Connection & Collaboration

A guide to information management and connectivity

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Always **more.**

We always offer you **more.**

Connectivity challenges and solutions in information management

Over the last decade, the rise of highly capable mobile devices, low-cost wireless data and an increasingly globalised business environment have made connectivity a point of focus across all industry sectors.

While it is generally raised in the context of communications, connectivity has an equally important relationship with information management.

The finance sector is ahead of the game in this area. With the majority of customer interactions now occurring online, businesses have a powerful incentive to promote and support connectivity as a competitive advantage. As customer-facing connective technologies become commonplace, they are also increasingly used in-house to allow work units across the world to concurrently access the same information assets, collaborate, and stay on top of sudden market changes. When in-house connectivity is solid, financial organisations can expect to enjoy greater levels of efficiency, competitiveness and client satisfaction.

While support for public connectivity is increasing with the development of apps and other online interfaces, there are still internal challenges to connectivity with flow-on ramifications for the quality of information management across the whole of government. With the Australian Federal Government's 2020 deadline for digitisation, many agencies are now enhancing their connectivity to support the increasing volume of electronic information being generated. Where connectivity problems do arise, however, is in interoperability between agencies. Interoperability refers to the compatibility of ICT systems (and the data they generate) across disparate work units. The current advantage of paper-based information workflows is that they do not produce any connectivity issues.

But full, multi-agency digitisation raises questions about whether systems will be capable of communicating properly, whether indexing conventions will be universalised, and whether file formats will be unilaterally accessible.

As the government's Digital Continuity 2020 Policy explains, "interoperability [needs] to be planned, designed and integrated from the initial stages... there is still much to be done."[1] For digitisation to actually enhance information management in government, current inter-agency connectivity challenges need to be properly addressed.

In healthcare, the quality of an organisation's connectivity affects whether information is updated in real-time or on a delay, which in turn affects the quality of data accessibility across multiple patient points of contact. When medical staff have an always-on connection to patient records, for example, treatment can be rendered more quickly, which in turn improves clinical outcomes. As it stands, however, information is often difficult to reach due to poor connectivity within the health system. "Each time you pick-up a prescription, get bloodwork done, or visit the ER, your personal health information is putting down roots in different places," says Tom Skelton, CEO of Surescripts. This results in "critical data that can't be exchanged, caregivers who can't properly communicate, and patients whose frustrations with an antiquated system are mounting."[2] Enhanced healthcare system connectivity also has the potential to limit mistakes.

The construction and manufacturing industries rely on digital connectivity to communicate over expansive or disconnected worksites, and to remain responsive to changing situations so that adjustments can be made before any resources are wasted. The challenges to connectivity in these sectors are both internal and external. In some businesses, there is a dogged refusal to adopt non-paper workflows. This is understandable in light of paper's practicality and convenience for in-person collaboration, but it can also hamper equity of connection to information across work units. Extraneous challenges to connectivity include "terminal immobility", where information management systems are used that cannot be operated on different device types across multiple locations, and document format incompatibilities with mobile devices.

While achieving more effective connectivity is undeniably important, it also necessarily results in much larger volumes of information being generated and stored, which presents challenges for how it can then be best organised and accessed. Additionally, organisations never had to worry about paper files being hacked, but the rising tide of digital data from millions of connected customers creates a litany of new vulnerabilities.

1. National Archives of Australia, *Digital Continuity 2020 Policy – October 2015*, p. 6
2. http://surescripts.com/news-center/blog/!content/posts/2015/03/20/the-future-of-healthcare-depends-on-connectivity-and-interoperability

Fortunately, a professional information management partner can help. First and foremost, good information management providers give their clients access to intuitive digital interfaces that make searching for archived information simple and secure, allowing organisations to instantly request delivery of any amount of data to wherever it is needed. They can also help assess the advantages of transitioning to a more connected, digital workflow, then set up a plan to implement a more appropriate solution — from an entirely digital system to a hybrid of digital and paper. Existing paper archives can be rapidly scanned and made accessible digitally, with better indexation also integrated with this process where OCR, ICR or manual data entry can be used to capture identifying information in documents. Any un-scanned hard copies remain available for on-demand scanning and electronic delivery, which can be requested on a wide variety of fixed and mobile devices in any format — eliminating the need for time-consuming conversions and allowing more rapid on-the-go data access and transmission.

The best information management providers can also help multiple organisations cooperate more effectively. For organisations requiring absolute interoperability, tailored solutions can be developed that seamlessly integrate with existing ICT interfaces, minimising the need for staff retraining. In government, a collateral advantage of multiple agencies seeking out the same information management provider is an overall reduction in cost. This is especially true for smaller government agencies, which can piggyback on a larger agency's contract thanks to the government's shared services initiatives. By creating a central information hub or "single point of truth" that doesn't rely on a single stakeholder's in-house archiving or ICT capability, premium information management solutions ensure data assets can be made accessible to all authorised parties on demand. This increases transparency and efficiency. It also dramatically reduces the chance of mistakes being made, which is especially important in the healthcare and legal sectors.

