, it's HARD to imagine life without, but technology has evolved (just like me) and you can do a LOT without relying on emails



Option #5: Ditching Emails

It sounds drastic, but in a modernized workspace, emails are **not** used except as a last resort

Let's face - it most people would prefer not to use emails anyway

They'd rather get a text or anything else instead

Simply put, emails are NOT EFFECTIVE OR EFFICIENT when it comes to business processes (they really aren't)

TIME TO STOP DIGGING THE HOLE!



Business in the time of pandemic

- How many of us upped your online commerce game during the pandemic?
- Notice how many businesses DO NOT USE emails as part of the process of purchasing/acquiring goods and services or they are used as a means of last resort?
- The right technology is AVAILABLE, no reason why agencies can't take advantage and transition to a modern workspace and follow suit
- No reason why government can't change up old outdated processes by way of automation
- No reason NOT to adopt alternative tools in order to conduct the business of government

Pandemic pivots

- Many businesses had to go online in order to survive, some have even improved business with online exposure
- Government can follow their lead (life goes on, in spite of disasters)
- We will never go back to “normal”, need to figure out a “new normal”
- Eliminate dependency on emails and other “messaging” types of formats, focus on the mission of YOUR agency
- Capture/memorialize only what you NEED, and not create extraneous stuff just because you can
- Back to the basics!



Money, money, money

I know, no one has any money!

Budgets have been tight and they are even tighter

However, the amount of money being spent and wasted to hang onto old obsolete processes and systems is a large gaping sucking hole. You are already paying not, and in some instances pay much, much more later....

There can be costly consequences of operating with old systems:

Poor Employment Security – using old system with known software flaws and then the pandemic hit – first massive fraud, and it just gets better with a security hack from a third party system that was 20 years old....OMG

You can't afford NOT to make different decisions and take different approaches

Already in Technology Debt

- By one estimate, the federal government spends \$94 BILLION on information technology*



- The budget for assessments of technology issues? ZERO

*Source – Opinion editorial written by Bill Pascrell Jr, former Congressman, on Congress grappling with IT issues from Spokesman Review dated 01/12/2019

Public disclosure costs

The costs to respond and process public records requests have only continued to INCREASE:

- Aug 2016 – State Auditor’s Office Performance Audit \$60 MILLION
- 2018 JLARC Reporting Cycle - \$74 MILLION
- 2019 JLARC Reporting Cycle - \$101 MILLION

And these are conservative figures from ONLY those agencies that are required to report and some who volunteered their data**

**Average of only 200 – 300 agencies actually report (in WA state there are roughly 187 state agencies, board and commissions, and over 2500 units of local government)

You can still use 0365 (or anything else for that matter)

Investing in a DoD5015.2 certified ECM system guarantees integration with other existing systems, you'll just find you use "the other guys" less and less as you modernize HOW you do business

It's all about smarter processes and leveraging the right system to solve managing of ALL your information, not just emails

It all costs money, it depends on HOW and WHERE you are spending it

- Continuing to rely on emails will only continue to cause issues and cost even more money
- Start planning for a different future and invest in improved and transformative technology infrastructures for your agency, not a rehash of the same old thing and same old process
- Work SMARTER (even when remote), but be able to manage it all and be proactive instead of reactive
- Transitioning to an ECM will alleviate so many issues (including emails and public disclosure and lessen risk of security breaches and malware)
- Don't continue to rearrange deck chairs on the Titanic!

“Un-siloing” government



Silos

Including remote offices!



Enterprise Content
Management (ECM)

ECM provides:

- Workflow capabilities
- Business processes
- Robust searching
(in one place!)
- Improves operational efficiencies
- “Single instance” of the agency records, no more duplicates
- Reduces volume
- Reduces risk
- And more!

Boldly going somewhere:

It will seem drastic, but nothing wrong with placing a 6 year (or whatever the agency deems suitable for both their retention requirements and to allow time to get their stuff together) temporary retention on ALL emails (heck, most agencies are keeping emails for way too long anyway) and pivot to FOCUS ON FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- *Using workflows and forms will greatly reduce email traffic !!*
- MOST systems already have libraries (or they should) or communities where common operations ALREADY have workflows developed (there's very little new under the sun when it comes to government processes)
 - *Financial (A/P, A/R, Budgets, Payroll, etc)*
 - *Meetings (Agendas, Minutes)*
 - *H/R (Hiring, Firing, Managing and Administering Benefits)*
 - *Contracts/Asset/Facilities Management*
 - *Case Management*
 - *Regulating processes*
 - *Enforcement processes*
 - *Public disclosure, FOIA*



Firing up the new

Then, as you fire up the new processes, do a clean-up/sort/purge and get those remaining emails that DO have value or meaning into the ECM (and trust me, there probably won't be that many you'll need to keep)

Once you get an ECM, then you can dump those emails into the system as appropriate and let the system take over!!



For more info on defensible cleaning-up

Online training offered by Washington State
Archives:

Digital Hoarding: Emails

(presented by yours truly)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XY5x0mclBWU&feature=youtu.be>

Is Email Management an Oxymoron?

With the right system, it doesn't have to be
You can have it all!





**Any questions??
THANK YOU!!
Go forth and organize!**

Washington State Master Contract (#07814-001)
ECM Software - Laserfiche

Pierce County (Contract #SC-103168)
Professional Services Consulting
Conversion and Preservation – Records Trust®



For more information on our full range of services:

Imaging Services
Public Records Administration Consulting
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