

Glossary of Records Management Terms

Many words, acronyms, and phrases are used in discussions of records management, filing systems, human resources, and government agency and law enforcement recordkeeping. Some are unique to this realm, while others are more commonly used terms that have a unique meaning when used in a records management context. To help clarify these terms and concepts, SmeadSoft, the leading supplier of unified records management software solutions designed to help organize and simplify the lifecycle management of records in any form, has compiled this set of definitions.



Glossary Sections

[Archive Records - Business Filing Systems](#)

[Business Process Consulting - Case File Management](#)

[Chain of Custody - Digital Records Management](#)

[Document Access - Document Workflow](#)

[Electronic Chain of Custody - Evidence Software](#)

TAB can help you organize, manage and access your organization's information through our integrated records management solutions. TAB provides premium custom-coded filing systems, high-density mobile shelving systems, records management consulting and file room outsourcing services.

By working with TAB, you will reduce the amount of space your paper files occupy, effectively manage both paper and electronic information and be compliant with the legislation and regulations that affect the way you keep your records.

For more information or to find out how TAB can help you with all your RM needs, contact us at **1-888-466-8228**.

Archive Records - Business Filing Systems

A

Archive Records

Long term, and sometimes permanent, storage of physical items, paper documents or electronic files as required by policies or regulations. Archived documents and other property are often kept in offsite [records storage](#) facilities, since rapid or frequent access is generally not required. On-site long-term storage is more appropriate for files and other items which need to be maintained for extended periods of time but also require accessibility (e.g. birth certificates, medical records and property deeds).

Asset Management

While this term can apply in other contexts to financial investment activities (i.e. the business of mutual funds) or the control of corporate physical property such as buildings, equipment and vehicles, in a records management context it refers to the maintenance of electronic files and documents as well as physical items. Also referred to as digital asset management, this is one of the functions of a [records management system](#), which also manages physical items and paper records. The digital assets managed by a records management system may be files that were originally created electronically (e.g. word processing documents and spreadsheets) or digital images of original paper documents produced by a [document scanning](#) system.

Asset Tracking

The monitoring and management of organizational physical assets using a [bar code labeling](#) and scanning system through a business process. This can be used for tracking both physical items (e.g. computers, evidence in criminal cases) and paper files. [Records management systems](#) provide bar code labeling and scanning functionality as well as the ability to manage electronic files, providing greater flexibility than standard asset tracking software. See also Asset Management (above).

[Return to main menu](#)

Archive Records - Business Filing Systems (cont.)

A

Audit Reports

In relation to [records management](#), documents that show the complete history of a file, document or physical record from creation or receipt to present. Audit reports show complete details of when the record was created or originated, its original storage location, any transfers or changes of possession, accesses made and any analysis performed. They help prevent the loss of information or tampering with a record's content or condition. Audit reports can be used in wide variety of situations, from finance and human relations to medical records and law enforcement.

Bar Code Labeling

Affixing a sticker to a folder, bag, container or other item incorporating a standardized optical data pattern or 2-D image for bar code scanning (see next entry). The bar code reader is connected to a system used for tracking to monitor the item's location, possession and movement. [Records management systems](#) can be used to create labels that are bar coded, color coded, or both, to simplify filing, access and tracking, often eliminating the need for separate bar code labeling software.

Bar Code Scanning

The use of an electronic device to read information from a defined optical data pattern. Bar codes are frequently used in filing or physical storage systems, and scanned to log items, files or records into or out of storage for viewing, use or analysis. **Bar code labeling** (see above) systems are used to produce the initial labels for the items or records.

[Return to main menu](#)

Archive Records - Business Filing Systems (cont.)

B

Bar Code Tracking

Use of a hardware scanning device (stationary or hand held) to read a printed optical or 2D data pattern. Bar codes are used for a variety of functions including [asset tracking](#), inventory control and [records management](#). Once an item is labeled with a bar code, it is normally scanned into a location for storage, then scanned again each time it is moved. In records management, this creates an [audit trail](#) showing all moves, changes of possession and storage locations for a specific item or record, which is critical in applications such as controlling the [chain of custody](#) for evidence in criminal prosecutions. Bar code tracking is useful in any records management environment where immediate file access is an issue. See also **Bar Code Scanning** (above).

Business File Management

The control and administration of the creation or receipt, access, storage, retention and the disposal of commercial documents and records. These may include email communications, contracts, personnel files, safety records, design documents, patents, purchase orders, receipts, shipping documents, marketing collateral, work instructions, policies and procedures, photographs, video and other paper or electronic records. A unified [records management system](#), incorporating software, supplies (e.g. folders and labels) and possibly hardware such as cabinets or carousel systems is the most flexible and effective way to manage both physical and electronic records throughout their lifecycle. Related terms: business file system, organizing business files. See also [Document Management](#), [Business Records](#), [File Management](#) and **Business Filing Systems** (below).

