Skills for Building Success in the
Electronic Business Environment

Today's electronic business environment demands that records and information professionals expand their skills but also provides the opportunity for them to have more influence on an organization's success.

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A corporation takes a routine human resource process online using new interactive voice response (IVR) technology to execute changes to the employees' benefits plan, allowing the company to save millions annually.

A large technology company starts to advertise its business services in a virtual world and develops policy to make sure the good, old fashioned business rules are being satisfied in this new world.

A technology professional wants to use wiki instead of blog technology to keep customers apprised of product developments.

Back-up tapes are routinely accessed to retrieve lost documents for employees, but lawyers worry they will be preempted from arguing that discovery should not have to be undertaken on the tapes because the data on them is "inaccessible" under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP).

Those who do not know what "IVR" is, cannot differentiate a wiki from a blog, have never heard of Internet-based virtual world video game Second Life®, or do not know what the FRCP are or about the many changes made to them in 2006 may not be tooled for today's record and information management (RIM) problems.

As the business world has gone electronic, top to bottom, the role of RIM professionals has had to change in major ways. Long gone are the days when their focus was the records inventory, offsite storage, and retrieval of paper records.
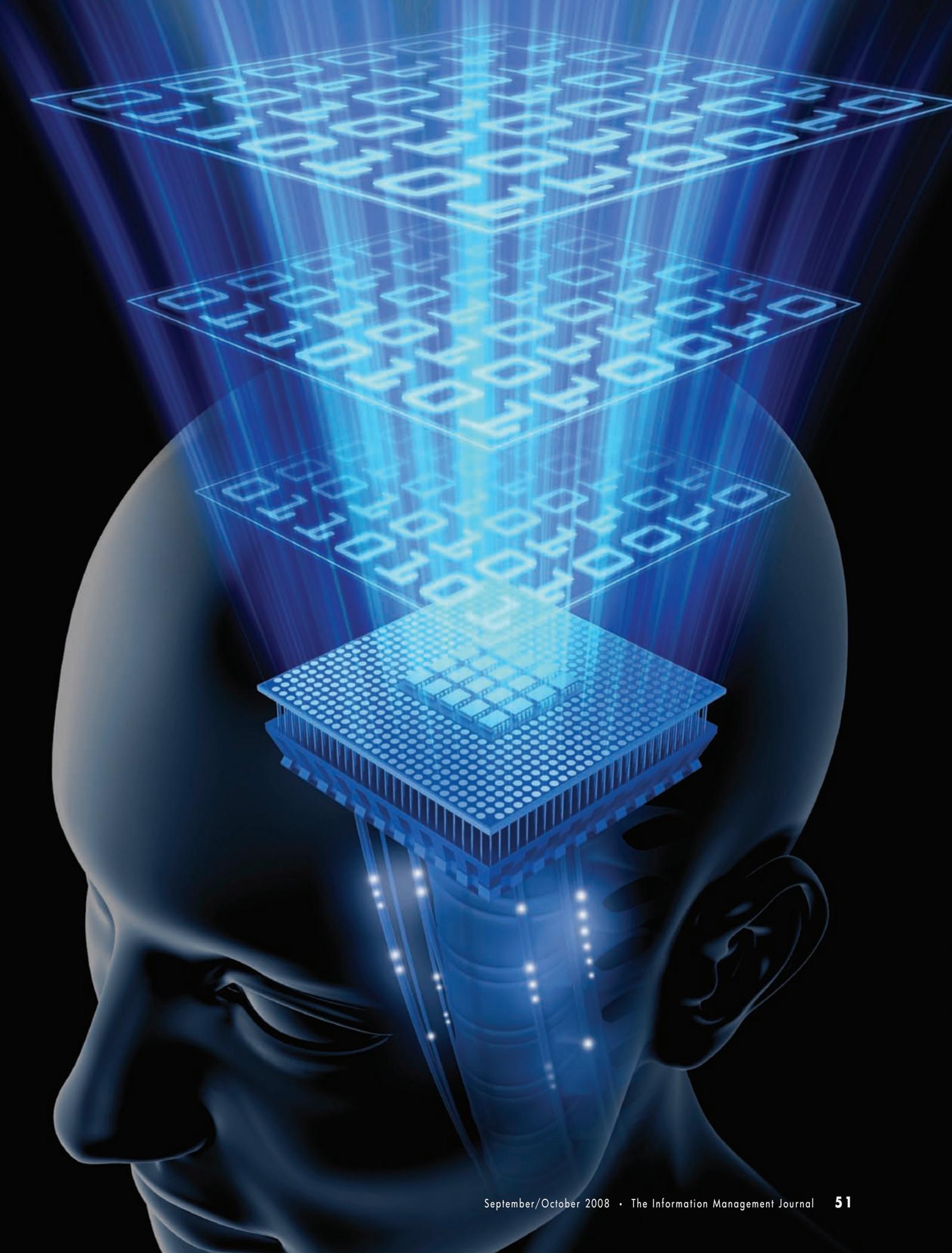
At the Core
This article

▶ Lists the essential skills successful RIM professionals must have

▶ Describes the value RIM professionals bring to organizations

▶ Tells how RIM professionals can have more organization-wide influence

RIM professionals must now manage complex, multi-disciplinary information issues with skills that may have been developed initially in the typewriter generation.

