

Basin Electric Power Cooperative



The records management team at Basin Electric deployed EMC Documentum Records Manager to streamline regulatory compliance at the power company.

Enhanced liability protection and streamlined regulatory compliance through centralized records management

Benefits

- Reduced time spent on records search and retrieval by half
- Significant cost savings and productivity gains through more efficient records management
- Enhanced litigation support and reduced legal costs
- Enhanced ability to comply with state and federal regulations

Business overview

Basin Electric Power Cooperative is a consumer-owned, regional cooperative headquartered in Bismarck, North Dakota. As one of the largest electric generation and transmission (G&T) cooperatives in the U.S., Basin Electric supplies power to 120 member rural systems in nine states: Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. These member systems distribute electricity to about 1.8 million consumers. Together with its seven subsidiaries, Basin Electric has more than 1,700 employees.

Challenges

Like any business, Basin Electric has a critical requirement to effectively manage and archive vital business records. This is important not only for litigation, in which certain records might provide the necessary documentation to protect the organization from liability, but also to meet regulatory requirements. At Basin Electric, records management and retention is the purview of an 8-person team within the Administration and Corporate Services department.

An information “black hole”

At Basin Electric, anything that results from a business transaction is considered a record, from routine correspondence to contracts and financial documents. More than 40 years of operation have produced a huge volume of these records in paper form as well as a variety of electronic formats, from VHS tapes and CDs to computer files.

Previously, records were stored in many locations throughout Basin Electric's corporate headquarters. Researching and retrieving requested information was a time-consuming and costly manual process.

In addition, there was no consistent method for classifying and cataloguing the information. For instance, records management personnel had no way of specifically identifying the appropriate documents for pending litigation, and would instead have to spend extra time retrieving and copying an entire volume of files in which the documents in question might be located. The situation became further complicated in recent years, as paper documents were joined by electronic files stored on many disconnected hard drives throughout the organization.

"Records management had become known as a 'black hole' in our organization because requesting and getting the documents you needed had become such a long, complex process," said Cheryl Neumiller, records management supervisor for Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "In getting user buy-in for a new system, this was a strong perception that we had to overcome."

Complex regulatory requirements

Basic Electric is bound by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) through the Rural Utility Services (RUS) to comply with complex regulations for records management and storage. The cooperative is accountable to other federal agencies as well, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA); for instance, Basin Electric must be able to document its compliance with OSHA safety regulations for each of its power plants and its synthetic natural gas subsidiary. Timely and accurate retrieval of the records demonstrating compliance is critical to help the organization avoid fines and other penalties.

As the year 2000 drew near, Basin Electric began storing records data in a Microsoft Access database to help it meet Y2K requirements. In addition, Basin Electric had adopted an electronic document management system for storing correspondence. Neither of these systems, however, provided the comprehensive solution that would solve the organization's records management challenges. Therefore in 2000, Basin Electric launched an effort to implement a centralized records management system that would not only streamline regulatory compliance, but also bring new cost efficiencies to the entire records retention, management, and approval process.

Documentum solution

For the solution, Basic Electric chose EMC Documentum® Records Manager, a complete electronic records retention and management solution. Documentum Records Manager allows organizations to create, safeguard, and access records and cost-effectively archive or destroy them according to system-enforced administrative, regulatory, or legal rules. With Documentum Records Manager, enterprises can demonstrate compliance with regulations, defend internal policies and actions, and avoid legal, monetary, and procedural penalties while protecting intellectual resources, reducing expenses, and protecting their corporate images.

Basin Electric's implementation process began with a comprehensive inventory of every record produced by each department within the organization, both at corporate headquarters and at each of the cooperative's G&T plants. An integral part of the inventory process was development of a standard set of acronyms that could be used to classify each record category.

Business profile

Basin Electric Power Cooperative

Regional power cooperative generating and transmitting electricity to its members; owns and operates coal-to-synthetic natural gas subsidiary.

Industry

Electric and gas utilities

Geographies

Headquartered in Bismarck, N.D., with power customers in nine states across the U.S.

Business solution

Contracts management, document management, regulatory compliance

Documentum products

EMC Documentum Records Manager

Deployment summary

Employees throughout the organization use Records Manager for fast, accurate retrieval of critical business records

Next, the records management team built a file plan/retention schedule for each department based on its specific list of records, with each record given a unique ID and stored in the records management system.

Simplified retrieval of all kinds of records

With Documentum Records Manager, Basin Electric employees can search for and retrieve electronic records quickly and easily, right from their desktops. “For electronic records, Documentum Records Manager has taken the burden off our shoulders and empowered employees to help themselves, making everyone much more productive,” said Neumiller.

For paper and other hard-copy items, employees can quickly identify the exact records they need and send an electronic request to the records management team. Since the Documentum Records Manager implementation is based on the detailed file plan/retention schedule cataloguing every record in the company, it is easy for records management staff to pull and copy the right records and send them on to the requestor. So easy, in fact, that Basin Electric credits Documentum Records Manager with a dramatic reduction in search and retrieval time.

“EMC Documentum Records Manager has had a powerful impact on our organization, improving not only our ability to respond cost-effectively in litigation, but also our processes for regulatory compliance. Giving our employees a centralized location to retrieve the records they need, quickly and easily, has resulted in significant savings—both in time and money.”

Cheryl Neumiller, Records Management Supervisor

Documentum Records Manager electronically captures the physical scheme for storing hardcopy records, making it even easier for records management personnel to hone in on the correct items. For example, users can view the contents of a certain box, stored in a certain warehouse. “Since we have close to 10,000 boxes of records stored in several different onsite and offsite records vaults, it’s easy to see how much time this saves us,” said Neumiller.

Reduced litigation costs

Because the timely ability to produce the right records is often critical for pre-trial discovery and other litigation situations, Basin Electric’s records management team plays an important support role for the legal department. In litigation, Documentum Records Manager gives Basin Electric a strong competitive advantage over other utilities that have not automated their records management function. “The ability to access the right documents quickly helps us resolve litigation that much quicker, saving court fees and attorney fees,” said Neumiller. “And since we can respond to outside attorneys right away with information, rather than requiring them to spend their expensive time doing the research, we can save so much more.”

Summary

The Documentum Records Manager solution has been so successful that Basin Electric is now investigating a strategy for enterprise content management. Conceptually, Documentum Records Manager would provide the records management and retention piece of an enterprise-wide system that would bring all corporate content—from plant drawings, engineering data, and documents-in-progress to website content—under the control of a centralized enterprise content management system.

“EMC Documentum Records Manager has improved not only our ability to respond cost-effectively in litigation, but also our processes for regulatory compliance,” said Neumiller. “Giving our employees a centralized location to retrieve the records they need, quickly and easily, has resulted in significant savings—both in time and money.”

About Documentum software from EMC

Documentum software from EMC Corporation includes enterprise content management solutions that enable organizations to unite teams, content, and associated business processes. With a single platform, EMC Documentum software enables people to collaboratively create, manage, deliver, and archive the content that drives business operations, from documents and discussions to e-mail, Web pages, records, and rich media. With Documentum enterprise content management, organizations improve their competitive advantage by accelerating time to market, increasing customer satisfaction, and reducing operating costs. For more information, visit www.emc.com/documentum or call **800.607.9546** (outside the U.S.: +1.925.600.6754).

About EMC

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Customer Profile
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