Business Filing Systems

The combination of software, supplies (e.g. folders, labels) and storage hardware (e.g. shelving, cabinets) required to properly store, access and manage commercial records.

[Return to main menu](#)

Business Process Consulting - Case File Management

B

These may include financial, personnel, worker safety, medical, legal, engineering / product design, manufacturing, marketing and other types of records. Unified records management systems enable businesses to manage both paper and electronic files (and digital images of paper documents) in a single application. See also [Business Records](#), [File Management](#) and [Filing Systems](#).

Business Process Consulting

Any services performed in assisting organizations with the design and implementation of standardized, efficient sequences of steps for common operational procedures. This can apply in any functional area, such as accounting, shipping and receiving, customer service or records management. Generally, such consulting includes implementation of and training on the use of software and hardware (such as bar code scanners) that automate inefficient, error-prone manual processes to improve productivity and accuracy. See also [Records Management Consulting](#).

Business Process Management

According to [Gartner](#), business process management (BPM) “provides governance of a business’s process environment to improve agility and operational performance. (Organizations are advised to focus) on a structured BPM approach employing methods, policies, metrics, and software tools to continuously optimize an organization’s activities and processes.” Business process management, also referred to as business process automation (BPA), is a wide-ranging discipline applicable to virtually any area of business or government operations. While most commonly applied to standard, repetitive processes such as billing, accounts payable, and inventory control, BPM is also applicable in [records management](#), where the use of standard software and processes ensures that paper, electronic and physical records are maintained and accessible throughout their specified lifecycle, while optimizing efficiency and minimizing space requirements.

[Return to main menu](#)

Business Process Consulting - Case File Management (cont.)

B

Business Record Retention

The storage and maintenance of financial, personnel and other commercial documents and files throughout their lifecycle. Different types of business records may need to be retained for a required period of time based on regulations (e.g., OSHA, IRS, Sarbanes-Oxley) or company policy. The length of time required for retention of specific record or types of records is often specified by a [record retention schedule](#). Companies often use [records management software](#) to automate the business records retention process, ensuring that documents are retained as long as needed, then properly archived or destroyed to minimize storage space requirements. See also [Archive Records](#) and [Retention Software](#).

Business Record Storage

The physical maintenance of commercial files and documents. These can include payroll, worker safety, financial, marketing, product development, legal and other types of records, many of which are sensitive and confidential in nature. Business records storage is usually thought of in terms of paper records, which may be stored on-site in filing cabinets or carousel filing systems for easy access and retrieval, or in secure off-site [record archive](#) storage. More broadly however, business record storage should incorporate both paper and electronic storage, the latter for both [scanned images](#) of original paper documents and content created in digital format. Like paper documents, electronic files may be stored locally (on a PC or network drive) for quick access, or archived to tape or offsite data center storage. Like paper records, most of these need to be eventually destroyed per an appropriate [record retention schedule](#) for confidentiality, space and regulatory reasons. A unified [records management system](#) ensures proper management of the entire lifecycle of both paper and electronic business records. See also [Record Retention Policy](#).

[Return to main menu](#)

Business Process Consulting - Case File Management (cont.)

B

Business Records

Any critical documents or files which are a product of, or contributor to the business process and the communication of business activities. These include [human resources records](#), billing records, patent or other intellectual property documents, contracts, agreements, letters, and other items. Records generally exclude short-term content such as memos and meeting notes. While [document imaging](#) systems may be used to store and quickly access electronic images of key documents and records, a [records management system](#) should be used to manage both digital files and original paper documents that must be stored and retrievable through their specified lifecycle.

Business Records Management

See [Business File Management](#).

Business Records Software

Computer applications that help commercial enterprises manage documents and files. While [enterprise content management \(ECM\)](#) software is often used to create, route, control and access digital files, [records management systems](#) provide a unified, comprehensive method of managing both paper and electronic records. This white paper on *Understanding and Selecting the Right Tool for the Job: Comparing Records Management Systems, Enterprise Content Management Systems, and Enterprise Information Portals* provides a comprehensive overview of business records management software alternatives.

Case File Management

Control and administration of records or collections of records pertaining to a specific individual, family or incident. [Case file management](#) is used in areas such as community government, health and human services, court records, and the juvenile justice

[Return to main menu](#)

Chain of Custody - Digital Records Management

C

system. Case file management software provides unified management of paper and electronic records, rapid accessibility and audit trail management.

