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# Digital Records Management



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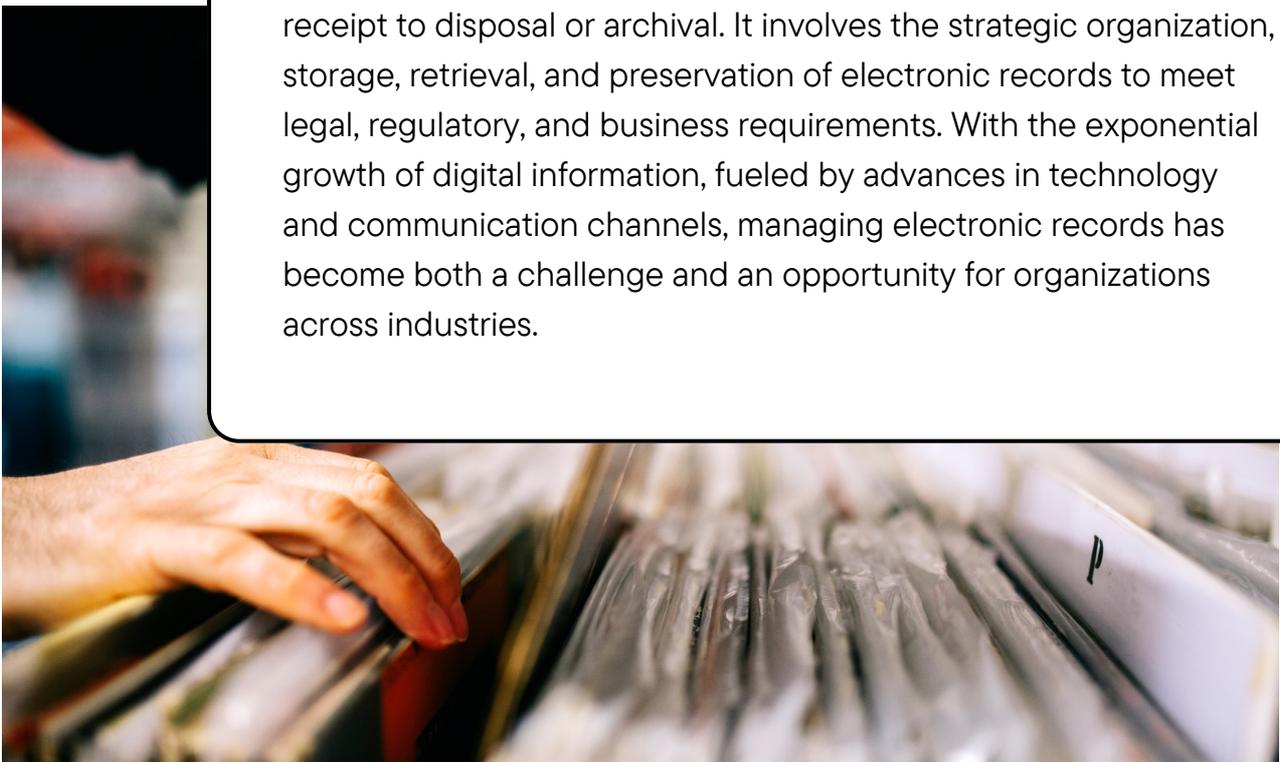


# Introduction



In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, effective management of records is essential for organizations to ensure compliance, enhance operational efficiency, and unlock the full potential of their data assets. As businesses increasingly transition from traditional paper-based systems to digital environments, understanding the principles and best practices of digital records management is paramount.

Digital records management encompasses the systematic control of digital records throughout their lifecycle, from creation or receipt to disposal or archival. It involves the strategic organization, storage, retrieval, and preservation of electronic records to meet legal, regulatory, and business requirements. With the exponential growth of digital information, fueled by advances in technology and communication channels, managing electronic records has become both a challenge and an opportunity for organizations across industries.





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## Unlock the benefits of digital records management:



**Informed  
Decision Making**



**Consistent  
Service Delivery**



**Operational  
Efficiency**



**Rights  
Protection**



**Security  
Assurance**



**Compliance  
Confidence**



**Disaster  
Continuity**



**Legal  
Support**



**Efficient  
Retrieval**

**Take a systematic approach to records management.**

# Understanding Digital Records

In the realm of digital records management, it's crucial to grasp the fundamentals of what constitutes a digital record. Unlike traditional paper documents, digital records exist in electronic formats and encompass a wide range of information, including text documents, spreadsheets, emails, multimedia files, and databases. Understanding the characteristics and properties of digital records is essential for effectively managing them throughout their lifecycle.

## WHAT IS A DIGITAL RECORD?

A digital record is any piece of information that is created, received, or maintained in a digital format. This includes files stored on computers, servers, or other electronic devices. Digital records may originate from various sources within an organization, such as email communications, document management systems, or enterprise resource planning (ERP) software.

## FILE FORMATS & METADATA

Digital records can be stored in a variety of file formats, each with its own characteristics and functionalities. Common file formats include PDF, Microsoft Office documents (e.g., Word, Excel, PowerPoint), image files (e.g., JPEG, PNG), and audio/video files (e.g., MP3, MP4). Additionally, digital records often contain metadata, which are descriptive attributes that provide information about the record's content, context, and structure. Metadata can include details such as authorship, creation date, file size, and keywords.

