

Information Lifecycle Governance (ILG)

What is it?

ILG is more than just another acronym. It's a way of managing information over time with the necessary controls to advance good business practices. ILG encompasses policies, processes, practices, and technology used to manage information throughout its life starting with creation and ending with proper disposal. Sounds simple on the surface, yet organizations struggle with the complexity of managing an expanding universe of electronic information, more laws that dictate how information is managed, and greater consequences for failing to get it right. Remember information is an asset that allows your business to be "faster, better, cheaper". ILG promotes business productivity and efficiency and allows your organization to be "legally compliant."

What is information and does it have different values?

In its broadest business sense, information is the data in any form (paper or electronic) created or received by an organization during performance of its daily business operations. The value of the information is determined by its content not the system through which it travels or on which it is stored. Today it is not uncommon to execute contracts in email, modify them with a voice mail and breach them in a blog. Our business world is replete with more information in more and more places screaming out for better management.

Different information not only has differing value but that value tends to change over time. So while the company holiday party invitation is likely not considered a business record, an email which comments on the performance of an employee is, and needs to be managed accordingly. The value of information is determined at the time of creation and reevaluated into the future. As soon as information is created or received by an organization, the value must be immediately identified so it can be properly managed in accordance with all the governing rules utilizing the "right" technology.

One thing is clear, you can't keep everything and expect to continue to be an efficient business; there are also an increasing volume of laws that tell organizations how to properly manage them. So just because it comes through a communications system and appears casual does not mean it's not important information. Increasingly all organizations need to more proactively manage their information if they are going to continue to be an essential asset.

Why is it necessary to manage information over a lifecycle?

Most organizations aren't effectively managing their information today, because they have huge volumes of it which keep growing. Employees have been having a challenging time for years classify information. According to Kahn Consulting Survey completed in conjunction with ARMA, results indicated that only

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21 % of respondents thought their employees would get retention right, and 16% had confidence that they would get discovery right. With increased information volumes, employees' challenges with RIM and discovery will only be greater, therefore the need to rely on technology becomes imperative.

Most organizations are not sure what they have, not sure of its value, not sure where it is stored, not sure what rules govern it and not sure what technology is available to better manage their burgeoning information parking lots.

One way to tackle this ever increasing mountain of stuff is to manage it as though it has a useful life. In other words, most information will be born and live for a time, providing business and legal value to the organization. Then at some future point in time, it will "die" according to the rules established by the company. The disparate requirements from legal, records, and IT must systemically be linked together to execute and enforce all rules governing information. Only a subset of information in an organization has long-term value and should be managed in more structured and formalized way. The ramifications of not managing valuable information can be very severe ranging from large expense regulatory fines to bankruptcy.

It is important to understand that the "lifecycle" of information is more than its birth and its death - but also about all the life in between. Even when data appears to be "inactive" it still must be managed for security, privacy, litigation and business value purposes. Just because it is "sitting" in a repository doesn't mean its value is diminished or the rules governing it have been lifted! So you need to manage information over time with prudent business rules.

What is governance and why do I need some?

If you believe that information is truly an asset then it makes business sense to manage information to better protect the "crown jewels"! One way to ensure a certain level of oversight is by applying a "governance" structure to information management practices. Whether its policies to guide retention, information security or privacy, or technology that "locks" down final documents, preempting unauthorized alteration, such controls will help make management more predictable, provide expectations to employees and bolster the value of the information itself.