

## Forms Management

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**FORMS MANAGEMENT:** the systematic process of

- increasing productivity and minimizing errors in information capture, transmission, and recovery through the use of workflow analysis and graphic design techniques;
- providing administrative control
- reducing procurement, storage, distribution, and use costs through standardization; and
- ensuring the adequacy, business as well as legal, of all historical records.

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### Work Skills

The work skills required by a truly effective Forms Management Program (FMP) are many, varied and quite broad in scope. While what has been called “Forms Control” (consisting essentially of inventory procurement and management) may be a significant component of the program, other skills, talents and techniques are equally critical.

- Cost Benefit Analysis  
One of the more obvious requirements of a good FMP is the fiduciary responsibility to contain and reduce costs. Understanding the mechanics and application of the cost benefit analysis is essential to that end.
- Consultation  
Assumptions are dangerous. It is incumbent on the Forms Management staff, therefore, to offer advice and council to those who need forms developed or revised to ensure that a useful tool is developed. Such consultation helps to guarantee that the form meets the real need of the business system it serves.
- Work Group Development  
When the functionality of a form crosses departmental or operational lines within the business environment, it is essential for all stake-holders to participate and buy-in to the final form. This work group should not attempt to execute the design layout, itself, but they do need to participate actively in the workflow discussion to ensure the form’s effectiveness.
- Customer Service Techniques  
The role of the Forms Management Program is one of service to the organization. Customer service techniques include responsiveness, accuracy, timeliness, sound advice, and respect for the needs and desires of the user community and the organization.
- Scheduling and Prioritizing  
Scheduling (setting a specific time to accomplish a series of tasks) and prioritizing (performing tasks in the appropriate sequence) are indicators of strong organizational skills. Procrastination and “doing the easy job first” can quickly lead to lost focus and momentum.
- Ethics  
Consistently doing what is appropriate and fair reflects a strong sense of ethics within the program and enhances the level of respect it earns from Forms Management Program users.
- Interviewing  
Genuine interest displayed while interviewing current and future forms users engenders not only respect from those users, but also keeps the forms manager from working in a vacuum. No one knows better how the form should perform and what it must accomplish than those who use it.
- Training  
Assuming that a form has been created based upon a sound understanding of the workflow surrounding it, the users must clearly understand its purpose and may require training in its proper use.
- Negotiating  
Negotiating takes on many faces. Besides the interfaces between forms management and their vendors (regarding specifications and costs), there may also be occasion to navigate compromise among users and, in some cases, with the organization’s legal authorities.
- Presentations  
When the analysis is completed and the next step is forms design, it is often appropriate to present the results of the analysis and the proposed layout for the form to the work group that collaborated on the content and function of the form. Such presentations should be short and to the point.

- Project Management  
Good project management assures that all the appropriate steps in the process, from the initial investigation phase through deployment or manufacturing of the final forms design, are successfully completed by the responsible individuals in a logical sequence and in a timely fashion.
- Environmental and Safety Awareness  
Environmental and safety awareness includes limiting toxic waste by-products from forms, such as carbon papers, whenever possible, and assuring that the proper risk reducing materials are used for tag and label items.

## **Administration**

Effective and efficient control of the forms management program requires thorough knowledge and technical dexterity to support the administration of the numerous inherent operational functions.

