

Zasio Enterprises

Consulting

Records Management Consulting Services

## Consulting Services in Electronic Records Retention: New Strategies for Data Life Cycle Management

By David O. Stephens, CRM, FAI



THE NATION'S FOREMOST CONSULTING PRACTICE IN ELECTRONIC RECORDS RETENTION

### OVERVIEW

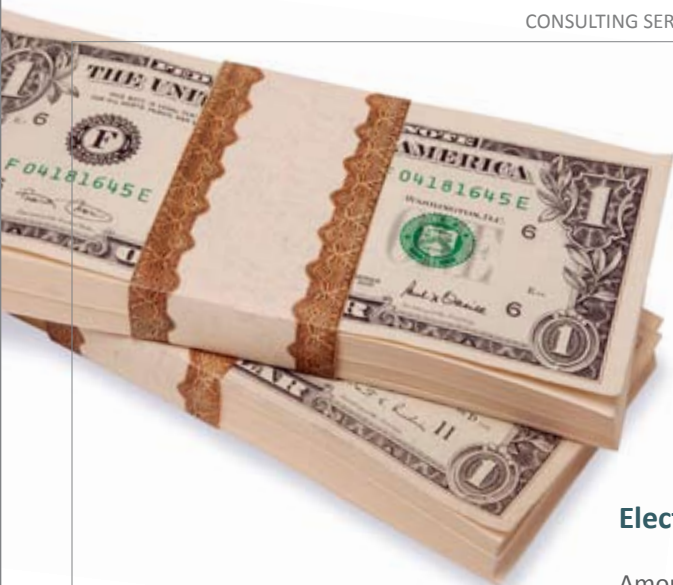
Zasio Enterprises operates one of the nation's leading consulting practices in electronic records retention: managing the life cycle of computer data such that it is retained and destroyed systematically under established management policies and professional practices. We pioneered many of the concepts and principles related to this practice, and we work with our clients throughout the United States and abroad to develop and implement fully customized electronic records retention solutions. These are described in the following pages.

In the computing environments of the United States, electronic records retention has been largely ignored. The vast majority of electronic recordkeeping systems in the U.S. have been implemented without a predefined methodology for eliminating data, text, and image files at a point in their life cycle at which their information content is of no further value. Moreover, although the vast majority of computer applications contain electronic records that possess temporary value, the few applications that do contain data of permanent value are generally designed with no forethought as to exactly how the permanent retention of digital data can be accomplished. **Consequently, we regard electronic records retention as the missing element in the life cycle management of computer-based information.** At Zasio Enterprises, we work with our clients to remedy this problem.



**Our comprehensive consulting practice in electronic records retention consists of the following components:**

- Developing a viable business case for electronic records retention
- Scheduling for retention the data in computer applications managed by IT departments
- Developing policies and practices for the retention of desktop data
- Developing policies and practices for the retention of e-mail
- Developing policies and practices for the retention of Web-based content
- Developing policies and practices for long-term data retention



*We see a huge savings in adopting the strategy of not having to bear the burden of storing and maintaining expired or useless data. For every \$10,000 in storage hardware costs, a good electronic records retention program can return \$50,000 to \$70,000 annually!*

### Electronic Records Retention: The Business Case

Among our clients, we find that electronic records retention is needed because the ability to manage data is not keeping up with the growth of data. In fact, the trends in computer data storage indicate that less data is being deleted while archival data is being retained longer. According to *Computer Technology Review*, annual storage growth rates are expected to range from 60% to over 100% annually for the next five years. Further, accumulating data indefinitely without implementing retirement or retention policies can turn storage management into waste management!

Chiefly because of the explosive growth of computer data in most organizations, the “total cost of data ownership” continues to escalate dramatically. Consider, for example, a \$10,000 investment in a disk drive. Data storage analysts say that the cost of operating this device is \$5 to \$7 annually for every dollar spent on the hardware. Thus, the annual cost of operating this \$10,000 disk drive would be \$50,000 to \$70,000. However, the total five-year cost of ownership would approach a quarter of a million dollars! We see a huge savings in adopting the strategy of not having to bear the burden of storing and maintaining expired or useless data. For every \$10,000 in storage hardware costs, a good electronic records retention program can return \$50,000 to \$70,000 annually!

