

ECM and Compliance: Ten Tips to Help You Get it Right the First Time

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Laws have established order and managed societal expectations since the earliest written decrees nearly 4,000 years ago. At that time, Babylonian King Hammurabi inscribed the first written statutes on stone tablets—the Code of Hammurabi—as ordered by the god, Shamash. The stones were displayed publicly, communicating rules with the expectation people would comply. Although many couldn't read, ignorance of the law was no excuse for defiance. Disobedience often resulted in retaliation, disfigurement, or even death.

Although today's legislation is created, administered, and monitored by governments rather than divine inspiration, non-compliance remains in the spotlight. Mandates have become complicated. Enforcement is increasingly common. Penalties for non-observance are rising, resulting in hefty fines, corporate ruin, and even imprisonment. Ignorance of the law is still no excuse. Non-observance risks a company's reputation and financial health—and sometimes even its survival.

Whether you're struggling with HIPAA, Sarbanes-Oxley, the Patriot Act, Freedom of Information Act, or another regulation governing your files, compliance can be challenging. If you're looking for a magic bullet to make your staff comply, you won't find it. However, if you're searching for a way to enforce and monitor your information governance policies, enterprise content management (ECM) software will save you time, resources, and headaches.

Ten Tips for Dealing with Compliance

1. Understand your governance responsibilities and corporate risks.

Make sure staff know and understand regulations affecting the files they utilize and business processes related to those documents. Regulations change constantly. Modifications should be conveyed to staff in writing and reflected in your ECM solution's security settings.

2. Study current information governance policies & evaluate deficiencies.

Evaluate procedures regularly to ensure they meet changing federal and state requirements. A solid ECM system, in tandem with business process management (BPM) tools, adapts quickly to regulatory changes. This saves you time and money.

3. Improve current policies and compliance strategies.

Information governance policies are not a one time project. Laws change. Organizations hire new leaders with different regulatory interpretations. Internal policies and hierarchies change. Responsibilities are redefined. Amendments must be reflected in your governance policy.

4. Communicate policies to staff regularly and document your efforts.

Make sure your plan specifies the types of changes requiring communication, in what timeframe, and other pertinent details. Inform staff of policy

changes regularly so no one can claim innocence if a security breach or other infringement occurs. Track all changes and communiqués. They may be needed in the future to demonstrate intent to comply.

5. Index your documents, keeping compliance & retention needs in mind.

Are your document retention rules triggered by specific data? Catalog the information to automate future data migration, retention, and destruction. Is your industry fraught with litigation? Index documents using keywords that will help you find files quickly in a mandatory search. A digital repository is a life saver in audits and litigation, but it's most effective when the right information is used to catalog files.

6. Limit document access appropriately.

ECM systems let you decide who can access, view, sign, act upon, or distribute documents. A flexible system lets users perform only the functions pertaining to their roles—no less, and no more. Integrated ECM e-mail system scan determine which files can be e-mailed, electronically faxed, or otherwise shared. Document your security strategy in case you are questioned.

7. Establish business processing rules to facilitate company compliance.

ECM solutions with robust BPM tools let you specify the hierarchy of actions related to each document as it travels through your organizational processes. Proper configuration ensures consistent data collection, fair client treatment, and enforcement of organizational hierarchies and work priorities.

8. Track file interaction.

Another benefit of ECM is the ability to monitor business transactions on the fly. Digital audit trails of all business activity make it easy to confirm corporate policies are followed. Inspections and auditing become significantly easier with digital records.

9. Verify compliance queries return the type of data you need.

Make sure you query your ECM system periodically to ensure auditors will get the information they need should a subpoena occur. It's easier to adjust indexing schemes now rather than later.

10. Use enterprise search in tandem with keyword search to return targeted data in response to queries.

Audits are time consuming and costly. ECM solutions with keyword search that incorporates full-text search capabilities targets information you need in order to answer inquiries quickly. Well, the fear of non-compliance can be history.

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