

## ***I. Executive Summary***

There is little current information in the forms management field about existing standard practices and best practices. Essociates Group proposes a research project to study these areas. A survey of willing forms managers and an extensive telephone interview with selected members of that group will provide information on standard practices. Further, a limited number of companies who are known to have exemplary forms management programs will be contacted for best practices. The project sponsors will determine the content focus of the best practices study.

This project proposal solicits your sponsorship of this research study. As a sponsor, you will provide input into specific areas to be examined, what specific questions you want answers to, what industry segments to be included, and other specifics about the overall study.

## ***II. Current Situation***

The North American business forms industry is large, diverse and highly fragmented. It consists of at least six segments.

- I. End users of forms, managed by forms managers, analysts and designers in major companies
- II. Forms manufacturers
- III. Forms distributors
- IV. Other manufacturers, including commercial printers, in-house print shops, specialty printers and others
- V. Electronic forms software developers
- VI. Forms consultants

The industry has experienced significant changes over the past 20 years. Many companies have downsized the forms management function; while others have outsourced some or all of it. Electronic and Internet forms have changed the way forms are developed within these companies. Forms manufacturers, faced with declining demand for pre-printed forms, especially multiple part forms, have consolidated or gone out of business. Forms distributors have added new products to their product mix, thereby diluting forms as a percent of total sales. Electronic forms developers have come and gone, with considerable consolidation within the industry. Adobe Systems and, recently, Microsoft Corporation have become the dominant forms software companies. And yet, electronic forms have failed to meet forecasts, especially outside the firewall (external forms). Forms consultants continue to use advancing technology to assist their clients in improving their businesses.

## ***III. Need***

Amidst all this rapid change, the associations that track trends and changes have also changed. One result is that there is little information available about what end users are doing to manage the forms that support their major business processes.

In Canada, the Canadian General Standards Board is developing forms management standards that companies can use to structure, staff and support forms management efforts. No such effort currently exists within the United States.

The Business Forms Management Association has many members throughout the world. Through various means (Symposium, Forms Institutes, Formsplace online forum, and networking), members are searching for best practice guidelines, job descriptions, organization structure, compensation guidelines, and other data regarding forms management. Senior management frequently does not have the information they need to plan for the management of forms within their companies. Forms managers experience frustration, as the value they provide is not well understood.

Yet, all companies, large and small, have a forms management function, either planned or by default. Properly organized, this function can provide stunning cost reduction, process improvement, sales increases, customer support and retention, and other strategic benefits to the total organization.

#### **IV. Proposal**

A gap currently exists between perceived value of the forms management function and how to achieve it. This study will:

- examine standard practices of how companies address forms development and forms management
- provide metrics on standard practices
- prepare case studies on best practices for selected companies that manage their forms well

These selected companies have earned the respect of their peers within the forms community and have demonstrated excellence through value delivered to the company.

Essociates Group proposes to perform a comprehensive analysis of forms management practices from companies selected at random from a group of selected industries. Essociates Group has the expertise, contacts, and analytical skills required to perform such a study.

We plan to enlist a limited number of sponsors. These sponsors will provide input into specific areas to be examined, what specific questions they want answers to, what industry segments to be included, and other specifics about the overall study.

Study results for standard and best practices will be immediately available to sponsors. Beyond that, summaries will be available to any organization for a fee after six months from completion of the study. Survey participants will receive a report summarizing the quantitative data. Further, participants selected for a telephone interview will receive an honorarium of \$50 in the form of a gift certificate to Amazon.com.

#### **V. Methodology**

The study will be divided into three specific areas:

- A standard practices survey made available online and/or mailed to about 2,000 forms managers and other forms professionals, including strong representation from Information Management (IT) professionals. This survey will ask specific questions within six areas.
  - Organization, structure, staffing and scope of the Forms Management function
  - Examination of common standards (style guides) that currently exist
  - Process Analysis – scope, techniques, and staffing
  - Warehousing and Distribution – paper forms include procurement, shipping, warehousing, pick-n-pack, delivery, and inventory control

- Electronic forms includes servers, catalogs, portals, file formats supported, obsolescence process, and differences between "inside-the-firewall" (in-house) and "outside-the firewall" (customer facing forms).
  - Design and design approval process and software used
  - Future plans, changes, and strategies
- Based on feedback from the standard practices survey, telephone interviews with selected participants will be conducted. We anticipate approximately 50 phone interviews designed to provide qualitative feedback that supplements the quantitative feedback.
- We will select a limited number of companies that have been identified as having excellent forms management functions. We will conduct case history studies with these companies to document best practices standards.

## **VI. Deliverables**

Sponsor companies will receive complete study results, including

- access to normalized (detailed) data (specific company identifications will not be included)
- Essociates Group's summaries of findings and conclusions
- summaries of quantitative data.

Each sponsor company may request a presentation from Essociates Group consultants to ask any questions regarding the information provided.

Sponsor companies will also receive the best practices case studies, with a personalized view of the specific areas of interest they request.

After six months, Essociates Group will offer for sale to the general public a report that summarizes the data collected, with our interpretation of trends, practices and recommendations.

## **VII. Cost**

Study sponsor fee is \$7,500. (US), 50% due upon beginning the study; 25% due upon completion of the telephone interviews and 25% due upon delivery of final report.

## **VIII. How to Participate**

To sponsor, complete the Sponsorship Application form at [www.essociatesgroup.com](http://www.essociatesgroup.com) and submit online, or complete the paper form and mail or fax to:

Essociates Group, Inc.  
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 Phone: 913-284-6573  
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For information on the primary consultants for the study, go to <http://www.essociatesgroup.com/>, Meet our Consultants.