At Zasio Enterprises, we help our clients develop a solid business case for electronic records retention, based on an analysis of the following issues:

- How much does it cost to store and maintain all the computer data in the organization? The total cost of data storage and maintenance must include the cost of *administering* the data over its entire life cycle, not just the cost of the storage media on which the data resides.
- How much of the current volume of stored data is *useless*; in other words, how much is inactive and is no longer needed for any purpose?
- What would be the costs and benefits of disposing of all such data? On the other hand, what will be the costs, risks and benefits of not doing so?
- What has been the rate of growth in stored data in recent years, and what growth rates are forecast in the foreseeable future? How will this growth affect the overall data storage situation, including the additional costs that must be borne?
- To the extent that data storage is being currently under-managed or even mismanaged, how could the systematic disposal of useless data contribute to better overall storage management? What costs and benefits would be quantifiable as a result of this?

## Scheduling the Data in Computer Applications Managed by IT Departments for Retention

Our data retention consultants work with various specialists from information technology departments. We help schedule for retention the data residing in the computer applications managed by these departments. We typically execute a seven-step methodology, as follows:

1. Obtain the cooperation/participation of the IT department.
2. Collect summary data describing system applications.
3. Solicit data from applications developers via questionnaire.
4. Conduct interviews with applications developers and data owners/users.
5. Determine legal retention requirements.
6. Integrate the electronic retention periods into the enterprise retention schedules.
7. Finalize the retention periods and publish the schedules as organizational policy.

## Electronic Records Retention at the Desktop Level

PCs occupy the desktops of virtually every office worker throughout North America, and untold millions of electronic records are created on these machines every business day. What happens to these records during the course of their life cycle? Are they permitted to languish indefinitely on the hard drives of their host machines or on a network server until they are forgotten about? Or are they systematically destroyed under an established records retention program based on retention times commensurate with their value? At Zasio Enterprises, we develop policies and practices designed to bring electronic records retention to the desktops of our clients.

Without guidance concerning how to organize and label electronic documents in desktop computing environments, PC users are left to their own devices to organize the records they create into filing systems of their own invention. Frequently they will store documents using file names that are arbitrarily chosen, cryptically expressed, and known only to the user. Further, these documents are often organized in directory listings in a straight alphabetical sequence, without regard to categories that correspond to the records series appearing in the organization's records retention schedules.

In short, in the absence of formal records management and retention practices, individual office employees are free to manipulate files—create, store, modify, and delete and destroy records—at any time, entirely at their discretion, without rules or discipline, and without complying with any established records retention requirements.

## The Remedy: New Policies and Procedures for Desktop Retention

As one of our major strategies for bringing electronic records retention to the desktop, we typically develop for our clients a Users' Guide to Managing Electronic Records at the Desktop Level. Very few desktop users in the U.S. have this kind of guidance furnished to them, and we think it is critical if PC-based records are to be managed and retained in accordance with professional records management principles and practices. The contents of this type of procedure would typically consist of the following:

- Purpose of this Guide
- Filing Records Created by Desktop Applications
- Protecting Records Created by Desktop Applications
- General Retention Policies for Electronic Records
  - Retention of Records Created by Desktop Applications
  - Responsibilities for Disposing of Electronic Records
- Records Management Practices for E-mail
  - Saving E-mail
  - Deleting E-mail
  - Using AutoArchive to Delete Messages
  - Using AutoArchive to Save Messages

We customize this type of toolset based on the specific nature of our clients' desktop computing environment, and we perform user training and assist with "Desktop Purge Days" to bring about the "culture change" that is required to make electronic records retention a reality at the desktop level.



## The Retention of E-mail

According to some observers, the management and retention of e-mail is the biggest—and certainly the most pervasive—records management problem in the U.S. E-mail has been the fastest growing business technology of the past decade. E-mail has become so prevalent in today's organizational environment that it has become the de facto tool for enterprise-wide communication and collaboration. E-mail has actually replaced paper correspondence during the last few years. According to an article in *Computerworld*, in 1996 more e-mail was sent than postal mail in the U.S. for the first time.

Despite many efforts to upgrade the quality of management for enterprise e-mail systems, e-mail continues to be under-managed, if not mismanaged, in many organizations. From a records management perspective, the biggest single problem is that e-mail systems, which are essentially “electronic post offices,” are frequently utilized incorrectly as repositories for electronic archives. At Zasio Enterprises, we believe that the use of an e-mail system should be restricted to performing its central function of facilitating daily electronic communications. It should not become the de facto repository for long-term preservation of inactive messages, the value of many of which has long since expired. In other words, the post office should not be morphed into an archive.

