



White paper

The hybrid information gap

How growing businesses bridge the gap between physical archives and digital agility



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Executive summary

For established companies across EMEA the challenge is rarely about starting a digital journey—it is about managing the complexity of a hybrid environment. Years of information trapped in filing cabinets and local storerooms act as a hidden weight on organisational growth.

The goal for modern enterprises is to move beyond mere storage and toward high-value data conversion. By transforming physical records into secure, intelligent digital assets, organisations can eliminate “dark data,” reclaim expensive office space, and unlock the operational efficiency required to compete in an AI-driven market.

The business challenge: The cost of the hybrid gap

Physical records are more than just a storage expense; they are a barrier to daily productivity and future growth. When critical information remains fragmented between paper and digital systems, it creates a multi-layered impact on your organisation’s **operational** and **economic** health:

- **Decreased productivity (operational):** In a hybrid or remote work model, teams spend excessive time searching for physical documents, diverting focus from high-value tasks.
- **The “AI barrier” (strategic):** In an era of rapid AI adoption, paper is “dark data.” If information is not digital and structured, it is invisible to modern analytics and AI tools, preventing your organisation from leveraging automated insights and trend forecasting.
- **Compliance and security fragility (functional):** Physical files are inherently vulnerable to environmental damage, loss, and unauthorised access, complicating **Information Governance** and Data Protection (e.g. GDPR).
- **Retention and litigation risks (reputation):** Over-retaining legacy records can lead to compliance breaches. Proactive management and defensible destruction are essential to reduce litigation risk.
- **Workflow bottlenecks (operational):** Paper-heavy processes, e.g. in **Accounting, HR, and Contract Management** result in slow workflows such as approvals and manual data entry errors.

Strategic triage: Selective modernisation for ROI

Digital transformation does not require an immediate, total backlog conversion. Being future-ready means exercising fiscal responsibility through selective modernisation.

It is advisable to audit your physical inventory to determine what to scan, what to store, and what to defensibly destroy.

On average, research suggests that only about 42% of paper records actually require digitisation to meet current business needs. By identifying the remainder for secure storage or destruction, organisations can reduce costs and reclaim valuable office space.

How the transformation works

To bridge the gap between physical and digital, a secure end-to-end process with secure chain of custody is essential:

1. **Identify and assess:** Locate your assets and align your digitisation strategy with your specific business goals, such as **freeing up employee capacity** or improving **access transparency**. Use a blueprint to decide what to scan, store or disposition.
2. **Secure collection:** Utilising secure logistics to maintain a complete chain of custody from your facility to a specialised scanning centre.
3. **Preparation and scanning:** Meticulously preparing documents—removing staples and repairing pages—to ensure high-quality imaging.
4. **Data capture and indexing:** Using OCR and AI to extract key metadata to make files fully searchable and “intelligent”—the essential foundation for **AI readiness**.
5. **Secure access:** Delivering encrypted data into a secure cloud repository for instant, authorised access.
6. **Secure destruction:** Securely destroying physical copies in a compliant manner or returning them for archival storage.

High-impact assets for transformation

A comprehensive digitisation strategy can modernise almost any physical asset. Focusing on the following categories provides the most immediate impact on daily efficiency:



General and business documents

- > **Financial, contract, and legal records:** Invoices, tax records, contracts, and wills form the backbone of your organisation's accountability. Transitioning these to a digital format creates a searchable, auditable archive that protects your most critical agreements and board minutes from physical loss or degradation.
- > **HR and admin documents:** Employee records, payroll files, and benefits contain highly sensitive information that requires meticulous care. Digitising these assets fortifies data security and simplifies compliance audits while empowering HR teams with secure, remote access to the files they need, regardless of their location.
- > **Physical mail:** Routing incoming mail directly into digital workflows to eliminate paper bottlenecks from day one.



Industry-specific records

- > **Healthcare and life sciences:** Patient medical records, physician notes, lab reports, X-rays, and pathology slides represent the critical pulse of care. Transitioning these to a digital format facilitates seamless interoperability across care teams and fortifies data security. Beyond efficiency, digitisation empowers clinical research by transforming static files into accessible data sets that fuel medical innovation.
- > **Government and public sector:** Vital records—including birth and death certificates, property deeds, and vehicle registrations—serve as the foundational evidence of a functioning society. Transitioning these legacy archives safeguards historical continuity and modernises the constituent experience by allowing residents to access documents on demand.
- > **Energy:** Technical specifications, engineering diagrams, installation documentation, and site procedures are vital for operations and safety. Digital access provides teams with the correct versions instantly, regardless of location.
- > **Finance and mortgage:** Loan applications, tax documents, appraisals, pay stubs, and property titles create massive paper files. Digitisation speeds up loan processing and simplifies audit responses.

How Iron Mountain supports your local strategy

Iron Mountain provides the **local proximity** and **expertise** required to solve these challenges for small and medium businesses as well as large enterprises. We act as a **one-stop-shop** for your entire information lifecycle.

- > **Free up capacity:** By using **Iron Mountain Smart Suite**, our portfolio of technology-enabled services for legacy records, we help you audit your physical inventory to determine what to scan, what to store, and what to defensibly destroy.
- > **Enhance operational agility:** Our **digitisation services** and **Digital Experience Platform (DXP)** allow your team to access information instantly, freeing up space and employee time.
- > **Ensure compliance:** We help **records management and data protection** officers maintain strict security standards and reduce litigation risk through compliant workflows.

Whether you are looking to optimise a single office or manage records across a region, Iron Mountain helps you transform “dark data” into business intelligence.

Ready to bridge the hybrid gap and build a more resilient, intelligent organisation? Contact our specialists today to align your records with your digital future.



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About Iron Mountain

Iron Mountain Incorporated (NYSE: IRM), founded in 1951, is the global leader for storage and information management services. Trusted by more than 225,000 organisations around the world, and with a real estate network of more than 91 million square metres across more than 1,400 facilities in over 60 countries, Iron Mountain stores and protects billions of information assets, including critical business information, highly sensitive data, and cultural and historical artifacts. Providing solutions that include secure storage, information management, digital transformation, secure destruction, as well as data centres, art storage and logistics, and cloud services, Iron Mountain helps organisations to lower cost and risk, comply with regulations, recover from disaster, and enable a more digital way of working. Visit www.ironmountain.com/en-gb for more information.

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