Managing off-site storage costs

Although most documents are created, maintained, and used electronically, many organizations still send files to off-site facilities for long-term storage. Or they may have legacy files in storage from earlier years. Once files go to off-site storage employees tend to forget about them, unless they need something, often resulting in escalating costs over the years.

Two ways to effectively manage off-site storage costs are to:

1. Reduce what you send; and
2. Reduce what you have.

Reduce what you send

Reducing what gets sent to offsite storage is connected with how records and information are managed across the organization. A records-retention schedule is a great tool to use because it identifies who is responsible for maintaining the records and the format (i.e., paper or electronic) of the official record. For example, if Accounts Payable is responsible for maintaining invoices electronically, in accordance with the records retention policy, then it's unnecessary for any other department in the company to send paper invoices to storage.

Reduce what you have

Reducing what exists in off-site storage is also connected to a corporate records retention policy/schedule, which establishes how long to keep the records and when they are eligible for destruction. In the absence of a records-retention policy, here are some good practices to follow that will ultimately help to reduce off-site storage holdings and improve retrieval.

1. Describe files clearly and concisely. Spell out abbreviations. Avoid words like "general" and "miscellaneous."
2. Include open and close dates for files. Dates are critical for determining when files are eligible for destruction.
3. Leave boxes unmarked. Eliminate the risk (and temptation) of somebody snooping in your files by keeping the outside of the box clean. Place a detailed list of box contents on the inside of the box instead.