The Impact of the Electronic World on the RIM Environment

The amount of digital information to be managed is truly staggering. According to a March 2008 IDC white paper called *The Diverse and Exploding Digital Universe*, the size of the digital universe in 2007 was 281 exabytes (1 exabyte = 1 billion gigabytes), and it is estimated the size of the digital universe by 2011 will be *10 times* that figure. In *The Sedona Principles: Best Practices Recommendations and Principles for Addressing Electronic Document Production*, The Sedona Conference Working Group notes that compound-

ing the management complexities is the fact that most information is being created in electronic form.

Executives now have a greater responsibility than ever before – they are now accountable for ensuring that their organizations' information assets are properly managed. As the disintegration of the Arthur Andersen accounting firm demonstrated, organizations and their executive management face severe consequences from their employees' misdeeds – even their mistakes – whether failing to protect private information, retain the right records, or produce documents requested in litigation. The cost of noncompliance is not measured only in dollars; the reputation of the enterprise itself is at stake.

As gatekeepers to their organizations' information assets, RIM professionals have a vital role to play in the management of these assets. Records management is now a component of the organization's strategic direction. RIM professionals must drive the development of policies and procedures that support both the employees who must implement the strategies and the technologies that facilitate them.

This new role is broader than merely the retention of records. RIM professionals must, in fact, focus on the entire lifecycle of information. This approach recognizes that the value of an information asset changes over time as it is used by different organizational units for different purposes. In addition, it requires that issues such as privacy and security be addressed.

The sheer volume of information an organization must manage also places increasing importance upon appropriate management of *non-records*, which is information that has no long-term business, statutory, or regulatory value. RIM professionals must raise awareness of the costs that non-records can impose on the company, including the costs of unearthing information for business purposes or to respond to regulatory inquiry or litigation.

The major shift in the business and technical landscape means that RIM professionals have to manage more business content that does not broadcast its "recordness" in environments where employees or technology professionals have exclusive province over information. They must deal with a whole host of new content and the various media on which it is stored in order to properly manage these information assets throughout their entire lifecycle.

The Value RIM Professionals Bring to the Organization

The right RIM professional can add to the enterprise's bottom line in concrete ways, helping organizations:

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Reduce risk of non-compliance. Organizations are able to more accurately respond to regulatory and litigation requests when they are able to locate the appropriate information assets. In addition, because the information is more accessible, and there are fewer non-records to sift through, responses to such requests are timelier and less expensive.

Improve employee productivity. Productivity is enhanced because employees are able to locate information more readily, and they are not required to manage as much information.

Manage all information regardless of media. The focus of the traditional records manager was on paper. The new RIM professional is more flexible and integrates paper into a comprehensive RIM design that seamlessly manages information independent of the media on which it is stored.

Integrate RIM into employees' duties. Bringing the management of electronic records under the umbrella of records management ensures a more systematic, measured approach as opposed to the scattershot, haphazard result that occurs when employees manage their own electronic records.

Reduce e-discovery costs. Attorneys do not have to "reinvent the wheel" each time they must respond to a discovery request. Relevant information is more easily located, and attorneys have a greater assurance that it has been preserved because promulgation of a legal hold policy is a key component of a comprehensive RIM policy.

Reduce IT costs. Although an initial investment in archiving technology may be advisable, in the long run, implementation of an appropriate retention schedule and policies results in reduced storage and associated management costs. Reduced volume of information also increases the likelihood of a successful system recovery (as well as a quicker recovery) should a disaster strike (e.g., a system crash).

Leverage corporate knowledge. Proper implementation of a RIM methodology involves identification of all sources of

electronic (as well as paper) data in the enterprise along with a plan for managing those sources. Today's RIM professional advocates the creation of a centralized "source map" that provides guidance to employees seeking to identify repositories of corporate knowledge to help them solve problems.

