Broadcast Management
How to Save Your Office from Being an Information Toxic Dump

by Barbara Hemphill

[November 2013] Even in this Electronic Age, business records, licenses, manuals, maintenance logs, and other document files have a strange way of piling up and filling all available spaces. In fact, some people swear there must be overnight "deliveries" of even more paperwork – it is the only way to explain the piles of paper.

Is there any way, short of a fire, to reduce the clutter?

Ask yourself: Does your company have offices, file cabinets, storage rooms, and offsite facilities full of unidentified paper files and electronic documents?

If so, you are not unique.

But now ask: 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!"

A LOT OF USELESS PAPER

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 to locate. Often people cannot find even the documents they themselves created, let alone information created by others – especially someone who is no longer with the company.

MANAGING THE PAPER IS IMPORTANT

Of course, 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 that key information – regardless of whether it is in paper or electronic format – has become an ever-increasing challenge. The ina-

bility to find information causes all sorts of problems – wasted time looking for information or recreating already-existing but missing information, missed opportunities, and increased stress.

PLAYING THE BLAME GAME

Worse, now the Blame Game starts.

Usually, the result is finger pointing in all sorts of directions:

- Management blames employees for the problem.
- Employees blame management for the problem. (!)
- The company still does not have a user-friendly filing system.
- In fact, *no one* understands the filing systems.
- Even if the needed information is eventually found, management fails to look at "records management" as a necessary ongoing activity

MOVING PAST THE BLAME GAME

Unfortunately, it is too easy to get caught up in the blame game.

On the other hand, 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 company. It can easily take up to a year, or even longer, to fully answer them, since accuracy requires addressing the questions over a one-year business cycle at a minimum.

BUILD AN EFFECTIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

I would suggest that you use the following *Productive Environment Process™* to implement a new system.

This system can be applied to organize information in any company.

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 effecttive information management program have on the conpany 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 current tools (software or existing systems that work well) do you 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?

We can summarize the process this way:

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 their 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!)*

INFO 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 company 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.

JOIN THE TEAM

A successful program requires people, processes, and technology. It must be supported by management, customized for the company, and executed by everyone in the company 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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