



Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services
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Electronic Records Management Systems Versus Document Management Systems

Electronic records management systems (ERM) and document management systems (DM) are two types of computer systems that are used to manage information. People are often confused about the differences between the two systems. This is no surprise. Many software vendors sell products that can do both ERM and DM. So, how do you tell the difference?

Electronic Records Management (ERM) Systems

ERM systems were first developed to manage paper files. They could also manage other physical records, such as microfilm and photographs. ERM systems help you perform the following tasks:

- Opening, closing and registering files, folders, dockets, and individual documents.
- Tracking the location of files.
- Charging files out to users.
- Classifying records.
- Indexing records.
- Searching for records using keywords and other search criteria.
- Managing the active and semi-active retention of the records.
- Managing the disposal of records.
- Managing access to and security of records.
- Newer versions of ERM systems can capture and manage finished electronic records.

ERM systems are an important tool for managing information. They streamline many of the most time-consuming records management tasks. Using an ERM system makes it easier to search for records, transfer them to the records centre, and dispose of them.

Document Management (DM) Systems

ERM systems were created to make it easier to manage paper records. In contrast, DM systems were created to make it easier to use electronic records. DM systems are designed to keep track of changes to electronic records, share them, and route them to different people.

DM systems integrate with most software packages that you use to create electronic records. Typically, when you try to send an e-mail message or save an electronic record, the DM system will prompt you to fill out a profile form. The electronic record is saved into the DM system and stored on a DM server. You must go through the DM system to retrieve the record.

DM systems have several strengths, including:

- Capturing electronic records at the point of creation.
- Full text searching of documents.
- Tracking of different versions of the same document.
- Monitoring who has viewed a document.
- Capturing document images from a scanner.
- Passing documents along a workflow. This is useful where a document must be passed through several people for editing, response, review, or approval.

Early DM systems did not manage records. They had limited ability to classify records and they could not apply retention and disposition schedules.

Imaging Systems

Imaging systems also developed separately from ERM and DM. The original purpose of these systems was to capture and organize digital images created by scanning paper records.

Convergence

The past decade has seen the ERM, DM, and imaging markets come together. Many systems that originated as ERM, DM, or imaging systems now perform tasks associated with all three types of systems.

In some cases, a single software package can be purchased to perform all functions. In other cases, separate DM and ERM systems can be integrated so that the DM system handles electronic records during their active stage, while the ERM system manages the life cycle of the records once they have closed and the retention period has been triggered.

DM, RM, and the GNWT

Many GNWT departments and agencies use an electronic records management system called **iRIMS** (integrated Records and Information Management System).¹ It is used to track files and boxes. iRIMS can also be used to manage electronic records that are no longer active. iRIMS is administered by Public Works and Services.

The GNWT is looking at setting a software standard for document management systems. DM systems are being used in a couple of GNWT departments to look after specific groups of records. Departments that are considering purchasing a document management system should contact both Records Management and the Technology Services Centre to make sure that the system is compatible with existing systems.

¹ IRIMS' manufacturer has recently renamed it as **Livelihood Records Server**. The GNWT continues to call it iRIMS.

For more information, contact your department's records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446