



Understanding and selecting the right tool for the job:

Comparing Records Management Systems, Enterprise Content Management Systems, and Enterprise Information Portals

The urgency around capturing, managing and protecting corporate and public records has become serious business. New laws, tightening industry regulations and increased scrutiny has resulted in a stream of software products and tools entering the market to manage various problems. So how do you choose the right records management system for your organization?

This whitepaper is designed to help you do that. We'll look at:

- *The difference between content and records and how they differ*
- *The differences in handling content vs. records*
- *Core competencies: Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems*
- *Core competencies: Records Management Systems (RMS)*
- *The role of enterprise information portals*
- *Selecting the right system for your environment*
- *Required functionality in an RMS*

Finding the right product for your records management needs can be simplified once you have this basic understanding of the records management software landscape, the various options available to you, as well as how this might fit your records management environment.

Content vs. Records: How they differ

It's important to first understand the fundamental difference between content and records. They are frequently and erroneously lumped into the same bucket with the assumption that they serve the same purpose and should be managed the same way.

Defined:

Content is simply information or data— structured or unstructured information that can be accessed and used in a variety of ways by a variety of people throughout an organization.

A typical budgeting cycle serves as a good example. For most organizations, budgeting is a highly collaborative process. It's handled with a variety of spreadsheets, notes and other documents; and typically, all the versions are tracked. At some point, the budget is finalized and set in stone. That file, then, becomes the official matter of record.

Records are official versions of the facts or evidence of business activities—be they in the form of vital records (such as birth certificates, permits, etc.) or non-vital records (such as meeting notes) that do not have an immediate impact on an individual or organization. Records generally need to be preserved, unchanged and uncompromised. They have strict compliance requirements regarding disposition, retention, auditability and destruction. And they have a defined lifecycle that needs to be managed differently than content (see Diagram 1). Failure to do so can carry stiff penalties, so using a system created to handle the unique lifecycle management needs of records is critical.

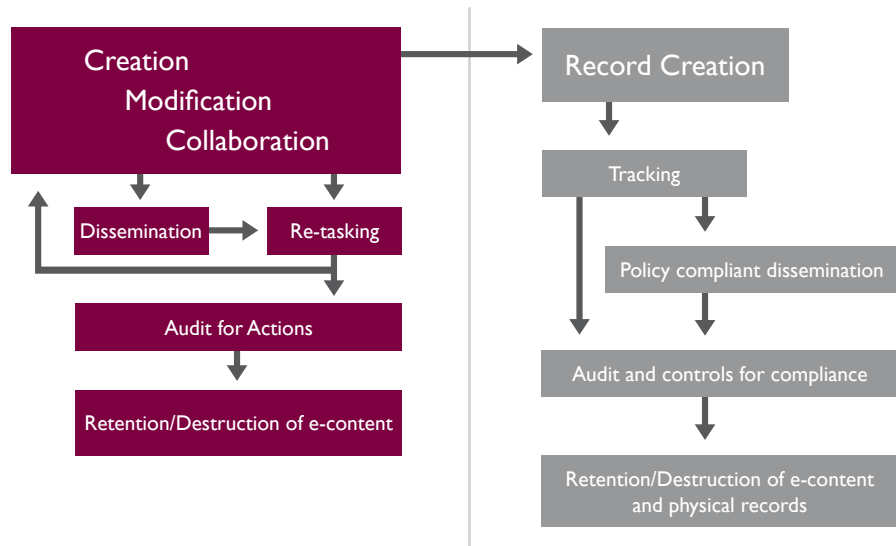


Diagram 1
Content vs. Record Lifecycles.

One example of a record is a bank loan. Once the original contract is signed, the bank is required by law to maintain the documents as official records (in the form of applications, agreements, etc.) and to prevent anyone from modifying them in final form. The same is true with employee records. From the time a person is hired until he leaves the company (sometimes even longer), all official employment records must be maintained securely in their final form. For many groups, records compliance has become even more stringent, such as the records management requirements that healthcare organizations now follow since the adoption of HIPAA.

