

## Bramble.cc helps Robert Gordon University with Information Management

The Robert Gordon University (RGU) is a dynamic, modern University with an international reputation for providing high quality education. Named by *The Times Good University Guide 2009* as 'the best modern university in the UK', RGU has a diverse range of degree programmes in Business, Law, Engineering, Science, Computing, Art, Design, Architecture, Pharmacy and Health Sciences - all taught in state-of-the-art facilities.

RGU believes that information and knowledge are its most cherished assets – and better management and exploitation of both were therefore considered essential to the University's vision of remaining a dynamic modern institution in a highly competitive market place. In discussion it was also acknowledged that the rate at which individuals and organisations learn may be its key sustainable competitive advantage.

### Records Management

The University's Records Management Department provides advice, guidance and training on information asset management issues. Keith Fraser, RGU's Records Manager, explained: "Records Management is a key function within the University responsible for ensuring that we have processes for managing information about business activities and ensuring compliance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Data Protection Act 1998."

With information held in different formats (paper-based and electronic) and departments across the

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University, it was difficult to maintain a cohesive information management strategy. To that end, Keith concluded that an Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM)/Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solution should be considered.

Bramble.cc was engaged by RGU to provide guidance on how an EDRM/ECM solution might be implemented in the University, and identify potential benefits for doing so. Bramble.cc was also asked to provide indications of the associated costs and timescales, implementation methods and possible archive solutions.

### Interviews and workshops

"When Bramble.cc's experts came in to conduct interviews it quickly became clear that the University did not have the basic building blocks in place for an enterprise-wide EDRM/ECM implementation," said Keith. "They identified many and varied IM problems and a general picture of varying local practices emerged, with IM decisions being made at a local 'tactical' level, rather than strategically across RGU. The resulting 'information incoherence' was symptomatic of a lack of IM focus and was adding to increasing levels of information overload and duplication."



In order to present these problems, Bramble.cc's review team arranged them around a typical information life-cycle model, categorising the IM problems as either tactical or strategic.

"Our users have a rich and complex environment which has resulted in multiple ways of storing unstructured information," added Keith. "Typical places where information is stored are on various hard drives, Outlook public and private folders and off-line storage such as CD-ROM or USB storage devices. Information is often inaccessible or unknown to other users, resulting in an electronic environment containing duplicated information."

### Universal view

Finding the right information at the point of need, in particular an authoritative or current version of the "truth" had therefore become problematic for not only the authors but also other stakeholders.

Bramble.cc identified that there was no universal view of corporate information, i.e. a Corporate File Plan. If there was, users would be able to navigate to the likely places where information could be found," said Keith.

The importance of having a controlled and auditable information infrastructure can have an immediate impact on, for example, EC funding, as Keith explained: “We receive funds from the EC for projects and it is essential that we can show an audit trail of records in order to maintain that funding, which can be £250,000 per project.”

In formulating the University’s requirements for an EDRM/ECM solution, Bramble.cc recommended that consideration should be given to the provision of Digital Asset Management. With a rich source of media in the form of high quality imagery and video being amassed by various departments, this could potentially be made available for re-use within the University.

“Bramble.cc found that there was no central location on the Intranet for the University’s business management policies, procedures and forms – they were scattered all over the place,” said Keith.

### Best practice

Fundamentally, Bramble.cc concluded that ‘best practice’ in information management had not been embedded across the organisation. In part this was attributable to under investment which had manifested itself in locally inadequate storage facilities for paper-based records and an uncontrolled electronic information environment.



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### Bramble.cc’s key recommendations for RGU included:

- Assign a lead for person to provide an Information Management and Security focus for the University.
- Develop information management principles.
- Develop a correspondence policy.
- Develop official templates for documents and presentations.
- Capture the University’s requirements for scanning and consider a centralised scanning capability rather than creating multiple point solutions.
- Develop approved electronic ways of working.
- Create an intranet-based IMRC presence to provide policy, advice, guidance and practical assistance in IM practice.
- Develop and information architecture initially comprising a corporate file plan, information security model, metadata library, etc.
- Centralise policies, procedures and practice in an intranet environment.
- Document business processes to prove a basis for EDRM/ECM business change.

“This in turn has led to avoidable business risk, inefficiencies and duplication of information across the University as a whole,” said Keith. “Whilst most business areas do have an understanding of the status of their information assets, records management and compliance obligations, the University as a collective does not.”

Keith concluded: “Bramble.cc did an excellent job in terms of evaluating our information management needs. Their report and recommendations were thorough and concise and have given us the foundation for moving forward with our IM ambitions.”



*Bramble.cc is an independent information management consultancy. We have extensive experience in helping public and private sector organisations to embrace change in their information management strategies to achieve operational and bottom-line benefits.*

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