Chain of Custody

Auditable and court admissible documentation of the possession, condition, location, transfer, access to and any analysis performed on an item from acquisition through eventual final disposition.

Though the term is used broadly in areas as diverse as forest management, financial recordkeeping and election ballots, it also commonly refers to evidence collected for criminal prosecution.

[Property and evidence management systems](#) are used by law enforcement agencies to fully track and document the chain of custody for criminal evidence. See also **Chain of Custody Certification** (below); **Chain of Custody Form** (below); **Chain of Custody Procedures** (below); [Chain of Evidence](#); [Electronic Chain of Custody](#); and [Forensic Chain of Custody](#).

Chain of Custody Certification

A method of verifying the possession, location, movements and condition of evidence, materials, products and substances from their creation or collection through any point. The term is most commonly used in association with forestry products and police [property and evidence](#). In law enforcement, such certification can be critical in ensuring that evidence is admissible in criminal prosecutions, by verifying that evidence has not been mishandled, modified or tainted. **Chain of custody** (see above) certification is generally achieved using some combination of **chain of custody forms** (see below) and proper **chain of custody procedures** (see below) in conjunction with [police records management](#) software, which provides a complete audit trail from collection through admission in court. See also [Chain of Evidence](#).

[Return to main menu](#)

Chain of Custody - Digital Records Management (cont.)

C

Chain of Custody Form

In law enforcement, a document describing each piece of evidence collected in a [criminal case](#), and detailing: how, when and where it was obtained; who has accessed and handled it; any analysis performed on it; any alteration from its original condition; its locations and storage as well as present location; and any transfers of the evidence prior to and during admission into court proceedings. A [property and evidence records management system](#) automatically provides a complete audit trail of the chain of custody with evidence. Chain of custody forms (also referred to as *chain of custody documents*, *chain of custody documentation*, or *evidence chain of custody forms*) are also used in forestry, environmental, medical and food processing contexts.

Chain of Custody Procedures

A set of defined processes or [workflow](#) steps designed to assure that the proper and secure [chain of custody](#) is maintained. Such procedures should maintain control of evidence, documents and records from collection, seizure or origination through tagging, storage, access, transfer, analysis, and ultimate disposition, with a full [audit trail](#). While chain of custody procedures are used in a variety of contexts including forestry products, food processing, pharmaceuticals and voting, the term is most frequently associated with the chain of custody for evidence used in criminal prosecutions. In this context, proper chain of custody procedures are vital to ensuring that evidence is not misplaced, damaged or tainted. See also **Chain of Custody Form** and **Chain of Custody Certification** (above).

Chain of Evidence

A special case of [chain of custody](#), this is a record of the seizure or receipt, transport, storage, access, transfer, analysis and ultimate disposition of property, documents and items pertinent to criminal investigations. The chain of evidence must be properly

[Return to main menu](#)

Chain of Custody - Digital Records Management (cont.)

C

maintained to provide the legal custodial linkages of permissible evidentiary handling in order to avoid missing, mishandled or tainted evidence that will jeopardize a criminal prosecution. [Property and evidence tracking software](#) helps assure proper storage, tracking and controlled access to evidence, while providing a full audit trail of the chain of evidence to assure the integrity of evidence introduced at trial. Related terms are *chain of custody for evidence* and *chain of custody of evidence*.

Color Coded Filing System

An efficient way to organize, store and retrieve paper documents and records by using color, frequently in combination with bar codes, text and numeric codes, to distinguish particular types or sequences of records. Systems may use color and other visual identity elements alone, or incorporate [bar code tracking](#) for greater control.

[Color coded filing systems](#) are managed using special software to generate labels incorporating color and other elements, or in some cases to print directly onto file folders. Color coding reduces the risk of misfiling, since they make misplaced folders visually obvious.

Content Management

Control of the [workflow](#) required for the creation, editing, review, storage, indexing, searching, publishing and archiving of electronic documents and digital records. These processes are generally maintained using a content management system, which is used to store and provide revision control of documents, records, images, audio and video files and web content. While useful for creating and managing digital documents, content management systems are intended only to manage a digital content lifecycle, not paper or physical records lifecycles.

[Return to main menu](#)

Document Access - Document Workflow

D

Data Lifecycle Management

See [Information Lifecycle Management](#).

Digital Records Management

See [Electronic Records Management](#).

