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Carpe Diem - Records Management Does Not Get Any Sexier

By Randolph Kahn

Listen up. I have a couple of really funny jokes.

Have you heard the one about the law department that refused to defend a lawsuit because they didn't have the budget for it?

What about this one? The company's new mantra this year is cut, cut, cut. So, management takes 20% out of the records management budget. However, IT has to suffer like everyone else - their budget only increases 20% this year.

So here you sit, trying to defend your budget and perhaps even justify your existence. You look long and hard, but nobody at the top really seems to believe that records management is that important. They seem to believe that an RM department of one is all that is needed. The only one that "gets it" is the newly hired young lawyer, but even she is not within shouting distance of the corner offices.

Sound familiar? Read on.

For over a year, nearly everyday, stories about records management have grabbed the headlines in major newspapers across the country.

- *A premier accounting firm withers away, clients flee, thousands lose jobs, and partners lose millions in value. All this because the company failed to have adequate records policies and teach them to employees. A few employees destroyed records to cover their tracks and the rest is history.
- *One of the world's largest phone companies files bankruptcy and, before the ink is dry on the court pleadings, the SEC does the unthinkable and imposes an \$800.00 an hour records babysitter to ensure that the company does not destroy or alter the records that may be needed during the ensuing investigation.
- *An executive from an international conglomerate allegedly seeks to alter shipping documents to make it look like the millions of dollars in art bought at company expense and sent to his personal residence was sent to a company facility instead. The executive is out of a job and being prosecuted.
- *In the face of all the records mismanagement and accounting scandals plaguing corporate America, a new federal law is passed increasing the penalties for anyone who "alters, destroys, mutilates, conceals, covers up, falsifies...any record..." to 20 years in prison and/or a fine.

In my dealings with information and records management professionals I hear a lot about their "sad" lot. While I am persuaded that it exists, I am not convinced that it has to be that way.

This is a unique time and you have an opportunity like never before. Records management has taken center stage as a corporate governance issue. The executives understand that failure to properly manage the company information assets can impact them and the company. You need to show them how you can help.

In fact, twice in the past year I have seen records managers present their case to senior management in this way, and win. Seize the day!

You need a plan. To help you jump start your plan of attack to put RM on the agenda consider the following: