

# THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE REAPS BENEFITS OF AN EDRM SYSTEM FROM TOWER SOFTWARE

CASE STUDY  
Northern Ireland Office



Northern Ireland

Streamlined information management make duplication and paper files a thing of the past, and enables savings of £40,000 per year.

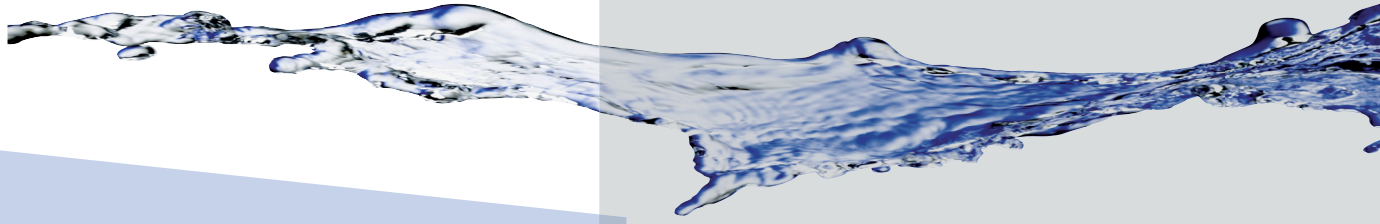
One of the biggest threats to the successful implementation of electronic document and records management (EDRM) solutions has always been duplication. Maintaining parallel electronic and paper files in many ways defeats the obvious EDRM objectives of reducing paper trails and increasing operational efficiency, but still it happens – typically because an organisation's incumbent EDRM system cannot deliver a fully end-to-end solution - and when the 'cracks' appear, they are usually covered over by a paper process!

Northern Ireland Office (NIO) had just such a problem, but it is now seeing real and tangible benefits from its move away from a 'partial' records management application, towards a fully end-to-end solution from Wokingham-based EDRM specialists, TOWER Software. It has effectively removed the need for duplication and paper files, via introduction of specific TRIM record types and e-processes, creating savings so far for the Department of almost £40,000 per year – resulting in its nomination for a 'Whitehall and Westminster World Civil Service Award' in the IT efficiency category.

## Organisation Profile

The NIO plays a pivotal role supporting the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in securing a lasting peace for the region. Based on the 'Good Friday Agreement', in which the rights and identities of all traditions in Northern Ireland are fully respected and safeguarded, the aim is to deliver a safe, stable, 'just', open and tolerant society which can thrive and prosper. He explains, "Information is a valuable asset used to support the many services offered to both internal and external customers. We saw an opportunity to improve electronic communication methods with the objective of achieving economies of scale, and efficiencies of costs.

The introduction of an EDRM system will allow for flexibility for potential restructuring, thus increasing the opportunities to share information and to enable the electronic document to become the record."



## Business Challenges

The NIO's previous records management system for managing government enquiries relied on a database that had limitations and had become temperamental with age, it was not able to capture all of the information required of it and it was only accessible by members of the Ministerial private offices. Fundamentally however, the data it held did not transfer or translate easily between the NIO's Belfast offices and Whitehall.

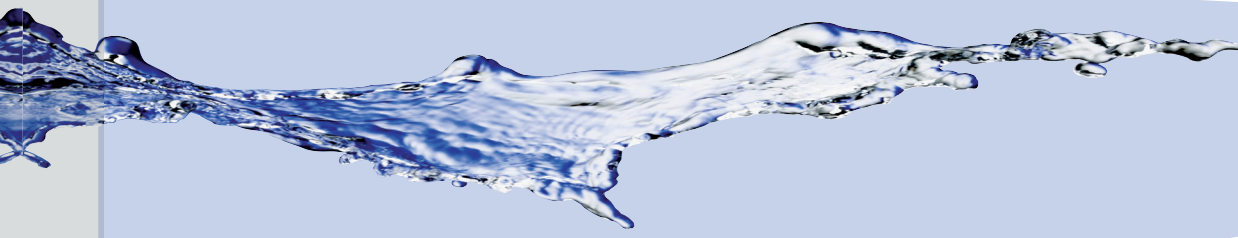
"A large proportion of the records held in the NIO's ICT system 'Oasis' were difficult to manage and were unavailable to other departments," commented Charlene McQuillan from the NIO's Information Management Centre. "There was considerable duplication of records; searching and retrieval of these records had become difficult and slow. It was also often hard to locate the definitive copy of a record. As well as this, the storage space – both physical and electronic - was wasted because of duplication," she added. "We recognised that the handling of these records in relation to business processes could be made more efficient via better use of the TRIM system."

This system is required to capture and process information and correspondence relating to issues requiring the attention of the Secretary of State and/or Ministerial offices. In practice however, the lack of a fully-co-ordinated system resulted in a 'jumbled' process in which digital records were managed in parallel to paper files – often in separate locations. The result invariably meant that it was frequently unclear which individual held responsibility for progressing a particular case on behalf of the Minister.

Particular emphasis was placed on the need to be able to manage the internal publication and dissemination of information in a cost effective manner, while ensuring that the business must have access to information published electronically by other providers, particularly other government departments.



**Stormont Parliament Buildings**



## The Solution

“We wanted a completely electronic process from end-to-end with a single, definitive, shareable record and significantly improved search and metadata access,” continued McQuillan. TRIM Context, from TOWER Software was capable of providing this. It had already been adopted by the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Department for Constitutional Affairs in Whitehall – as well as other Central Government departments in the UK so it was a strong contender as the backbone of the NIO’s improvements to Oasis.

TOWER’s EDRM system was the first to be approved against The National Archives (previously Public Records Office) revised 2002 functional requirements for electronic record management systems. Such sophisticated systems provide a wide range of metadata fields and indexes that can be used to classify records. For example, by customer, author, recipient, date created, date of contract, cost values, urgency etc, all of which allow users to view and group the available documents from the perspective that’s relevant to their work.

Installed by TOWER partner BT Systems, two thousand users throughout the NIO are now supported by TRIM Context, operating a series of improved processes which deliver significantly better service to the people of Northern Ireland and the departments which serve them.

## The Results

TRIM Context now delivers a much more precise and focused EDRM application to the NIO – one in which departmental responsibilities, work flow processes, data security and records management from creation to disposal are both clear and efficiently managed electronically. The efficiency of the system has eliminated the need to create and store separate paper trails and completely eliminated the need for information to be stored on anything other than TRIM Context itself – to which all NIO staff now have access. In other words, according to Charlene McQuillan, it has provided the NIO with a ‘more efficient records management system, by which business processes have become more rational and streamlined.’

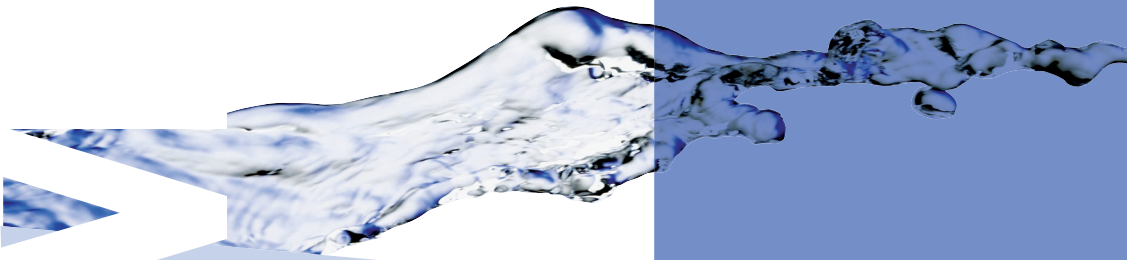
However, while TRIM Context was originally introduced to deliver performance, administrative improvements and compliance with e-government and FOI initiatives, it has also delivered a range of cost savings.

“Clearly, TRIM Context has provided a means of managing records and processes electronically from end-to-end,” concluded McQuillan, “And in doing so we have achieved a key objective within the Modernising Government Agenda.”

In essence, the NIO now has an EDRM solution with which it can more efficiently serve the people of Northern Ireland as well as the broader public service agenda – a capability which TRIM Context is already delivering ably for other sectors of the UK civil service.



**Armagh Cathedral**



# TRIM

## About TOWER Software:

TOWER Software, a leading enterprise content management (ECM) provider, delivers electronic document and records management (EDRM) solutions. TOWER Software's award-winning solutions empower organisations to manage and secure their vital information assets. The TRIM Context® solution is a single, integrated platform that manages business information throughout its complete lifecycle. By relying on its proven domain expertise, strong strategic partnerships, and powerful solutions, TOWER Software enables organisations to improve the accuracy of information on which business decisions are made; maximise efficiency by finding business critical information more quickly and easily; and achieve and maintain standards compliance across industries, resulting in sustained competitive advantage. TOWER Software is a privately held company with operations in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

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