

## Executive summary

"But these are things that people do not know. They do not know because they are not told.  
Hilaire Belloc – *A Ballad of General Misapprehension*.

Managing records retention and disposal is a task that organisations do very badly. It is work that staff see as an unnecessary, low level, administrative burden linked to archiving and filing, and not their responsibility. Most people know that there are various laws and regulations that govern their particular business and that hidden within these laws are vague references to retention of files. Most are wise enough to fear that this lack of detailed knowledge may come back and bite them, so they squirrel away all their records indefinitely just in case.

This report aims to set the retention record straight and shows why and how records retention is an integral part of every business process. It provides detailed information on how to research and integrate accurate retention rules based on the legislation and regulations for the sector in which you work.

While a records manager understands the need for a robust records retention programme within the organisation, he/she doesn't always have the necessary tools and funding to implement such a programme. In this report there are methods to assist the records management professional to develop, implement and maintain, with accurate rules and regulations, a detailed retention schedule.

This report is not limited to discussions about records retention, but includes live examples of both UK and international legislation, as well as information pertaining to conflicts between laws across a number of countries, safe harbour agreements and even religious influences on records.

So why do organisations need to retain records? There are many reasons relating to both business requirements and legal requirements, as well as historical interest – all of which are covered within this two part report.

Part One concentrates on both the theory and practice, and is broken down into five chapters.

Chapter 1 defines records retention and explains what it means and where it fits in relation to records management and business processes. To a records manager, managing records retention is a vital part of their work and involves a major audit of their organisation's records and archives. To their colleagues who generate the records, this is seen as extra work in their already over-stretched day. This chapter examines the business process owners' and the records managers' responsibilities, and explains three different approaches to applying retention.

Chapter 2 delves into the research required to identify the well-hidden retention rules that are contained within various citations. Separating fact from rumour in relation to retention rules can be tricky. The majority of staff, when asked how long certain records should be kept, will quote 'seven years'. This is not a bad guess, but not all records fall into the seven-year time frame as this chapter and the examples in the appendices will show. Sector-specific regulations will also be discussed in this chapter as will best practice retention for those records that do not have a governing retention period.

Chapter 3 outlines the business case for developing an organisation-wide retention strategy and policy, and discusses why it adds value, aids compliance and reduces risk.

Chapter 4 examines technology and how current practice has largely skirted around records retention when it comes to integrating the retention requirements within the many applications that support records management programmes.

Chapter 5 offers a practical perspective by discussing methods for integrating legal requirements with business practices. Arguably the most difficult part of the retention process is to marry the legal requirements with those of the business. This chapter examines where law and business retention collide and offers solutions to overcome this challenge.

Part Two commences by looking at two different approaches to implementing a records retention programme within the business. The first examines the less rigorous method of making users responsible for implementing retention by means of using a reference tool. The second approach looks at implementation as part of a formal records management programme with the possible guidance of the ISO Standard 15489.

Part Two includes two case studies which relate to a retention programme in a major UK food and drink organisation and one in the Welsh Assembly.

The appendices will include example retention schedules with a sample list of UK and international legislation and a bibliography of resources to access accurate information on citations relating to records retention in the UK and abroad.