In short, for these and many other organizations, ensuring the integrity of their records is no longer simply a best practice. It's mandated by law with penalties and repercussions for failure to achieve compliance.

The differences in handling Content vs. Records

The same mistaken assumptions people make about defining content and records can also be made when identifying the best systems to manage content versus records.

The most obvious example is the confusion that exists between Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems and Records Management Systems (RMS). Frequently, ECM and RMS are mistakenly believed to be interchangeable. There are some similarities: both ECM and RMS are designed to manage information efficiently throughout an organization; and they do have some common features, such as document routing, security, imaging, version control, audit trails and the ability to handle different electronic file types (documents, sound, video, etc.).

It's there that the similarities end. Understanding the differences is key to understanding which solution is best for any given environment.

Core Competencies: Enterprise Content Management (ECM) systems

ECM systems were originally based on document management systems, which originated in the 1980s. They were created in the vision of the "paperless office" as imaging and database technologies enhanced the capabilities and met the demands of organizations beyond "shared drives." However, as the variety of content, documents, files and application output expanded through new technologies to include more formats and types, ECM systems were designed to manage the full spectrum. Typically used for document collaboration, information dissemination and organizational information-sharing on a shared platform attached to a repository, ECM systems allow content to be created in an ordered framework. ECM systems are at their most beneficial when creating, storing and modifying content and accessing the data within that content for re-tasking or provisioning other applications.

Core Competencies: Records Management Systems (RMSs)

RMS are designed to manage documents and other content as well. The primary mission of RMS is to manage the lifecycle of records, which need to be preserved in their original form, secure and unchanged. Records frequently have a lifecycle (for example, tax returns have a typical lifecycle of seven years and are processed through that life as needed) as well as specific requirements related to the retention, disposition, audit and destruction of any given record. The RMS system must also accommodate exceptions, such as legal holds in instances of litigation or audit. RMS are designed to manage all of those requirements with a goal of ensuring that organizations achieve records management compliance.

In addition, many RMS support imaging technology like scanners to reduce physical file storage costs and provide remote users access to records. They can also leverage barcode scanning technology to quickly locate physical records and provide a complete audit trail of their usage.

Key differences and similarities can be seen in Table 1.

	Enterprise Content Management	Portals	Records Management
Primary Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic collaboration • Info and data exchange • Organizational info sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing • Internal collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining docs/files/ objects as records • Managing their locations and dispositions
Design Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document content • What data can be used, re-tasked, shared, delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document content • What needs to be shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Envelopes” the docs are in • Where the records are • Preservation of information
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing, storing, accessing and delivering information, data and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploying large repositories quickly and easily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserving record integrity • Capturing the chain of custody • Assuring appropriate retention and destruction

Table 1

Here’s another way to look at the difference between ECM and RMS. Think about content and records as though they were a letter in an envelope. ECM systems focus on the content inside the envelope and on sharing and modifying that content. RMS focus on the envelope itself—providing a secure framework to ensure that official records are stored, maintained and managed confidentially, safely and securely.

The role of enterprise information portals

It's worth devoting some attention to enterprise information portals as well, especially given their growing popularity at both the department and organizational level. The primary function of an enterprise portal is to provide a consolidated internal repository for information. Similar to ECM, enterprise portals focus on the content—creating a repository for content, sharing information and enabling collaboration. However, unlike ECM, enterprise portals can't search and identify data in an automated way, and they can't extract key pieces of data from among several documents. And like ECM, enterprise portals do not address the specific requirements of records management, even though they may have some of the features required to do so.

Selecting the right system for your environment

So how do you know which of these three systems is right for you? The answer may be all three. In many environments, all three systems are deployed side-by-side and are even integrated with each other. Each focuses on its core capabilities: ECM and enterprise portals share information and enable collaboration; and the RMS tracks, manages and secures those items deemed as records. Typical points of integration are at the user interface, the application itself and/or at the database itself (see Diagram 2).

