

RECORDS MATTER



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When Law Firms Merge

When law firms merge, it is essential they have infrastructure in place to safeguard client information. While there are many facets regarding client information that must be addressed, this article will focus primarily on ways to effectively merge firms' records departments.

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Going Green With Your Records Program

In today's workplace there is an increase in demand for sustainable products, services and technologies that will inflict minimal or no harm on the environment. Your firm's records management (RM) practices and choice of equipment and supplies can profoundly affect your firm's overall impact.

But how environmentally friendly is your firm's RM program? In this article you will find an assessment tool to help put your firm on the path to a more environmentally friendly management of information assets.

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When Law Firms Merge – Merging Records Departments

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Total Document Solutions, Inc. (“TDS”) has extensive knowledge and experience merging records departments in law firms. Thirty-five of the top 100 metro area firms have worked with TDS during mergers, acquisitions, and moves integrating records departments with 30,000 records to over 1 million.

With the legal industry looking to control costs and sustain profits, more and more firms have merged or are looking to merge. When this occurs, firms need to quickly prepare to protect their client information. Clients demand to work with firms who can be responsive, so it is critical to partner with a company such as TDS to ensure exceptional client service is not compromised before, during, or after any merger.

TDS provides professional people to work closely with firm management, IT departments, and conflicts departments to ensure a smooth integration of records. From project management of the file merger to complete outsourcing of the newly formed records operations, TDS provides the expertise to ensure the following is accomplished on each engagement:

1. Initiate projects to clean up data and close inactive matters. Prior to the merger and transfer of records, inactive files are purged. This allows for proper space planning and file management.
2. Establish protocols for departing attorneys to ensure that documents leaving the firm are limited to what has been authorized by the firm and the client. The records department and IT dept work closely with law firm management to guarantee proper documentation is received before any client files are released to any departing attorneys.
3. After the firm receives a copy of the client’s transfer letter, the conflicts department opens the approved client/matters in the system. The client letter notifies the previous firm to index and send all approved records and files to the attorney’s new firm.
4. Once the files have been transferred, the records department receives the boxes of files and verifies all the indexes for each box are accurate. A signed copy of the index can be returned to the attorney’s previous firm if requested. This process is performed as a safeguard to ensure all listed material was received as stated on the index.
5. Files are entered into the RM system and bar-coded for tracking purposes. In some cases, it is necessary to convert all of the new files into uniform media types. This process can include transferring documents or file contents into new folders and relabeling them. This uniformity gives a firm the ability to properly track and store the physical client files so the attorney can receive them at a moment’s notice during and after the merger. It might also be important to look at off-site storage if different vendors are under contract.
6. Space Planning - Recommendations are made as to how files should be integrated and stored on-site; in central file areas or in cabinets throughout the firm. Once that has been decided, records personnel complete an inventory and barcode scan all files to their exact location in the newly merged firm and update the RM system accordingly. Reports are generated and delivered to the attorneys so each attorney in the newly merged firm has a complete index of their records.

Going Green with Your Records Program

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Today's businesses operate in a world that places increasing importance on protecting the environment. This growing environmental emphasis applies not only on the front lines of the natural resource, manufacturing and transportation sectors, but also in fields as diverse as law, consulting, and information technology.

In fact, any business which consumes resources or occupies physical space has an environmental footprint. The good news is that there are direct business benefits associated with minimizing that footprint. Your firm can decrease the risk of non-compliance with emerging regulatory requirements in the area of environmental protection.

As a field dedicated to managing large physical and intellectual business resources, RM can play a key role in helping your firm realize these benefits. This assessment looks at three areas:

- **Life Cycle Practices**
- **Filing Equipment and Supplies**
- **Information Management Services**

Life Cycle Practices

By imposing life cycle controls on the physical resources that go into creating, storing and distributing record media, RM is very much an exercise in natural resource management. An effective recycling program ensures raw materials are put to a more productive use instead of occupying valuable office space (*including land and maintenance resources*). The better we manage our records, the better we protect. Here are some questions your firm can ask to assess the impact of your firm's program:

Does your firm...

1. Have a policy authorizing or requiring employees to dispose of non-record material when it is no longer useful?
2. Conduct clean-up days to identify and purge non-record material that is no longer useful?
3. Have a records retention schedule which authorizes disposal of different categories of records, subject to the expiry of standard time periods?
4. Implement records retention schedules by regularly identifying and disposing of records whose retention periods have lapsed?
5. Minimize duplicate copies and control document versions?
6. Take steps to encourage personnel to create and retain records in electronic format and actively discourage them from creating paper copies?
7. Implement an electronic document management system that allows you to replace multiple paper copies with one version-controlled electronic document?
8. Use electronic imaging and transmission options as an alternative to physically transporting paper documents across different geographic locations?