Skills Needed for Successful RIM Professionals

Obviously, RIM professionals must be skilled in the RIM discipline. However, to excel in the current business climate, they also should hone the following skills:

Collaborative Skills. The RIM professional must be able to work with other key areas of the company, including:

- **Business units** – By gaining a greater understanding of the objectives of the various business units within the organization, RIM professionals can better comprehend the types of information the various units need to keep and for how long to achieve those objectives. Speaking the language of the business units can also advance RIM objectives; for example, demonstrating how compliance with retention schedules in the e-mail environment can improve performance and reduce costs through

The New RIM Professional in the Real World

Jeffrey Wills and George Goldsmith of Forest Laboratories and Maureen Bazan of Northeast Utilities System (NUS) provided their perspectives on the changing and evolving role of the new-era records and information management (RIM) professional. Bazan is records program manager for NUS and reports to the IT organization. Wills is senior manager for the Informatics Enterprise Content Management department for Forest, while Goldsmith is director of that department. All three have observed the changing role of the RIM professional in their organizations.

Is More Collaborative

Bazan observed that the position has evolved from management of physical records to a more technical position that interacts more with the legal department and the business units. She commented on the many benefits realized as a result of technology enhancements. Goldsmith stated that the increased emphasis on managing electronic records is causing a convergence between the RIM and IT management functions. Focusing on establishing a culture of accountability for creating and managing company information is important, and this requires strategic alignment and understanding of business operations and objectives, policies, and procedures as a foundation before considering technology.

Has More Technological, Legal Savvy

Wills noted that today's RIM professional needs to contend with the new varieties of information introduced by technological improvements – such as instant messaging, wikis, blogs, and unified messaging. These technologies often have unintended consequences and introduce many nuances into the management and retention of information. The new-era RIM professional must be able to both create and leverage enterprise knowledge.

Technical knowledge, business knowledge, and understanding legal concepts are critical for new-era RIM professionals to do their jobs, said Wills. The RIM professional is the conduit among all of these groups. Goldsmith added that understanding the business and its core information needs is important. The ability to think strategically is also desirable – there is a lot of information, and the RIM professional needs to know what information is essential to the organization, where it is managed, and who is responsible for managing it. In addition to these characteristics, Bazan emphasized the importance of change management.

The main business objectives of the new-era RIM professional, outside of compliance with the 2006 changes to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, involve business efficiency, according to Bazan. The modern RIM professional recognizes that the organization is burdened with extraneous information, which only

reduction in overall message volumes.

- **Legal department** – RIM professionals can have a major role in translating legal requirements into on-the-ground solutions. If a legal requirement mandates that an individual's private information be encrypted, RIM professionals may need to answer such questions as which records, or parts of records, are affected by the legislation. The parts of the information that must be encrypted have to be addressed. The RIM professional can play a vital role in helping meet electronic discovery challenges by identifying information responsive to electronic discovery requests.

- **IT department** – As the IT department considers new technology, RIM professionals can raise awareness of RIM issues that, if not addressed, could have serious consequences. For example, an IT policy may address synchronization of mobile devices (e.g., personal digital assistants, Blackberries) with the corporate e-mail server. RIM professionals can raise the issue of whether the instant messages sent using those same devices are being stored anywhere in the event any such communications are disputed.

adds cost and inhibits efficiency. Goldsmith agreed, noting that better management of information actually improves legal compliance and business efficiency. Too much information can be a burden to the company and the legal process. Appropriate remediation of unneeded information is healthy for the employee and the company. Wills highlighted the role of technology and the corporate retention schedule in finding and removing duplicate information from company data stores, which leads to improved business efficiency.

Has More Strategic, Budgetary Influence

All three highlighted the strategic role of today's RIM professional. Goldsmith observed that the implementation of a modern RIM program is a complicated process of change for the organization requiring a seamless governance, policy, and procedural framework that aligns the legal, business, and technology functions while supporting legal requirements and business objectives for the company. He saw the ability to fundamentally change how the organization manages and leverages information. Bazan noted that one of the initial results of the NUS RIM program was a reduction in the rate of increase of storage requirements over time. In addition, a new search tool is greatly enhancing the legal department's ability to find documents relevant to legal matters.

As a result of these activities, executives in both organizations are realizing and appreciating the value of the RIM program. The most concrete expression of this appreciation is reflected in the budget – the RIM programs in both companies received substantial funding increases. Bazan remarked upon the savings benefits on the IT side and its enhancement of e-discovery. The RIM program was also critical to the facilitation of the creation of a knowledge base at NUS. The value of the RIM program at NUS outside of the traditional records management environment was further established when Bazan met with all 18 of the company's vice presidents to get their buy-in for the program. This process established regular communication channels throughout the enterprise.

The Forest RIM program bore similar results. Communication channels were established with 60-plus departmental record champions throughout the organization, and the RIM group was the central governance body for facilitation and resolution of technological challenges where a traditional records management group might have been shunted aside.

Effects Organization-Wide Change

The new RIM program has enabled the RIM groups in both organizations to collaborate successfully with other areas of their respective companies. At NUS, although the main objective was compliance, noticeable business process improvements have been realized. The Forest RIM team's engagement of the legal, human resource, corporate security, IT, and quality and compliance departments as a strategic oversight team brought the initiative to a different level. The diversity of opinions at the table substantially increased the overall quality of the decisions made.