## STRUCTURED VS. UNSTRUCTURED DATA

Digital records can be categorized into structured and unstructured data types. Structured data refers to information that is organized into a predefined format, such as databases or spreadsheets, where data elements are clearly defined and can be easily searched, sorted, and analyzed.

Unstructured data, on the other hand, consists of free-form or semi-structured content, such as text documents, emails, and multimedia files, which may lack a predefined schema and require more sophisticated methods for indexing and retrieval.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Ensuring the long-term accessibility and usability of digital records is a critical aspect of digital records management. Preservation strategies may include data backups, migration to newer file formats or storage systems, and the implementation of digital preservation standards and best practices.

By preserving digital records effectively, organizations can safeguard valuable information assets and maintain continuity of access over time.



# Lifecycle of Digital Records

Records management revolves around the concept of a lifecycle for each record, encompassing stages from creation to disposal. Initially, records are created or received and then systematically filed in a managed repository for authorized retrieval. As records lose immediate value, they transition to inactive status and may be retained, transferred, archived, or destroyed based on their nature.

## Key Activities in Records Management Include:

1. **Establishing Policies:** Developing and enforcing records policies, including classification and retention guidelines.
2. **Storage Planning:** Creating strategies for storing both physical and digital records in the short and long term.
3. **Classification and Storage:** Identifying, classifying, and storing records according to standard procedures.
4. **Access Coordination:** Managing access and circulation of records within and outside the organization.
5. **Retention Policy Execution:** Implementing retention policies to archive or dispose of records as per operational needs, regulations, and procedures.

A pivotal tool in managing record disposition is the records schedule, outlining official instructions for retention and disposal. It dictates actions for records and non-record materials that are no longer necessary for current business operations.





## What do I need to know about records management for my business?

### WHAT IS A RECORD?

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A record, according to the International Council on Archives (ICA), is information created or received during institutional or individual activities, providing evidence with its content, context, and structure. It can be a tangible object or digital data valuable to an organization.

### HOW CAN I IDENTIFY A RECORD?

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**If any of these apply, it might be a record:**

- Created in business operations (e.g., correspondence, agreements)
- Received for action (e.g., FOIA requests, controlled correspondence)
- Documents organizational activities (e.g., calendars, meeting minutes)
- Mandated by law or regulation (e.g., administrative records, legal/financial documents)
- Supports financial or legal obligations (e.g., contracts, litigation files)
- Communicates organizational requirements (e.g., policies, procedures)

**It might be a non-record if:**

- Reference material (e.g., vendor catalogs, phone books)
- Duplicate or convenience copy (e.g., duplicate correspondence)
- Stock copy (e.g., organizational publications)
- Draft or working paper (e.g., draft with no substantive comments)

**Personal papers:**

- Relates only to personal affairs (e.g., personal schedules, PTA rosters)



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# What is a Records Schedule?

The records schedule is the key tool for managing record disposition, providing official policies for retaining and disposing of records. It mandates instructions for handling both records and non-record materials no longer needed for current business operations. Additionally, record series organize files based on specific subjects or activities, facilitating lifecycle management and ensuring coverage by the records schedule.





## Benefits of Using a Records Schedule



Ensures organization and easy retrieval of important records, crucial for evidentiary purposes during audits, FOIA requests, or legal proceedings.

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Optimizes office space and equipment by storing only active records in filing cabinets.

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Saves costs by transferring inactive files to less expensive storage areas for eventual disposition.

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Preserves valuable records for historical or research purposes.

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Controls the growth of records in offices by systematically disposing of unnecessary records.



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# What Records Must Be Kept?

When considering what records you need to keep, it first starts with identifying critical records. These will vary between organizations, but there are 5 criteria to consider in any situation....





## Identifying Critical Records



**Organizational Activities:** Consider what activities your organization undertakes that require documentation.

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**Types of Records Created:** Identify the various types of records generated within your organization.

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**Mission-Critical Records:** Determine which records are vital for fulfilling your organization's mission or objectives.

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**Decision Documentation:** Look for records that document important decisions or are integral to your workflow processes.

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**Regulatory Requirements:** Recognize records mandated by regulatory bodies overseeing your organization's operations.



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# Managing Digital Records in Canada

When considering what records you need to keep, it first starts with identifying critical records.



## MANAGING DIGITAL RECORDS IN CANADA

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The principles of records management apply universally, including to digital records, often referred to as electronic records, which present unique challenges. Preserving and protecting the content, context, and structure of electronic records can be more complex due to their intangible nature.

In Canada, managing electronic records necessitates computer-based systems. Functional requirements for such systems are outlined by various bodies, including the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS). The TBS Directive on Recordkeeping provides guidance for federal institutions on managing electronic records effectively.

International standards such as ISO 16175 provide guidelines for managing electronic records systems. Canadian organizations may also adhere to provincial or industry-specific regulations governing records management practices.

