

Records Management

- Electronic vs hard copy filing
- Record Management practices
- On and off-site records storage

Issues

- Despite the various systems and technologies available, the legal sector is still a heavy consumer of paper. It is clear that we are still being challenged by achieving a 'paper less office'.
- Poor records management also means poor risk management.
- Generally inefficient record managing practices come from a bad culture or lack of policy adherence - or both.

Considerations

1. Identify Requirement

- Undertake a full review of how your office manages its records.
 - Are you using electronic file management systems and smart technology to minimise paper consumption?
 - Are your RM processes centralised or spread out amongst different parts of your firm?
 - Is there full control and tracking of a file from its creation to destruction?
 - Do you have a standard filing system in place or are there various methods used throughout your firm locally and / or nationally?
 - Are there clear policies in place to manage your records effectively and if so are they being adhered to?

2. Plan

- Changing an inefficient RM culture can be very challenging but it is not impossible. It may end up being a slow process but the change will benefit your Partners and staff, your clients, it will improve your risk management processes, improve utilisation of your office space and will ultimately save your firm money and have a positive impact on the environment.
- Seek support from management as their buy-in is critical.
- Be prepared to communicate openly to staff and clearly explain the benefits of the changes and the reasons why they are happening.

3. Select

- File Management process - implement a national standard so that everybody is using the same filing method (eg lateral filing, lever arch etc) and make sure everybody is clear about what can be filed electronically or needs to be printed. Re-use your files where possible which reduces cost and landfill.
- Technology - use your office technology to support your RM policies and processes. Invest in databases to electronically store your correspondence / emails / documents etc and only

Records Management

print off what is needed. Set your printing devices to default to double sided printing and explore a secure or follow-me-print option to reduce unclaimed printing waste.

- Set up your mailroom to scan all incoming mail and send on electronically. Reduce the paperwork trial by making invoices / approvals and office forms (such as timesheets, leave forms etc) electronically available.
- Review all hard copy publications, magazines, reference materials that individuals receive and see if (a) these are still needed and (b) if so arrange for them to be received electronically if possible. You will find that many staff don't even read the hard copy publications that they currently receive.
- Look at other alternatives to reduce the need for hard copy files being produced. For example, I pads and other similar devices can be uploaded with files and presentations and taken to client offices instead of hard copy files. Provide reports, training and firm materials to clients electronically or on a USB.
- Off site storage - be smart with the file retrieval management of your off site storage. The more regularly files are retrieved the more retrieval fees you will pay and the more emissions are produced by courier vans.
- Office storage space - minimise how much physical shelving space staff have individually or in team environments. Force staff to think about what they really need to print out and encourage electronic filing instead.

4. Manage

- Promote the good work that is achieved within your firm by individuals and teams, show others that being more efficient with managing their records is achievable.
- Calculate the paper used per person each year within your firm and stack this up in reams to show each person their true impact. Once improvements are made in managing your records then this will show with reduced paper usage. Communicate the changes and demonstrate to staff the reduced reams per person and highlight the environmental benefits achieved.
- There are true financial savings to be made in improving the management of your records in areas such as reduced paper and printing costs, time efficiencies, reduced amount of paper records being created if stored electronically, reduced storage needs within your office and also less to store (and later destroy) in your off site storage facility and standardising your filing system will give you procurement cost efficiencies. Track and report on these savings to management.
- Remember that a 'paper less office' is not a 'paper free office' - be realistic with your expectations.

Further Information