

The Employment and Education Centre and the Implementation of an Electronic Document and Records Management System ~ 2011 ~

Introduction:

Records Management is the practice of maintaining documents from the time they are created until the time they are disposed of. These documents include any and all information created, received, maintained or used by an organization pursuant to its mission, operations and activities. For many organizations, both public and private, this accumulates to a large amount of hardcopy documents that take up a significant amount of valuable floor space. Many of these documents must be retained for a significant amount of time based on legal requirements and obligations so the ability to free up floor space can be quite restricted. Image Advantage offers a solution that helps solve this problem and also helps increase the efficiency and effectiveness in managing, accessing and disposing of documents.

Situation:

The Employment and Education Centre (EEC) in Brockville, Ontario is a not-for-profit agency that helps individuals from the local area reach their potential through education, employment, volunteering and financial counseling. Their services are designed to give people the training and/or experience they need to become employable. When performing their day-to-day activities as well as their training and



counseling sessions they generate a large amount of paper documents. The EEC has only one main filing room and the filing cabinets had reached their full capacity and they were literally running out of space to store their documents. Because of government regulations, they have to keep the majority of their documents for seven years including their Employment Counseling Files and Credit Counseling Files, the two file types that take up the most filing space.

The second issue that the EEC identified was that they did not know what files they had in their possession. They have thousands of file folders in their cabinets but did not know who created them, when they were created or when they could be disposed of. They also did not have a tracking system that inventoried what files had been destroyed, when this took place and how. This information is all very important and is required in order to have a complete and effective records management system.

Image Advantage Case Study

Solution:

This project was completed in two phases, the first being inventorying and reorganizing the hardcopy files, the second being installing an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS).

Phase 1: Inventorying and Reorganizing the Hardcopy Files

All the Credit Counseling Files and Employment Counseling Files were inventoried collecting useful information such as what client the file related to, the date the file was closed, the date the file could be destroyed and other important and useful information. It was decided that any file that had closed in the past two years would be removed from the filing cabinets, scanned, and then stored electronically in the EDRMS which is discussed in *Phase 2*. This process removed approximately one-third of the file folders from the cabinets freeing up a lot of storage space. When this phase of the project was complete, every file folder that was stored in the filing cabinets was inventoried making it very easy to locate when needed. This also makes it easy to go through the cabinets and purge the files whose retention has expired and are no longer needed, again freeing up valuable and much needed storage room.

Phase 2: Installing and Setting Up an Electronic Documents and Records Management System

The EEC was interested in purchasing an EDRMS to store their electronic documents and to be able to better manage their hardcopy documents. FileHold is a system that has advanced capabilities and functionalities but is also very affordable and this made it a perfect solution for the EEC. The two years worth of files that were removed from the filing cabinets in *Phase 1* were scanned and then stored electronically inside of the system. The hardcopy was then shredded because it was no longer needed. The system was also set-up to help locate the hardcopy files that were still being stored in the file cabinets in the main filing room. When searching for a file that is still in hardcopy format, a file appears telling the user where the file is located, the cabinet and drawer name/number, when the file can be destroyed, and also a field for entering information on when and how files are destroyed when their retention period expires. This makes the EEC adhere to all legal obligations relating to their documents and records.

Benefits:

The EEC has identified several benefits that have occurred because of this project. Firstly, they removed approximately one-third of their hardcopy files from their main storage room by scanning them and storing them electronically. This freed up a significant amount of storage space, one of the main goals of the agency when the project commenced. Secondly, all files that are in their possession are now inventoried removing the unknown factor that existed previously. The EEC is now able identify what clients they have done work for, when this took place and if they have any documents still in their possession relating to the work that was completed. This is a big improvement compared to how the system was setup before and it also makes it easier to handle Freedom of Information requests that are becoming more common.



The biggest change and benefit to the EEC in terms of how they store, locate and retrieve their files came with the implementation of the EDRMS. This converted their records management system into a secure organized electronic library. The EDRMS provides full text searching ability, version control settings, security settings restricting access to confidential material and much more. The EEC can now search on keywords, phrases, indexing/metadata fields and other search parameters to identify and retrieve information. Information can be retrieved in a matter of seconds compared to hours, days, weeks or even months which was common previously. It is also significantly easier for employees to share information with each other. Rather than having to go retrieve or deliver a file folder, binder or other hardcopy document every time information is needed they are now able to access it easily through the system. Also, users can all access the information at the same time and not have to wait for others to finish with the needed documents.

Since the implementation of this system, new files are now being stored electronically rather than in hardcopy, again freeing up valuable floor space. In five years, the maximum time period for how long the Credit Counseling Files and Employment Counseling files that were not digitized need to be kept, all the file folders stored in the main filing room will have exceeded their retention period meaning they can all be disposed of. This means within five years none of the files that are currently in the main file room will need to be kept and the entire room will be freed up for whatever purpose the EEC finds suitable.