Ensuring the long-term accessibility and readability of electronic records is a concern shared globally. Canadian institutions are actively engaged in research and initiatives related to digital preservation, aimed at addressing the challenges of technological obsolescence and ensuring the continued accessibility of electronic records over time.

While certifications or compliance with standards provide assurance of system functionality, they do not guarantee regulatory compliance or records security. Organizations in Canada must remain vigilant in implementing appropriate measures to safeguard electronic records and ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations.



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# Document Management vs. Records Management

What's the difference? Both are essential components of information governance, but they serve distinct purposes and involve different approaches. Understanding how they differ will save you time and money.



## Digital Document Management Typically Focuses On:



**Managing & organizing  
electronic documents**



**Enhancing search &  
retrieval capabilities**



**Optimizing  
physical space**



**Streamlining existing  
document organization**



**Enhancing overall  
workflow & efficiency**

## Records Management Expands To Include:



**Identification & inventory  
of all records & owners**



**Retention & compliance  
with regulations**



**Security via chain of  
custody & audit trails**



**Policy development and  
enforcement**



**Overall lifecycle  
management**



# Transparent Records Management

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Creating a compliant records management strategy while accommodating departmental content management needs can pose challenges. Transparent records management offers a flexible solution, catering to the unique requirements of each business unit while ensuring an effective and compliant records environment for all.

Records managers often prioritize adherence to rules, like published retention schedules, over understanding the business importance of records. They focus on designing a repository layout aligned with retention schedules rather than optimizing for quick record retrieval.

# Transparent Records Management

Traditional file plans, organized by document types and retention schedules, can be cumbersome for general users. Transparent records management addresses this issue by allowing users to customize their view of the repository, offering multiple folder structures tailored to their needs.

Records managers maintain control over actual records, while other users access shortcuts, enhancing security. This approach enables records managers to create and manage retention schedules without disrupting departmental workflows.

With transparent records management, users are not required to actively participate in the process once the system is set up. Records managers retain control over indexing, archiving, and disposition, ensuring compliance without hindering departmental operations.



# Records Management Application

What does it entail and what are the legal considerations?

Records management systems necessitate specific features beyond those found in document management systems.

Legally, records must be trustworthy, complete, accessible, admissible in court, and durable as per the retention schedule. Records management applications aid records managers in meeting these requirements. Unlike paper files susceptible to physical threats, digitized records offer enhanced security features, protection against tampering, and auditing functionality to monitor user actions. Disaster recovery planning is facilitated through the ability to copy records to unalterable media for off-site storage, ensuring quick restoration in the event of an incident.

Effective management of web records is vital for risk mitigation, given the significance of web content in service delivery. Records management applications enable snapshots of the organization's website at regular intervals, retained according to a specified schedule. These records prove invaluable in legal challenges or if the original web content is compromised or lost.

## Key Functionality for Records Management:



Customizable Searches



Export Capabilities



Lifecycle Management



Detailed Reporting



Audit Trails

# Implementation of Records Management Application

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While circumstances will vary between businesses, putting it all together for your business can be distilled into 5 main steps when implementing your RM application.

1

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Assess organizational requirements and user needs for effective records management.

2

## SYSTEM SELECTION

Choose a suitable records management system based on functionality, security, and compatibility.

3

## CONFIGURATION & CUSTOMIZATION

Customize the system to align with specific organizational workflows and preferences.

4

## TRAINING & CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Provide comprehensive training and change management strategies to facilitate system adoption.

5

## DEPLOYMENT & ONGOING SUPPORT

Deploy the system gradually, ensuring ongoing support and maintenance for continued effectiveness.

# Let's Get to Work



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## Our Commitment to Quality

With over 50 of experience in the digitization industry, Consentia is equipped to assist organizations in implementing effective records management solutions. Our expertise lies in providing comprehensive digitization services, tailored to meet the unique needs of each client.

- 1. Digitization Services:** Consentia offers high-quality digitization services from paper scanning, data entry, microfilm/fiche conversions, and transcriptions, we ensure accurate and efficient digitization, enabling organizations to access and manage their records more effectively.
- 2. Records Management Solutions:** We provide robust solutions, including document management systems and records retention policies. Our team works closely with clients to customize solutions that align with their specific requirements and compliance standards.
- 3. Training and Support:** Consentia offers training and support services to ensure seamless adoption and utilization of records management systems. Our experts provide comprehensive training sessions and ongoing support to empower users and maximize the benefits of the implemented solutions.
- 4. Compliance and Security:** We prioritize compliance and security in all our services, ensuring that digitized records meet regulatory requirements and security standards. Our solutions incorporate encryption, access controls, and audit trails to safeguard sensitive information.
- 5. Continuous Improvement:** Consentia is committed to continuous improvement, regularly updating our technology and processes to stay ahead of industry trends. We strive to deliver innovative solutions that enhance efficiency, compliance, and organizational success.

## Connect Today

Partnering with Consentia means gaining access to a trusted partner with a proven track record of delivering successful digitization and records management solutions. Let us help you streamline your records management processes and unlock the full potential of your digital assets. Connect with us and one of our experts will be happy to chat with you.



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