- Version Control  
Regular maintenance of forms keeps business systems operating at optimum efficiency. Version control assures that only the most current edition of each form is available for use.
- Identification Systems  
The basic form numbering scheme serves as the proper identification tool for each item in the system. Form groupings (kits) and other specific categorization indicators (e.g., product types, business functions, etc.) are also common and must be carefully maintained to assure their accuracy and usefulness.
- Filing Systems  
Filing systems serve various purposes, including the general forms file (specifications, samples, notes, etc.); purchase order history files (requisitions, receiving reports, etc.); warehouse and distribution reports; related forms files (e.g., an invoice and its accompanying envelope); procedures and other miscellaneous file types.
- Security Issues  
Some forms items may be negotiable instruments, such as gift certificates or checks. For other items, user access may be severely restricted (e.g., salary adjustments, promotion announcements, stock option awards, etc.). Whether locked storage is required or a simple check-out system is sufficient, security issue awareness is crucial.
- Warehousing and Distribution  
Warehousing and distribution of paper forms must be carefully monitored to assure availability of a steady supply of forms and easy access to those forms by users. Whether there is a desk-top delivery system in place, a mail-based requisitioning system or a will-call window for personal form pick up, records must be kept of the number and frequency of forms distributed. This will facilitate timely re-ordering and stocking activities.
- Management Reports  
On-going support for a forms management program often depends largely upon upper management's comfort level that the program is worthwhile and that the return on investment is adequate. One way to maintain firm trust in the program is to provide management reports on a regular basis. Various performance metrics, such as number of forms in the system, new forms vs. revisions, number of requisition per period, costs expended vs. costs saved, etc., are typical reporting areas.
- Standards  
Standards: the consistent, logical and accepted way of performing specific tasks; of executing general form layouts; of placing text and graphics on a form; of preparing documentation and specifications; of managing production, stocking and distribution of supplies; of deploying electronic forms; of presenting management reports; and of controlling costs. These are representative of the various tasks and techniques that, when done according to defined practice guidelines, help to foster and operate a strong forms management program.
- Tracking  
Traffic management is an important function of the FMP manager. That includes tracking the progress of various analysis projects, of vendor manufacturing orders, of warehouse inventories, of the forms portal database, of the various FMP databases, of strategic management reporting metrics and many other on-going processes.
- Operational Procedures  
"S.O.P." should mean "Standard Operating Procedures," not "Seat Of Pants," when referring to how the program runs. There is much less room for variation (and error) when operational procedures are formalized and documented in writing to simplify reference by anyone with a need to know.

- Records and Data Retention  
Forms Management has long been closely associated with Records Management and, in some organizations, is an associated function within the same department. Recognition and adherence to records retention schedules applies to the form files and to the maintenance of data records such as management reporting metrics.
- Obsolescence  
A reasonable rule of thumb states that when a form has seen no usage nor requests for modification within a defined period of time, it may be declared "obsolete." The obsolescence criteria is defined individually within each Forms Management Program. Even though a form becomes obsolete, its form number should never be reused and its history records should not be destroyed, since it is always possible the form may be reactivated at some future date.
- General Record Keeping  
General record keeping procedures should be defined in the FMP documentation and checked periodically to assure compliance.
- Forms Libraries  
Form libraries may be as simple as a single copy of each form in the system in a centralized file and as complex as discrete files containing specific groups of forms, e.g., all paper forms or all electronic forms, or all forms for a certain business process. They may be physical files and/or electronic files, or a combination of both. They may contain samples, specifications, historical records, inventory records and other documents and be generally accessible or they may be restricted to forms department personnel only. Departmental procedures govern these files.
- Other  
Other functions may be considered integral parts of the administration of a forms program. These other activities may include personnel management (hiring, training, performance reviews, firing); participation on various management teams (workflow improvement projects, implementation teams for new systems, etc.); or any other miscellaneous assignments from higher management levels.

## **Procurement**

Procurement is the process of obtaining materials and services needed by the organization. An awareness of the broad spectrum of functions and activities required to guarantee success is essential.