Going Green with Your Records Program *(continued)*

Filing Equipment and Supplies

To further minimize the impact of records storage, firms should give careful consideration to the composition and design of the file cabinets, shelving units, folders and other enclosures that support file management activities on a day to day basis. Here are some questions your firm can ask to assess the impact of your firm's filing equipment and supplies.

Does your firm...

1. Maximize the records storage potential of available floor space?
2. Use file folders, pockets, label designs and other filing supplies maximizing the number of visible filing rows available in a given shelf or cabinet?
3. Utilize file folders and/or pockets that can be expanded as needed to accommodate growth within a file?
4. Have to regularly replace your organization's filing supplies due to wear and tear or are they reused after contents have been transferred or disposed of?
5. Recycle folders and other paper materials once they are no longer needed?
6. Use supplies that contain non-paper materials (e.g. Mylar) and are those materials biodegradable?

Information Management Services

Few offices operate in a vacuum where their environmental impact is determined solely by their own direct practices. In the RM world, such services may include offsite or nearsite storage of physical records, document disposal (e.g. *shredding*), and computing equipment leasing. Here are some questions your firm can ask to assess the impact of your firm's service vendors.

Does your vendor...

1. Use storage equipment which maximizes the storage potential of warehouse floor space and associated land resources?
2. Follow a delivery/return schedule that optimizes the productivity of each trip between your work site and the warehouse ensuring the maximum number of files transferred for each mile traveled?
3. Confirm that paper is subject to recycling once shredded and is maximum paper product relative to the volume of material recycled?

None of the questions above are intended to impose obstacles to the development and operation of your firm. Strategic application of environmentally-friendly RM practices can bring long-term benefits that outweigh their upfront costs. Support for more cost-effective, legally compliant business operations is one of the primary objectives of an effective RM program. In realizing this return on investment, your RM program can discover what other areas of your firm may already know: that good environmental stewardship is good for business.

Excerpt from "[TAB Self Assessment Tool: How Environmentally Friendly is Your Records Management Program?](#)"
[Click Here to take the full assessment >](#)

Testimonial

"Our Firm has partnered with TDS on a number of projects over the past several years. These projects included file consolidation, file relocation, file tracking software with implementation, and analysis of internal records department policies and procedures. These projects produced positive results in the form of reduced costs, streamlined processes for maximum efficiency, and an overall improvement of our records department operation."

Business Manager; 1,000+ lawyer
National Law Firm

[Click Here For More Testimonials >](#)

About TDS

Total Document Solutions, Inc. works with on-site active records centers in law firms. Leading law firms have come to rely on the full range of file management solutions TDS provides. From complete outsourcing of records departments to project management with mergers and moves, TDS will control costs while effectively managing your information. Let our experienced records professionals implement your RM initiatives.

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TDS Green RM Tip of the Month

Using Eco Friendly File Folders

Want an environmentally-friendly records management (RM) program for your firm? One important step you can take is to use Eco Friendly file folders. Interest in protecting the environment continues to grow and manufacturers have responded with a range of products that your firm can incorporate into your environmentally conscious RM program. TDS now offers a 100% recyclable, carbon neutral, acid free folders made from 100% recycled materials.

Having an Eco Friendly RM program can help your firm save money while helping the environment. Here are some things to consider when ordering file folders that will reduce your firm's impact on the environment:

- Are the folders durable enough for the life cycle of the record? *This reduces the need to replace, which lowers waste.*
- Are the folders able to be reused? Can labels be removed cleanly? Does the material allow writing to be erased?
- Are the folder's materials fully recyclable?
- Do they meet biodegradability standards such as the US Standard Specifications for Compostable Plastics (ASTM D-6400-99)? Some folders contain mylar or other non-paper material so this is important to consider.
- Do the Eco Friendly file folders cost the same or less than standard file folders?

tabZEROfile™ a 100% recyclable, carbon neutral, acid free folder made from 100% recycled materials. Even the packaging is recyclable and reusable! TAB took a holistic view of the product manufacturing lifecycle, from packaging to transportation and disposal. **tabZEROfile™** is the perfect folder for organizations that are doing all they can to reduce their impact on our environment. And the great news it is the same price or less than a standard file folder! [Click here if you would like more information or a FREE sample of tabZEROfile™](#)

Sources (click to view).

TAB, Inc. "TAB White Paper: Best Practices for Mergers and Acquisitions" 2006.

TAB, Inc. "Color Code Green: Tips for Environmentally Friendly Records Management." 2009.

TAB, Inc. "TAB Self Assessment Tool: How Environmentally Friendly is Your Records Management Program?" 2009.