E-mail users are typically left to manage large volumes of messages on their own, with little or no policy and procedural guidance and few management tools. How do employees know whether and under what circumstances e-mails require management as organizational records? And even if these judgments can be properly and consistently made by most or all e-mail users, the question then becomes how to apply records management principles to assure their proper management. Finally, what tools are required and/or available to do this?

Many organizations estimate that up to 70% of the e-mail data they currently receive does not possess long-term value and could be eliminated prior to archiving under a proper retention plan. The remaining 30% of the e-mail data contains information of continuing value—critical business information that is difficult to search, retrieve, and leverage for competitive advantage or litigation protection.

At Zasio Enterprises, we regard e-mail systems as tools to facilitate the daily communications, of a transitory nature, between employees and external parties relative to current business matters. We do not see e-mail as a platform for the long-term preservation of official, mission-critical or vital records. More specifically, we counsel our clients that their e-mail systems should *not* be authorized for purposes of the retention of stored records. Further, we recommend that they retain only such records as are needed to operate the business and comply with the law. All other records—including e-mail—should be systematically disposed of under established retention policies and practices. We develop policies and practices for e-mail retention based on these principles.

## The Retention of Web-based Content

At Zasio Enterprises, our philosophy is that intranets and Web sites contain “records” which should be managed utilizing similar principles as are employed for any other paper or electronic information—including retention or life cycle management practices. Thus, we work with our clients to schedule the content of Web sites and intranets for retention where required.

However, because intranets are developed utilizing several technology toolsets (such as Web document authoring tools, proprietary server technologies, specialized programming languages), most lack any real records management or retention functionality. More specifically, intranets have no inherent means of applying a retention policy to effect the scheduled disposal of the electronic documents residing in them. In most implementations, intranet documents are frequently updated, with new documents replacing the superseded ones. This destroys the provenance of the records as well the capability to preserve a revision history of the documents throughout their life cycle.

At Zasio Enterprises, we work with our clients to develop strategies for applying electronic records retention principles to Web content. Where such content possesses long-term value, we develop policies and practices for transferring original electronic records with their associated metadata/tags to an archival repository for ongoing preservation and management, as per approved retention policies.

*How do employees know whether and under what circumstances e-mails require management as organizational records?*

*If an organization creates a record in electronic format in, say, the year 2000, and this record will need to be digitally processed and read many years later, how, exactly, can this requirement be supported?*

## Long-term Data Retention

In working with our clients, we frequently hear the following comments: “Our in-house computer staff tells us that they can provide storage for 3 to 5 years ‘with certainty,’ for 7 to 10 years ‘with a little bit of luck,’ and if storage is required after 10 years, ‘there are no guarantees.’” In the same vein, Jeff Rothenberg, senior research scientist at the RAND Corporation, offers the somewhat whimsical observation that “digital documents last forever—or five years, whichever comes first.” What to do about this small but important—and growing—problem? We work with our clients to put in place the following eight “best practices” for long-term data retention.

### Best Practices:

1. Select data for preservation based on a conceptually sound appraisal methodology.
2. Select appropriate storage media.
3. Perform data migrations under established retention policies and practices.
4. Address metadata issues relevant to long-term data retention.
5. Preserve systems documentation.
6. Store media properly.
7. Perform proper media maintenance tasks.

## Policies and Procedures for Electronic Records Retention

To make enterprise records retention happen, Zasio Enterprises typically develops the following six sets of policies and practices—customized for every client we work with:

- Records Retention—General Corporate Policy
- Records Retention at the Desktop Level
- The Management and Retention of E-mail
- Software Applications: Records Retention Requirements
- The Retention of Web Content
- Long-term Data Retention

---

Want to know more about Zasio Enterprises can help your organization develop policies and procedures for electronic records retention?

Contact us at:

visit [www.zasio.com](http://www.zasio.com)

call **1.800.513.1000**

e-mail [sales@zasio.com](mailto:sales@zasio.com)

---

**1.800.513.1000**  
[sales@zasio.com](mailto:sales@zasio.com)

□ [zasio.com](http://zasio.com) | Managing Information The Way You Work

**Consulting Division**  
316 North Third Street  
Smithfield, NC 27577  
P: 1.919.989.1106  
F: 1.919.989.6453

**ZASIO**  
RECORDS & DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT EXPERTS

12601 W. Explorer Dr, Ste 250  
Boise, ID 83713