



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Broadcast Management **Saving Your Office from Being an Information Toxic Dump**



by Barbara Hemphill

[September 2010] Business records, licenses, manuals, maintenance logs, and other document files have a strange way of piling up and filling all available spaces. Can you can certainly

Does your organization have offices, file cabinets, storage rooms, and offsite facilities full of unidentified paper files and electronic documents? Are there files in your office that you have never opened and probably cannot even identify the contents? Have you ever come across a piece of information you did not know whether to save or throw away, so you saved it, just in case?

If so, you are working in an “Information Toxic Dump!”

Research shows that 80% of the information kept in most offices is never used. Ironically, the more information that is kept, the less it is used, simply because it is too difficult for employees to find. Often employees cannot even find the documents they themselves created, let alone information created by another employee – especially someone who is no longer with the organization.

WHY INFORMATION MANAGEMENT REALLY MATTERS

Your ability to accomplish any task or goal is directly related to your ability to find the information you need when you need it.

Finding key information in every organization – regardless of whether it is in a paper or electronic format – is becoming an ever-increasing challenge. This inability to find information causes all sorts of problems for the organization and for the individual – wasted time looking for information or recreating already-existing information, missed opportunities, and increased stress.

PLAYING THE BLAME GAME

Blame for the information management debacle falls in several courts:

- Management blames employees for the problem
- Employees blame management for the problem (!)
- Organizations do not have a user-friendly system
- No one understands the filing systems
- Management fails to look at records management as an ongoing activity

SOLVING THE INFORMATION PROBLEM

Unfortunately, it is too easy to get caught up in the blame game. To create and maintain an effective information management program, it is important to stop playing that blame game and, instead, focus on and answer the following six questions:

1. What information should we keep?
2. In what form?
3. For how long?
4. Who is responsible for maintaining the information?
5. Who needs access to the information?
6. How can everyone who needs the information find it?

Answering those six questions requires the cooperation of everyone in the organization. It can easily take up to one year, or even longer, to answer them, since accuracy requires addressing the questions over a one-year business cycle at a minimum.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Use the following *Productive Environment Process*[™] to implement a new system. This can be applied to organize information in any organization.

1. State your vision. If your information management program is successful, what will you be able to do that you cannot do now? What positive effect will an effective information management program have on the organization and your clients?
2. Eliminate your obstacles. What currently prevents you from having a successful system?
3. Commit your resources. How much time, money, and human resource power are you willing to put into the project.
4. Create your system. What tools (software, existing filing systems that work well, etc.) do you currently have that will be helpful in the process? What other tools are available? What processes do you need to apply? A crucial component is applying The Art of Wastebasketry® to eliminate unnecessary records.
5. Maintain your success. What procedures do you need to develop and implement so the system you create will continue to work long after the creators of the system are gone?

The Art of Wastebasketry®

When faced with too much paper, ask yourself these questions:

- Does this require action?
- Can I identify a specific use?
- Is it difficult to obtain again?
- Is it recent enough to be useful?
- Are there tax or legal implications?

If the answer is "No," ask:

- What is the worst possible thing that will happen if I toss this?

If you can live with your answer, toss or recycle it – and work happily ever after!

*(Note: These tips apply to both paper **and** electronic files!)*

EFFECTIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IS A TEAM SPORT

It would be wonderful if creating an information management system was simply a matter of buying a book or hiring an expert who told you exactly what to do. However, since every organization has different sets of information, needs, and legal imperatives, the best program is the one that is thought out so that it works for you and your workplace.

A successful program requires people, processes and technology. It must be supported by management, customized for the organization, and executed by everyone in the organization to succeed on an ongoing basis.

Designing, implementing, and maintaining an effective information management program will help to put you on the road to a productive environment – an organized facility in which everyone can find what they need when they need it, so they can accomplish their work and enjoy their lives.

Putting these ideas into practice will also end up giving you more space to work, less wasted time and energy searching for paperwork - and most importantly – get a lot more accomplished each day.

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Barbara Hemphill is one of the country's leading productivity experts. As a speaker and consultant on organizing, Barbara helps individuals and organizations create and sustain a productive environment. She is author of the best-selling "Taming the Paper Tiger" book series. For more information on Barbara's speaking and consulting, visit www.barbarahemphill.com

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