All three executives stressed the importance of the change management process in driving the success of the RIM program. Bazan described the impact as "huge." The program resulted in fundamental changes in the ways employees think about their work. Wills remarked on the importance of leveraging the company's corporate communications and training areas to ensure that the employees understand all concepts of the program. Goldsmith emphasized the importance of identifying existing initiatives within the company that can benefit from the information, business, and legal insights offered by the RIM program.

Although both organizations were still working on appropriate company-wide metrics, some early successes were observed. Bazan noted that the purchasing department was happy with the new processes, while Goldsmith indicated that some initial benchmark metrics were captured during Forest's initial gap assessment and that these would be revisited as the program progressed.

Even "old" technology may have new RIM implications. Is the IT department aware that back-up tape recycling might need to be interrupted if the information on the tapes is subject to a duty to preserve information relevant to a lawsuit?

Leadership, Verbal, and Interpersonal Skills. A comprehensive RIM initiative will touch all employees. RIM professionals must be change agents. Policies associated with new archiving technology can be more critical than the technology itself. New-era RIM professionals must demonstrate to top management the need for policy development to support the technology. In addition, they have to be able to communicate to employees the importance of properly classifying their e-mail messages into the appropriate retention category. Anyone from a customer service representative up to the president of the organization might question the use of their valuable time for such an exercise, so the ability to relate effectively at different levels could make or break the project. Thus, RIM professionals might need to persuade and lead somewhat different constituencies to see the benefits the organization will enjoy.

Conceptualization Skills. RIM professionals should be able to understand the key components necessary to achieve compliance with applicable policies and procedures. Specifically, understanding how systems and applications work is a critical skill. How do the various "fuzzy" search methodologies built into enterprise search tools work? Is one methodology more suited than another to the organization's business needs? If the technology is used to retrieve documents for an electronic discovery request, can the advantages and limitations of the technology be communicated to legal counsel? To what extent does an archiving application support the retention schedule? RIM professionals must determine whether the systems can support the

RIM policy, be able to articulate why or why not, and, if not, be able to understand how the policy can adapt to the systems or vice versa.

Program and Project Management Skills. Project management is the means by which the enterprise will reach the desired RIM environment, and in many cases RIM professionals will be required to participate in or lead several projects at once. Within these projects, they may need to manage consultants, vendors, and other staff to drive towards success. Successful project management involves many of the other skills listed here –

> RIM professionals should be able to assist in identifying the risks faced by the organization from a RIM perspective, evaluating the potential damage posed by those risks and addressing these potentials in a systematic manner.

leadership, problem solving, and the ability to manage change. Project management has been described as a field that requires competencies in the areas of technology, business, and behavior, but technical expertise is not as critical. When asked for a *Computer World* article on the topic to choose between two of the three areas, one CIO stated he would prefer a project manager without a technical background because that individual would be more likely to deliver a solution that meets the business needs of the enterprise.

Risk Management Skills. RIM professionals should be able to assist in identifying the risks faced by the organization from a RIM perspective, evaluating the potential damage posed by those risks, and addressing these potentials in a systematic manner. Risks must be assessed and considered in a wide variety of areas. How effectively are the organization's records protected in its disaster recovery plans? How vulnerable are records to security threats? Is the organization, for example, at risk for non-compliance with applicable privacy regulations such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act? A key means for exposing risks is the audit and monitoring process. Astute RIM professionals will enlist the company's internal auditor to assist them in determining the enterprise's risk exposure from the RIM perspective.

Cultural and Change Management Skills. The effective implementation of a RIM policy requires an understanding of the company's culture and how the policy will affect the culture. For example, the discipline required of employees in the record retention process can be challenging in an informal environment. Understanding the methodologies involved in change management can facilitate the effective adoption of a RIM policy. The Harvard Business School's *Managing Change and Transition* describes a seven-step, systematic approach to change management, addresses social and human fac-

tors, and identifies strategies to help reduce stress and anxiety among employees faced with change.

Problem-Solving Skills. Problems may arise from unexpected sources during the implementation of a RIM project. RIM professionals need to be flexible enough to adapt to the unforeseen issues that arise and formulate solutions. Furthermore, RIM professionals must be able to meet obstacles presented by laws, regulations, discovery requests, and other such roadblocks and incorporate best practices to find optimal solutions. These solutions may involve the participation of other departments within the enterprise, such as IT, legal, or the business units.

Challenging Environment Provides a Bright Future

RIM professionals have never had such a potentially bright future to have a positive impact on their organizations. However, there is so much more to do that requires strong business, technical and governance, risk, and compliance skills. The strategic importance of RIM cannot be overstated. Information mismanagement has taken down companies, eviscerated careers, and cost countless companies millions. Increas-ingly RIM professionals are the ones that stand between failure and success. ◗◖

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