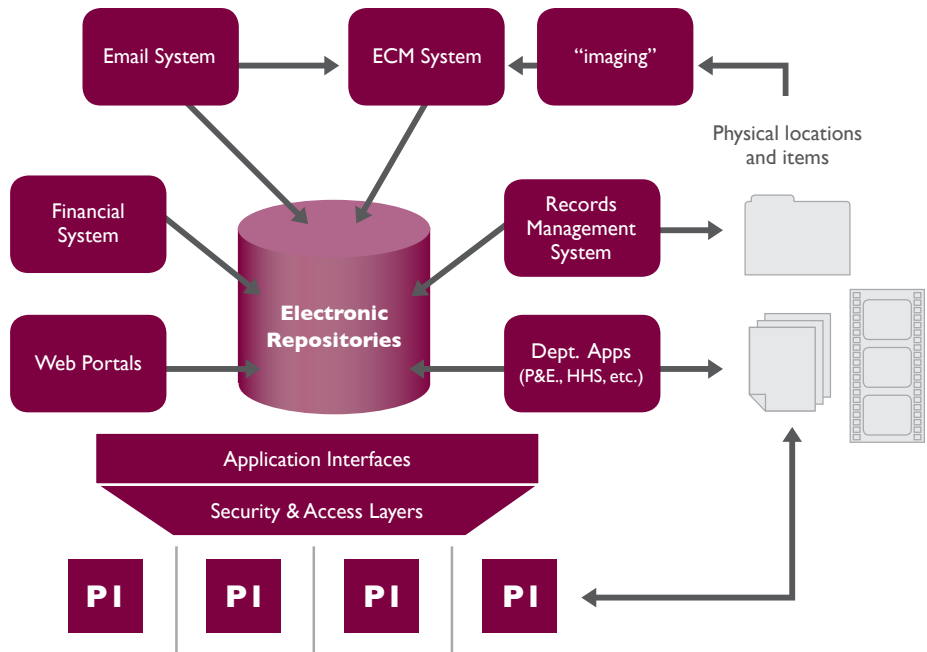


Diagram 2

This diagram depicts the many separate systems that can exist in an organization, including both an ECM and RMS. The lines illustrate key points of potential integration or interoperability, as well as how users (PI) access the content and records inside the systems.

To ensure the system(s) you select meets your business objectives and requirements, consider the following questions:

Are we managing records as records or as content?

As detailed in this paper, content is simply structured or unstructured information that's accessed by many people for many purposes and has a unique lifecycle from creation through destruction. Records, however, have strict compliance requirements and have a distinct and different lifecycle based on preserving the integrity of the matter of record, which is different than that of everyday "content." In that case, selecting a tool that manages all records properly is critical.

What are the retention and dissemination regulations we're bound by?

Unfortunately, there's no easy and universal answer to this question. Compliance regulations vary widely based on your state, county, city, business and even the type of records you're managing. Understanding the regulations your organization is governed by is key to ensuring compliance.

What is the nature of our records? What paper do we need to keep? What documents can we "scan and burn"?

As noted above, the compliance mandates you face may depend on where you live and what type of records you're managing. An important first step on the path to successful compliance is understanding your own organization's policies and the compliance regulations you are required to meet—either on your own or with the help of an expert.

Required functionality in an RMS

If you know you need a records management system to manage the full lifecycle of your records and ensure their integrity, here are some specific features the ideal system will have:

- Integrate both electronic and physical records management in one system with a common user interface.
- Unlimited Flexibility: No one knows your records better than you. The system should be designed to help support your team in meeting your most complex recordkeeping objectives.
- Scalability: No matter what size or your organization or how many locations you have, regardless of the number of records you track, from single departments to the entire enterprise, the system should grow with you.