Document Access

The ability to efficiently search for and retrieve paper or electronic records and files. Effective document access for multiple information formats is facilitated by [records management systems](#) which provide the appropriate security at the system, user and document or record levels around such access.

Document Destruction

The obliteration of electronic and paper files or records at the end of the retention. Many types of records are temporary in nature (e.g. meeting notes) and are routinely destroyed after a specified period of time for the sake of expediency, while other types (e.g. juvenile court records) are required by policy or regulations to be eliminated. Secure document destruction is used for sensitive or confidential material, as well as situations where certification of document destruction is required.

Document Imaging

The process of capturing, storing, retrieving and printing electronically scanned images of paper documents and records. This is a function or subsystem of document imaging software, enterprise content management software, and [records management systems](#), which also manage the storage, access and disposition of the original paper documents. Related terms include document imaging management and document imaging systems. See also Document Scanning (below).

[Return to main menu](#)

Document Access - Document Workflow (cont.)

D

Document Management

The imaging, storage and retrieval of documents and information scanned into electronic systems. This includes both documents and files originally created in electronic format as well as paper documents, photos and other items scanned into digital form and saved with keywords and/or full text for easy searching and retrieval.

Document Management Software

Computer software applications that perform document management functions: such as scanning, storage, search, retrieval and [workflow](#). routing of documents, files, images and other items stored electronically. Also referred to as *document management systems*. While valuable, such systems are insufficient for most organizations which need storage and retrieval capabilities for both electronic and original paper versions of key documents and records, which is provided by [records management software](#).

Document Scanning

Creating a digital image of a paper document indexed with “meta data” (descriptive information) for rapid search and retrieval. Often, document scanning software (a function of records management systems) will be used to create images that can be used to help identify specific paper records for later access or to provide viewing and printing access to sensitive original documents (for example, reviewing an online image of an original document that is evidence in a criminal proceeding). A document scanning system can be used to efficiently capture single images or of large volumes of documents in batch mode for government or business applications.

[Return to main menu](#)

Document Access - Document Workflow (cont.)

D

Document Storage

A repository for either physical paper or digital records. With physical records, this can be on- or off-site or centralized or decentralized within an organization, though generally an off-site repository is referred to as a document or [record archive](#). These are often file rooms, with filing cabinets and shelving systems. Also referred to as [records storage](#) or file storage. In the electronic record segment, this is the database or repository, the electronic storage media to which that database is connected in which the electronic records or data is stored and from which it is managed. This is often seamless to the electronic records consumer and can refer to localized media, network storage, offline media or “cloud” storage methodologies. The same care should be provided to the segmentation and management from other business content in both types of records from a document storage perspective.

Document Tracking

Monitoring the creation, possession, transfer, storage, access and disposal of a record. This is a function of different types of software including [enterprise content management](#) (ECM) applications and [records management](#) systems, though the latter provide the flexibility to track both electronic and paper documents. Paper document tracking is typically accomplished using [bar code scanning functionality](#).

Document Workflow

A defined sequence of steps required to complete a process involving a file or record. A simple example of document [workflow](#) is processing a purchase order (PO): print a PO form; enter the relevant information in the required fields; deliver it to the appropriate manager for approval; get the manager’s signature on the PO; deliver the signed PO to the purchasing department; fax the PO to the specified vendor; upon delivery, attach the shipping

[Return to main menu](#)

Electronic Chain of Custody - Evidence Software

E

manifest to the PO; deliver both documents to the accounts payable department; send payment to the vendor; and file the PO for audit purposes. More complex document workflows may involve collaborative review and editing, multiple levels of approval, conditional routing and other tasks. While the workflow of electronic documents can be managed using [document management software](#), [records management systems](#) provide a more complete system for managing both digital and paper documents and files.

Electronic Chain of Custody

A computerized audit trail detailing the storage, transfer and analysis of specific products, substances, materials, documents, evidence or other items through their complete lifecycle from creation, collection or seizure through final disposition. Also referred to as the digital chain of custody, this verifies that proper [chain of custody procedures](#) have been followed to prevent loss or mishandling of items or evidence, and is facilitated by the use of [law enforcement management software](#) or [police records management applications](#). See also [Chain of Custody](#), [Chain of Evidence](#) and [Chain of Custody Certification](#).

Electronic Documents

Another term for documents either originally created in digital format (e.g. word processing documents or spreadsheets) or paper documents scanned and stored in digital format. See also **Electronic Records Management** (below). These may be created, searched and retrieved using electronic document management software or [records management systems](#) which can also manage paper files and physical items in one unified system.

[Return to main menu](#)

Electronic Chain of Custody - Evidence Software (cont.)

