



WHITE PAPER

EMAILS, GROUPWISE AND RECORDS RETENTION



ISO 9001:2000
Lic No.
OEC 5844

Emails, GroupWise & Records Retention

All organizations, whether government or private, are required by law to manage emails as corporate records. Very few organizations do so. There are four prerequisites to correct email management:

1. A records management policy and procedures
2. A retention schedule
3. An email policy
4. A tool to capture, analyze, index, store and retrieve emails

Let's look briefly at each required component.

1. A Records Management Policy and Procedures

We first need to understand what a record is. In its simplest form it is evidence of a business transaction. In the context of email we need a policy to determine for our organization which emails are valid corporate records and which are not. In the light of recent court cases this is not an easy differentiation to make. However, it behooves us to make the rules and embed those rules within a formal policy and then make that policy operational by defining and enforcing a set of procedures. If we do this we are defining our corporate email records. If we do not do this, we take a very real risk that the courts will define it for us with usually unpleasant and costly consequences. The contents of any email store will vary greatly from organization to organization depending upon many factors; the most important of which is the email policy (see later). Eighty-percent or more may be 'junk' or eighty-percent or more may be valuable, valid corporate records. We need to build a set of unambiguous rules that clearly tell all employees which email records to retain and which to discard. For example:

Emails to Retain

Any email to or from a customer
Any email to or from a supplier
Any email containing a quotation or reference to a quotation

Emails to discard

Personal emails between you and a family member
Personal emails between you and a medical practitioner
*Personal emails between you and another employee

But, we have a problem already. What if a personal email between you and another employee contained expletives, racism or sexism? What if an inappropriately worded personal email later becomes the subject of 'discovery' in a civil court case?

Difficult but not impossible to handle if, in addition to our policy and procedures, we also have the other prerequisites, namely an email policy and a tool to analyze emails.

2. A Retention Schedule

This component is critical if you want to stay on the good side of the courts and meet the requirements of legal 'Compliance'. A retention schedule for emails simply states how long we retain certain types of emails and what we do with them when that time is up. It is not difficult to build a retention schedule; it requires a basic knowledge of your legal obligations and common sense. The overriding 'common sense' rule? Never keep anything longer than you have to.

First, define the different types of emails you handle; keep it simple. If you get to more than thirty types scrap what you have done and start again.

For example, any email that goes on an employee's HR file can be classified as an HR record. Check with you State and Federal awards to see how long you have to keep these. It can vary from seven years to seventy years.

Most commercial emails (e.g., quotes, contracts negotiations, etc) will usually only need to be kept for seven years.

At the end of an e-mail's 'active' life there are only two things you can do with it. You can destroy it or you can consign it to long term storage in the local salt mine.

If in doubt, contact a professional organization such as ARMA (www.arma.org) and ask them to recommend a suitable qualified ARMA consultant to assist you in building your retention schedule.

Why is this so important? If you are ever involved in a legal dispute and the court asks for discovery of documents and you have destroyed some of those documents under a formal retention schedule as part of your normal business operations, you do not have a problem. If you have destroyed documents and you do not have a formal retention schedule and process in place you may have a very big and expensive problem. Be smart and do not take the risk.

3. An Email Policy

You can't criticize or discipline employees for poor or inappropriate email practices if you haven't told them what the acceptable practice is. So, draw up your code of practice, your email policy and distribute it to all employees. Make it part of each new employees orientation package. Regularly remind all employees of this policy. You can copy a sample email policy from our website at:

http://www.knowledgeonecorp.com/products/sample_email_policy.htm

4. A Tool to Capture, Analyze, Index, Store and Retrieve Emails

Knowledgeone Corporation has been capturing emails for many years and we have evolved several different ways to do it. There are basically two options; you either rely on the employee to capture all appropriate emails as corporate records or you do it automatically via a rules based system. Which option you choose depends upon you organization, your industry and your environment.

Option 1 – The Employee

Knowledgeone Corporation uses two products to satisfy this need; RecFind-Corporate, its knowledge management system (managing either a SQL Server or Oracle relational database) and the RecFind-Button.

RecFind-Corporate provides all of the functionality to store, index, manage and retrieve emails including a retention schedule, workflow and reporting.

The RecFind-Button is a simple to use, tiny application that we embed within GroupWise so that emails can be captured into the RecFind-Corporate relational database from within the GroupWise client.

Staff capturing emails this way do not need to know anything about RecFind and do not have to leave the GroupWise client.

For more information on RecFind-Corporate and the RecFind Button see our web site at:

<http://www.knowledgeonecorp.com/products/index.htm>

Option 2 – Rules Based Automatic Capture

For those organizations that want a totally automatic, rules driven, non-intrusive email management solution we created a new genre of product. GEM (Knowledgeone Corporation's Email Management solution) runs in the 'background' silently and unobtrusively examining each email you send and receive.

In order to have as little impact as possible on your GroupWise email server(s) (GEM supports multiple servers) GEM is organized into several small, asynchronous process.

The GEM Agent 'connects' to the GroupWise email server and takes a copy of every email you send and receive. It was specifically designed to have a minimal impact on your GroupWise server. It writes these emails to a SQL queue on another server. A second component of the GEM Agent continually analyzes this queue in an asynchronous process comparing the characteristics of emails against the 'rules' you have built and accumulates detailed statistics. Those emails deemed to be valid corporate records (according to the user defined rules) are passed on to the GEM-RDBM (A version of RecFind-Corporate) for the emails to be stored, indexed and for any workflows to be initiated.

Access to all stored emails is via a 'thin' browser client called GEM-TC. This client provides a secure search capability on all emails enterprise wide. Searches can be made against almost any aspect of the email including sender, receiver, subject, body text and the text of any attachments. The security system allows you to protect or expose emails as needs be.

The GEM Rules wizard guides you through the creation of a set of rules (based on the contents of any part of the email) to determine the right 'policy' for your organization. In addition, GEM will automatically email the GEM Administrator each day at midnight with three reports:

1. Errors seen in the email system
2. Statistics for all emails seen that day
3. Any emails that 'slipped through' your Rules (so you can continually update and modify your rules).

Why Do We Need To Manage Emails?

In some organizations emails represent more than eighty-percent of the paperwork for all business transactions. In some cases, emails may be your only record of a business transaction.

In some organizations employees use email to illegally distribute company confidential information such as plans, formulae, trade secrets, source code, customer lists, etc.

In some organizations employees use email to seek new positions with competitive organizations.

In some organizations employees use email to harass other employees or persons with threatening, racist or sexist matter.

In some organizations employees use email to distribute pornography.

Don't you want to know what is in your email store?

*Written by Frank McKenna, CEO Knowledgeone Corporation
2003*