

CASE STUDY

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY SIMPLIFIES EMAIL MANAGEMENT

Decisiv Categorization Automates Email Retention and Facilitates Records Management Compliance

ABOUT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY (EERE)

The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) invests in clean energy technologies that strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and reduce dependence on foreign oil. By partnering with industry, state and local governments, universities, and manufacturers, EERE plays a critical role in improving energy efficiency practices and increasing their adoption by American consumers, industry, and governments.

THE CHALLENGE

Like all federal agencies, the Department of Energy Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) must follow stringent mandates for record keeping. And with the volume of electronic data—particularly email—increasing dramatically, maintaining compliance became a daunting task. EERE realized a few years back that traditional “print and file” policies had become an inadequate means of records management. These traditional policies did not account for multiple media types or the ever increasing volumes, which EERE needed to categorize and place into a records management system. In addition, EERE was relying on employees or contractors to decide which data to preserve and where to file it—a process that was fraught with inaccuracy and limited participation. Without an effective way to organize the increasing volume of information, EERE was unable to enforce any governance policies for fear of deleting permanent records.

Steve Von Vital, the CIO at EERE recognized the importance of electronic records management, and was an early proponent of using technology to automate the process. Even before a Presidential Memorandum launched an effort to reform the executive branch’s records management policies and practices in November 2011, EERE had already started working on its records management solution. The Memorandum noted a greater reliance on electronic communication and systems that have radically increased the volume and diversity of information the agencies must manage. It stated that technology can make these records less burdensome to manage and easier to use and share. The Memorandum also included a Records Management Directive to “create a government-wide records management framework that is more efficient and cost-effective.” The Directive called for a transition “from paper-based records management to electronic records management where feasible.”

Initial efforts by EERE focused on the user taking proactive steps to declare an email a record with the email client. While this technically worked it depended heavily on user effort and did not yield the desired results in spite of constant

DECISIV CATEGORIZATION PROVIDES TIME, SPACE, AND COST-SAVING EMAIL MANAGEMENT:

- Allows large volumes of newly created electronic records to be classified daily
- Ensures that email-based information is properly tagged and categorized with no impact on busy professionals
- Integrates with nearly any repository including SharePoint and Documentum
- Proactively reduces the costs and risks associated with eDiscovery and E-FOIA by reducing the amount of information being stored
- Offers high categorization accuracy through machine learning
- Eases ongoing administration with built-in auditing and iterative machine learning.

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incremental efforts to make it easy for the user. During the period when the agency was evaluating document management solutions, they discovered Recommind offered an approach to auto-categorization that could help with automating their efforts and relieving the user of the burden of having to manually declare records.

THE SOLUTION

In 2010, EERE began working with Recommind to implement a multi-faceted electronic records management system with an initial focus on email. The solution includes Microsoft® SharePoint® 2010 as the content management platform and Recommind Decisiv Categorization for auto-categorization of data. The solution also incorporated Recommind Decisiv™ Search, which enabled comprehensive search capability across EERE's network including websites.

In the implementation, Decisiv Categorization actively crawls and indexes content and metadata from emails, tagging them by categories that match the EERE General Records Schedule. The Decisiv software automatically categorizes new documents based on a training set using positive and negative sample documents. The training sets are augmented with rules based categorization to improve accuracy.

Emails are routed to the categorization engine via the Microsoft Exchange Journal. The Journal allows an agency to get a copy of every email sent to a mailbox for compliance purposes. After an email is categorized, that information is published to SharePoint and it is moved to the appropriate library in the SharePoint Records Center. Unlike with previous manual efforts, the system ensures that a copy of every email is handled appropriately, reducing information risk without placing burden on employees. And because the EERE organizes data before it enters SharePoint, the information is far more usable and actionable across the agency for issues like E-FOIA (Electronic Freedom of Information Act) requests or eDiscovery.

Through the categorization process, the system automatically identifies duplicate email so that when more than one person is copied on an email, just one copy is retained—significantly reducing storage requirements. The Decisiv software also includes a built-in auditing feature, which ensures quality control and makes the categorization process auditable and defensible.

In order to maintain categorization accuracy, EERE monitors accuracy by category and when necessary provides additional training data for the system to iteratively learn from as content evolves over time. Decisiv's built-in iterative machine-learning methodology allows EERE to maintain the precision of auto-categorization with minimal administrative overhead.

THE RESULTS

Though it's being implemented in phases, EERE's electronic records management system has already proven to be an improvement over previous programs. Where the agency formerly relied on employees to retain relevant data, the automated Decisiv Categorization system now copies, organizes, and files a large volume of emails per day into the correct SharePoint library. The system handles email for 1,000 EERE employees, without requiring their time and effort.

DECISIV CATEGORIZATION HELPS THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY:

- Categorize email with 87% accuracy
- Automate the process of finding and tagging relevant information without disrupting employees or relying on them to preserve documents
- Dramatically improve the speed, accuracy and cost-effectiveness of records management
- Improve the value and usefulness of SharePoint implementations and upgrades by enabling more accurate and comprehensive search results
- Drive compliance with federal electronic records management mandates
- Simplify information retrieval for eDiscovery, Freedom of Information Act requests, or congressional investigations via powerful conceptual search capability

The initial goal of the automated records retention program was a 70% accuracy rate. After 3 months in production, the program exceeded that goal with an 87% accuracy rate.

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On average, the system auto-categorizes EERE's email with 87% accuracy. Of the remaining 13%, only 7% are relevant records that need to be manually processed by exception. In addition to improving the speed and precision of email preservation, the system helps EERE quickly identify non-essential records that can be deleted, reducing storage costs and improving governance of data that drives efficiency. Because the system automatically tags and files emails appropriately, EERE is able to facilitate records management without requiring a large staff; the agency currently has one federal records manager and two contract-based analysts.

The solution has enabled EERE to adhere with the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA's) General Records Schedules (GRS) for record retention requirements. An early adopter of electronic records management, EERE is a leader among Federal agencies—and one of the few using an automated solution to email management.

Building on the success of the Decisiv Categorization and Search solution thus far, EERE plans to add more content to its records management system, including migrating data from local drives and unstructured file shares, as well as rolling the email categorization system out to field offices. They will also begin addressing the paper records that the agency currently stores, a process that will require EERE to scan documents before categorizing and filing them in SharePoint.

ABOUT RECOMMIND

Recommind is the leader in predictive information management and analysis software, delivering search-powered business applications that transform the way enterprises, government entities and law firms conduct eDiscovery, enterprise search, and information governance.

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