Connectivity is only one of many considerations for organisations looking for a better information management solution. Read on to discover other challenges — and how a good information management partner can help overcome them.

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Other important considerations in information management

: Compliance

One of the most important parts of compliance is information retention. But done poorly it can be a great burden to both compliance and other important considerations in information flows. The biggest issue across the board is "infinite retention", which organisations can resort to in an attempt to ensure compliance without having to attend to specific guidelines each document type. There are several downsides to this, however, including the difficulty of effectively indexing the resulting bloated archives, the cost of storing many years of unnecessary files, and paradoxical compliance violations that arise from the inability to find relevant information. Infinite retention can also place organisations in violation of the Privacy Act due to personnel files being retained past their period of usefulness.
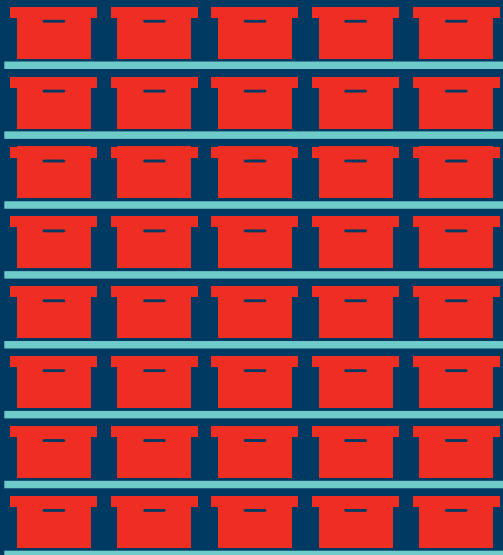
A good information management partner makes compliance a simple matter. Archives can be initially audited, then properly indexed for easy content visibility. Destruction is arranged for redundant or unnecessary files to limit the number of files being stored, while sentencing schedules are set up for the rest in line with the relevant legislation. As files reach the end of their lifespan, a good information management partner will double-check before destroying anything, and provide a certificate of destruction after information has been physically shredded or electronically degaussed.

: Speed

Speed of information access is a principal consideration across every industry sector. The faster information can be accessed, the more fluidly an organisation can respond to changing situations. In finance, on-demand information access is a crucial customer service point of difference, with clients often choosing banks, insurance companies and mortgage brokers based on their response times. In healthcare, where lives are often on the line, the stakes are higher. Timely information access allows medical staff to make faster, better-informed decisions, and ultimately increases the quality of treatment outcomes. For the legal sector, speed of information access has a direct bearing on how responsive legal teams are to case developments, how well they communicate with clients, and how much of their time is externally billable.

All information management companies understand how important fast data access is. But not all of them are equipped to support high-level needs. The best providers deliver physical documents twice per day as a standard service, and can deliver urgent files within three hours. They also provide solutions that make entire archives available digitally, so files can be intuitively searched and retrieved more swiftly than physical delivery allows. Scan-on-demand solutions also help speed delivery of physical archives not previously converted to a digital format.

: Security

Security is a growing concern for many organisations. While the online era has been a boon for those dealing with large amounts of data, it has also fostered the development of a new illicit marketplace for both digital and paper-based information due to the ease of duplication and dissemination. While many organisations, like finance companies, have a unique incentive to keep their information safe due to the tremendous costs involved in a breach, others such as healthcare providers and government agencies can lag behind due to complex decision-making processes, tight budgets, and a greater focus on core competencies.

By centralising their data with a competent information management partner, organisations can increase the safety of their information while limiting the amount of money spent on security in-house. Moving physical archives off-site eliminates human access to anything not officially requested by the information owner or company representative. With client-anonymous indexing, unauthorised parties are prevented from discovering what an archive contains — not even the fully police-checked staff of the information management company.

When being transported, documents stay within an unbroken chain of custody, limiting the risk of loss or breach during handovers.

In terms of cyber security, good information management partners also provide an administrative console with airtight security configurations, function-level verification, and application-level safeguards that limit users to accessing only the functionality and data they are authorised to use.

: Privacy

In recent years, privacy has become vitally important across all industry sectors, especially for those dealing with large amounts of personal data. After numerous high-profile data breaches in government agencies, a guarantee of privacy-conscious information management is crucial for restoring and maintaining public trust. In healthcare, the necessity is two-fold. Patient files need to be kept safe for the sake of patients themselves, but also in order to deter cyber attacks that can cripple ICT systems and hamper the ability of medical staff to save lives. In the legal sector, duty of confidentiality has always put privacy front of mind, but with hackers now targeting law firms with increasing frequency, privacy-consciousness is now be a powerful point of difference.

Engaging a reputable information management partner can make a huge difference in how an organisation is perceived in terms of its ability to keep private data safe.

The best information management companies centralise data off-site under 24-hour surveillance, have their staff sign confidentiality agreements, and employ systems that delete local digital content from viewing devices as soon as the file is closed. An organisation outsourcing its information management can use assurances like these as influential selling points to increase client confidence and stand out from rivals.