- Supplier Relationships  
Suppliers are those who are outside the department but furnish products and/or services needed by the organization. Maintaining cordial supplier relationships helps to assure that the information available from each supplier is complete and accurate and that the best interests of your organization are served.
- Product Evaluation  
When a new requirement is identified that may be able to take advantage of a product that is also new, or is currently unused by the organization, it is prudent to conduct a product evaluation to confirm the appropriateness of the product, whether physical or electronic, as a solution for the environment where it is proposed.
- Quotations and Proposals  
Prior to placing a manufacturing contract or purchasing software or services, it is wise to request a quotation or proposal from the potential vendor. Even when the vendor is known and has provided products and/or services in the past, each new requirement should be handled the same way. Formalizing the quotation and/or proposal process ensures that nothing is assumed or left to chance and that all legal bases are covered adequately.
- Contract Negotiating  
Long term relationships with vendors (beyond a single order) are common in the forms industry. Negotiating contracts should spell out price levels, manufacturing locations and delivery times, manufacturing specifications for products, vendor warehousing and storage costs, on-site services (such as periodic inventory counts), other services available, associated legal agreements, and any other routine interface that may be involved. These components encourage a strong and equitable vendor relationship.
- Trade Customs  
Trade Customs codify the standard terms and conditions under which the relationship between the customer and the printing vendor operate. Many topics are included. Exceptions, if any, must be individually negotiated between the parties.  
Reference: [http://www.essociatesgroup.com/enformation\\_central/default.htm](http://www.essociatesgroup.com/enformation_central/default.htm)

## Inventory Management

By and large, inventory management systems relate specifically to paper forms, since there is no physical inventory of electronic forms. Techniques for maintaining inventory varies from stock on warehouse shelves to some variety of stockless inventory.

- Automated Systems

Using a computer-based system for tracking inventory is useful for any form of inventory control. Automated systems provide quick accessible and timely information regarding inventory status. Statuses includes on order, en route, vendor stocked, on-site stock, off-site stock, shipped, back ordered, and obsolete.

- Barcoding

One handy way to track inventory on hand is through the use of bar codes. Depending upon the content of the bar code, such information as form number, edition date, production date, vendor identification, form effective date, do-not-use-after date, package quantities, limited manufacturing specifications and other data elements can be included.

- Just In Time (JIT)

Just-in-Time (JIT) is an economical method of controlling inventory costs. Forms are not stocked in a warehouse in the traditional way, but are produced as needed in the quantities needed at or near the locations where they will be used.

- Freight Optimization

One technique for reducing shipping costs is the application of freight optimization principles. This entails knowledge and coordination of the production of multiple forms inventory items in the same manufacturing plant; then combining them into a single shipment. This process can as easily be applied, as well, to shipping items from a warehouse to one or more using locations in similar combinations. Not only does the freight arrive together, but also the warehouse handling of that freight is streamlined – both of which save costs.

- Other

One other technique for tracking inventory bears mentioning. RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) labeling provides an electronic signal identifying each package, its contents and whatever other information may be included in its coding.

- Forms Fulfillment

In addition to the traditional method of supplying forms to users in response to their own inventory requisitions, it may be appropriate – especially when one or more forms are new and immediate wide deployment is necessary – to distribute a base supply of each item to each the expected users (or departments) without their first submitting a requisition. Forms fulfillment methods should be flexible enough to satisfy both routine and special situations.

- Print-on-Demand

Print-on-Demand (POD) is similar to just-in-time production, except that usually the user produces the production is done locally by the user who needs the form.

- Receiving

Management of inventory begins upon receipt of the forms stock. Receiving activities require accepting shipments, accounting for and matching quantities listed on shipping documents from the shipper, decisions regarding where stock is to be located, stock rotation activities where appropriate, and filling of existing back orders.

- Inventory Control

Avoiding stock-out situations is a key component of a good inventory control system. Maintenance of accurate records reflecting all receipts, stock locations, distributions, destructions and reorders is critical.

- Shipping

Shipping activities are usually categorized into three basic scenarios: 1) shipments to users to fill requisitions, 2) shipments between warehouse locations to balance stock levels and 3) return-to-vendor shipment when an error is discovered or for some other reason stock must be returned. Needless to say, accurate records must be kept of each transaction and inventory levels adjusted accordingly.

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Note: This information may be useful to a forms professional preparing for the Certified Form Systems Professional examination offered by Business Forms Management Association. <http://www.bfma.org/certification/CFSP.htm>