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- Ability to Consolidate all Records in a Single System: Records need to be tracked, whatever their form. The system should simultaneously manage physical and electronic records in a single easy, efficient and accurate system and easily track the disposition of records throughout their lifecycle.
- A Powerful Database: Make sure the database structure makes sense for you. It should be an industry standard such as Microsoft SQL, as well as easy to administer, maintain and scale.
- Simple to use: The user interface should comply with standard Windows operating systems which is the industry's most popular format. This ensures a comfortable look and feel, designed to make the product approachable for users of all skill levels.
- A Configurable Workflow: The system should feature automated document routing capability, configurable to your specific requirements, and paired with powerful centralized tools. This will offer greater efficiency for database and retention setup specific to active and inactive records, complete with user settings and menu items based on security rights.
- Bar Code Tracking: The system should use the latest bar code tracking technology to instantly locate any paper record and provide a complete audit trail of its usage.
- Robust Security: You need a comprehensive and intuitive system designed to complement and respect existing IT security conventions.
- Flexible and compatible Imaging: The right solution should support the most industry-standard scanners, from desktop to high-speed production scanners, as well as the full range of image indexing, image controls, viewing and access technologies. This will allow you to immediately reduce your file room and storage costs and provide remote access to any number of users.
- Search Functionality: Full text search of electronic records designed to quickly take you to the documents you seek is critical.
- Reporting: The system should offer various reporting options to provide overall feedback, compliance and audit information as well granular views of your records management environment
- Retention: Robust retention management features for citation maintenance and legal holds is critical.

Finally, when evaluating products to meet your needs, consider whether they meet both your physical and electronic records management needs in an integrated fashion. The ideal system maintains the connection between paper records and their electronic counterparts. Such a system allows you to:

- Integrate both electronic and physical records management in one system with a common user interface.
- Define document types and their retention and disposition requirements, and determine if they have to be managed physically, electronically or both. This enables a paperless system while ensuring compliance with regulations.
- Co-exist with ECM and/or other systems so that documents and records can be made available for online workflow processes and collaboration, while still maintaining the lifecycle management requirements of the official record.
- Integrate established and well-designed physical records management technology that makes it easy to maintain order in file rooms and document repositories, while filing and accessing physical or electronic documents quickly and efficiently.
- Easily manage corporate retention schedules and allow updates when annual changes with retention requirements are performed to avoid extensive programming changes through the program vendor.

TAB Can Help

At TAB, we can help you get the right RM software in place, whether you have an existing ECM solution or not. Our comprehensive knowledge of records management and its application to RM software tools gives us a tremendous advantage over a company that only sells software without understanding records management. We take a holistic approach, looking at your entire records situation, paper and electronic, before determine how any software will fit into the organization. We look what your business issues are, which workflows need to be solved, and then customize a solution to fit your organization's requirements.

If you would like to know about how TAB can help you be more efficient by deploying RM Software, please [contact us](#).

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Checklist: Does the system provide?		
Features	Yes	No
Document imaging and electronic tracking		
Paper file tracking		
PC file management		
Property and evidence room management		
Document routing and reporting workflows		
Paper and electronic versioning		
Paper and electronic audit trail		
Web access to information		
Multiple retention schedule management		
Automatic generation of barcodes for tracking		
Barcode tracking		
Processing history report		
Pipeline report		
Retention report		
Missing documents report		
Productivity report		
File history report		
Compliance report		
Requestor exceptions report		
Audit report		

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Checklist: Does the system provide?		
Features	Yes	No
Instant location of hard copy records		
Remote scanning capability		
Chain of custody capability		
Applies barcodes and color-codes on one easy-to-apply label strip		
Creates alphabetic, numeric or custom index filing systems		
Integrates color-labeled folders with existing files with a perfect color match		
Generate new labels automatically with information from host database or keyboard		
Vendor can create conversion plans		
Vendor can provide file strategy consultation		
Vendor can provide file-to-file conversions and data input into physical and electronic records management system		
Vendor supports unique requirements for physical and electronic records management		
Vendor has a long history and large install RMS user base among government organizations		