

# There Oughta Be a Law:

## Why Records Management Training Is Critical to Your Success

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Recently my neighbor taught his son to ride a new two-wheeler. From a distance, Sam looked like a proud expert on his "big boy bike." Closer, you could see that Sam's training wheels kept him upright, as did his dad's light hold on the bicycle seat. His helmet added insurance that he could avoid serious injury if he did take a spill.

Today Sam was on his bike – wobbly, but doing fine. His training wheels were off, and his dad was not holding on. Sam had perfected balancing, now confident to go faster and farther – thanks to his training wheels.

What do Sam and his training wheels have to do with records management for police departments?

Well, the principle is the same: good, solid training is the basis for confidence, efficiency, and success!

### **"Training Wheels and a Helmet" for Records Management**

Worldwide, records management is a high-priority focus for virtually all organizations of any size, and police departments – especially those in the US and Canada – are no exception. In the US, Federal, State and Local laws and regulations govern everything from the definition of a record to storage, disaster recovery, retention schedules, and access. As the paperwork of law enforcement has become more electronic based, filing practices have eroded. What was once a file properly stored has now become a file somewhere on a network drive.

Further complicating records management is that today, "records go beyond the common paper variety," said John Gibbons, a former New Jersey Police Chief now focused on records management. Gibbons continues, "non-paper records include surveillance tapes, crime-scene samples and photos, 9-1-1 recordings, videos from in-car cameras, etc."

"In addition, police records management has always been a challenge and is becoming more so. New technologies, such as improved DNA testing, illustrate why old cases can become reactivated. When this happens, recovering old files becomes crucial to the revived investigation," said IMERGE Consulting Founding Partner Jim Minihan. Minihan managed the project that received a Computerworld award for ground-breaking application of computer technology to law enforcement records management.

This article assumes that you have the "bicycle": a records management system is in place (or soon to be), all of the questions about definitions, retention schedules, access, etc., have been addressed, and a policy is firmly in place and adhered to.

So, whether as the result of your direct involvement beginning with defining requirements (the ideal) ... or your department's having been an "add on" to other municipal departments ... or your municipality's governing body having determined what system should run in your Police Department ... all you need are the training wheels and a helmet before you are off and rolling!

Here is some advice on how to help ensure your records management system runs efficiently and effectively.

Manage change. It is a truism that people resist change – even when the change is guaranteed to bring a positive outcome. “We have always done it this way” or “I don’t have the time!” cannot be accepted as support for the status quo. The risks are too high and the benefits are too substantial.

As Police Chief, you set the example: be sure your team understands why the move to a records management system (either an update to the current system, or your first system) is necessary, when it must begin, who and what will be involved and how each individual is expected to help. Understand and address their concerns directly, clarifying that your department’s migration to its new records management system is a foregone conclusion. If your department is relatively large (i.e., more than eight to 10 persons), you may find it helpful to have a “kick-off” meeting with your users, enabling everyone to hear the same message at the same time, and ask/hear others’ questions and concerns.

Manage expectations. In addition to your users’ expectations, you must manage those of your municipality’s governing body. They need to understand what will be accomplished by the new records management system, by whom, the expected positive outcomes, and the milestone dates. Discuss training: who will be trained, why, how, when, and how much it will cost.

In addition, offer frequent progress updates. Anticipating roadblocks and how to overcome them will help ensure meeting the aggressive, though realistic and do-able, dates and deadlines for which modules will go “live”. Begin with the easiest, most-assured victories so that you can build momentum off the established initial success.

Mandate training. Training is much easier to postpone than to schedule and implement: there seem to be other priorities demanding attention, and training can seem like just another thing to add to an already too-long list.

That is why it is necessary to mandate training. The mandate should include the clear goals and expected outcomes discussed above, and set the training date. Sooner rather than later is best.

Training – good, solid, effective training – is absolutely critical to the success of your records management system and to your department. The proper training will ultimately help your department avoid unnecessary risk, while helping your department run its most efficiently. Remember, records management system training is not an option.

## **Evaluate Your Training Options**

Training options run the gamut from online training done per individual, to in-person training. Let’s look at the pros and cons in relation to the unique needs of law enforcement agencies.

Online. Several professional organizations offer online training in records management. As an example one offers certificate programs in both electronic records management (ERM) and enterprise content management (ECM). Each certificate program has several modules leading to a certificate. Pro: convenient (modules are available on demand, 24/7). Con: high level and not specific to law enforcement; independent studies show lower retention rates than with live training; statistics show that only 20-30% of law enforcement professionals who sign up for online training actually take the training.

Live Workshops. Training is at either a public or a private venue. This training will also include certificate programs in ERM and ECM which are offered in live classroom settings. Within the private consulting firm arena only one consulting firm is licensed to teach the live Association for Information and Image Management certificate workshops in North America. Pro: interactive with other trainees and the trainer. Con: high level, and not specific law enforcement.

Vendor-led Training. When available, training may be offered to purchasers of the vendors' software/hardware. Pro: focus is on the product/service purchased; vendor knowledge of law enforcement needs. Cons: not as comprehensive as users require; can be difficult to schedule at your convenience; can be out of your budget.

Consultant Training. Many consultants offer records management systems training that runs the gamut from poor to excellent. But, nearly all consultants are in some way tied to a vendor or integrator, so the training ends up being less than what you need at more than you can afford.

### **Your Training Wheels and Helmet: IMERGE Consulting**

When you begin your search for an organization to conduct your training it is strongly suggest that you look for a vendor-neutral analyst and consulting firm focusing on ERM, ECM, business process improvement, and compliance advisory services. This type of firm will help your department improve ROI (return on investment), clearly define requirements and business case, evaluate software, write requirements definitions, and deploy systems faster. Lastly you should look toward that consulting firm that does NOT sell hardware, software or system and who has a solid reputation and hopefully office in locations near your community.

Additionally the consulting (training) firm must have substantial experience working and active connections with all levels of government, including law enforcement departments

When you contract with either a person or corporation – whether to write requirements definitions, evaluate software, or conduct records management training -- you must get exactly what you need, when you need it, where you want it, and at a rate you can afford.

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