Cost-effectiveness

For many businesses, information management solutions are a grudge purchase. This is largely due to the perception that third-party providers offer limited value for money. In actual fact, handling information in-house can ultimately cost organisations more, especially if they have limited resources to dedicate to efficient archiving and retrieval systems. Internal information management systems are prone to costs associated with chaotic indexing, duplication, and compliance problems. Additionally, for institutions with limited floor space, in-house archives can end up costing many times what they would if stored off-site simply by virtue of the valuable

real estate they occupy. A lack of internal resources can also make audits difficult, making archives much larger and more cumbersome than they need to be.

The comprehensive solutions provided by professional information management firms can help organisations cut costs dramatically. The best providers will often roll a low-cost audit into their archiving package, dramatically reducing storage fees by limiting the number of files eventually put into storage. They can also assess an organisation's existing indexing systems, providing more efficient options if necessary — as well as computer interfaces that make searching faster and more intuitive.

Overall, organisations engaging a third-party information management solution can expect to enjoy significant savings in terms of time, space and money.

Value & Variety

Many organisations avoid information management providers completely because they have limited money to spend on non-core services. Others may engage a third-party information management solution but not know how to make the most of the money they are spending on it. Organisations will often engage multiple service providers for everything from cleaning to office relocations to asset storage to renovations, and end up spending excessively as a result. This is a common problem in industries where budgets are difficult to keep under control and cost overruns are common.

The best information management companies do far more than just store and retrieve information. They can tailor a package that integrates a wide range of non-core offerings covering everything from small office refits to the relocation of entire industrial worksites. Consolidating multiple services with a single provider not only increases value for money, but assists with centralised organisation. For example, if a room full of paper files needs to be audited and archived, shelving needs to be dismantled and disposed of, and then the same space needs to be set up as an office using fittings and equipment relocated from another location, a provider with an integrated offering can arrange the entire process internally — eliminating the need for an organisation to dedicate its own resources to coordinating multiple individual contractors.

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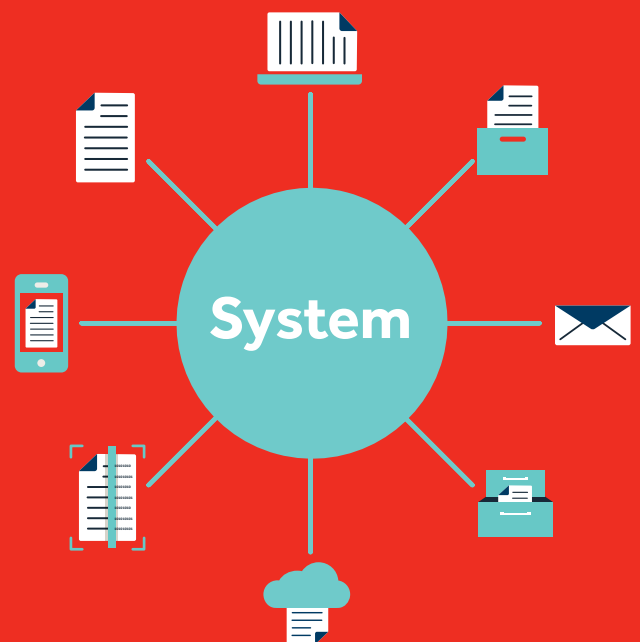
The Grace Advantage

With over 50 years in the business, Grace is uniquely qualified to deliver excellence in information management.

Grace provides solutions for a full range of information management requirements, from storage and indexing to retrieval and destruction. Here are the advantages your organisation will enjoy with Grace:

: Expert consultants to assess the precise needs of your business and tailor solutions that address your specific information management challenges.

: The speed, convenience and security of 26 information management centres across the country – more than any other provider.

: Many facilities are protected by state-of-the-art safety systems, including sprinklers and fire doors – all linked directly to the local fire brigade. Plus, electronic intruder detection with back-to-base alarms.

: Complete and customisable cataloguing, indexing and sentencing solutions for projects of any size, right across the country – with information management software that gives you total control.

: A scanning and digitisation process to make searching and retrieval as fast as possible. Digital files are audited to ensure 100% accuracy, and can be delivered in any electronic format.

: Fast and flexible retrieval, with the capacity to deliver documents twice per day as standard, urgent scan-on-demand services that respond within just 3 hours, and the option to personally retrieve information on site.

: The only secure chain of custody in the industry that spans the entire country. With GPS-tracked vehicles and police-checked staff, your documents never leave Grace's sight. Their client-anonymous indexing system also ensures your confidentiality at all times.

: Real-time tracking of your documents, from anywhere in the world.

: Secure destruction of documents, either on schedule or on demand, under a strict authorisation process – protecting against both accidental data loss and unnecessary storage terms.

: Innovative solutions that recruit Grace's commercial and fine-art removals expertise to cater to a wide variety of unique business requirements.

Contact Grace today to find out how their specialised information management solutions and integrated services can help you. Visit www.grace.com.au/contact-us for your nearest office.

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