E

Electronic File Management

The administration and tracking of documents and other content, whether originally created in digital format (e.g. word processing documents, spreadsheets) or scanned from original paper documents. While this can be accomplished using [enterprise content management](#) (ECM) software or similar applications, records management software provides a more focused solution for specifically tracking both paper and electronic files. See also [File Management](#), [Electronic Records Management](#) (below) and [Electronic Documents](#) (above).

Electronic Records Management

The capture, storage, access and tracking of digital documents and files. These may be files originally created in electronic format (e.g. word processing documents and spreadsheets) or scanned images of original paper documents. It also contains the electronic references and data on the management of physical records managed within an electronic system. This is one function of [records management software](#). See also [Content Management](#), [Document Imaging](#) and [Enterprise Content Management \(ECM\)](#) (below). Related terms include *electronic record retention*, *electronic recordkeeping*, *electronic records archives*, *electronic records software*, *electronic records storage* and *electronic records systems*.

Email Management

Storage, retention management for and archiving of messages contained in corporate or government email systems. Many types of email messages must be retained in accordance with state laws, federal statutes such as the [Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce \(E-Sign\) law](#), and company or agency policies. In the private sector, companies should have policies and systems in place to assure that all communications relevant to financial,

[Return to main menu](#)

E

contractual, intellectual property and legal matters are appropriately retained. In government, according to the [State of Minnesota](#), “E-mail messages are potentially official [government records](#), so you should plan for e-mail as part of your electronic records management strategy. The medium is irrelevant. The content of the message determines whether it is a record or not; the content determines to which records series the message belongs; and the content determines how long the message needs to be retained. Both statute and case law make clear that government agencies have to include e-mail in an overall [records management](#) strategy. Currently, few government agencies manage e-mail as records. Managing e-mail is usually left to personal preference or routine systems back-ups and administrative procedures that treat all e-mail alike. These practices can result in serious legal, operational, and public relations risks.” Various types of email management software including [records management systems](#) can be used to ensure that email messages pertaining to important business or legal matters are retained for the necessary period of time.

Employee Record Management System

A comprehensive system of software, filing cabinets (possibly including a carousel filing system for high-volume filing) and filing supplies for managing the storage, maintenance, access and eventual disposal of employee records in a human resources department. The system supports creation, maintenance and access to records in both paper and electronic formats. Both the types of records (e.g., resumes, performance reviews, health and safety records, payroll records, etc.) and the [record retention schedule](#) that applies may be controlled by regulatory requirements as well as organizational policy. See also [Business Filing Systems](#), [Payroll Record Retention](#) and [Employee Record Retention](#) (below).

[Return to main menu](#)

Electronic Chain of Custody - Evidence Software (Cont.)

E

Employee Record Retention

The storage and maintenance of personnel files and information, typically provided by [human resources records management](#) or other HR software applications. The length of time required for various types of employee records retention is governed in some cases by regulation (e.g. OSHA or IRS rules) and in others by organizational [record retention policy](#), depending on the type of information stored. A [records management system](#) provides control and tracking of both electronic and paper records, which often must be maintained by regulation or policy. Related terms include employee recordkeeping, personnel record retention, personnel recordkeeping and personnel records retention.

Enterprise Content Management (ECM)

According to the Association for Information and Image Management ([AIIM](#)), enterprise content management (ECM) is defined as “the strategies, methods and tools used to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver content and documents related to organizational processes. ECM tools and strategies allow the management of an organization’s unstructured information, wherever that information exists.” While this definition would encompass [records management](#), in practice the term ECM is usually applied to software systems designed to manage only electronic documents and digital content. Since most organizations need to manage **both** digital and electronic records, a complete evaluation of the capabilities of different types of software systems is critical. See the white paper *Understanding and Selecting the Right Tool for the Job: Comparing Records Management Systems, Enterprise Content Management Systems, and Enterprise Information Portals* for more information on this topic. Related terms include *ECM software*, *electronic business records* and *electronic content management*.

[Return to main menu](#)

Electronic Chain of Custody - Evidence Software (cont.)

E

Evidence Chain of Custody

See [Chain of Evidence](#).

Evidence Software

A computer application that enables property room managers and associated law enforcement personnel to log items and documents collected from a crime scene or in association with an investigation, attach a [bar code tracking](#) label, place the item into storage, and track its movements and location throughout the [chain of custody](#). Property and evidence records management software maintains the chain of custody to help eliminate missing or mishandled evidence. Also referred to as *evidence tracking software*, *evidence management software*, an *evidence management system*, or *police evidence software*.

[Return to main menu](#)