



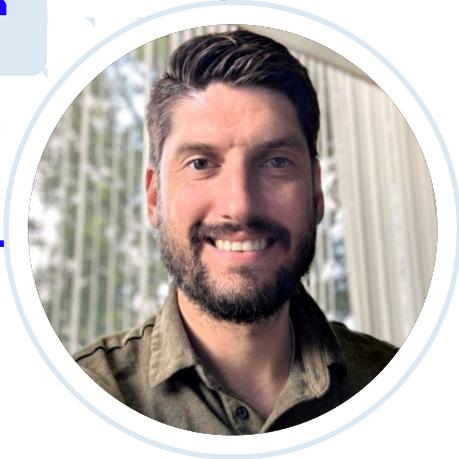
CUSTOMER STORY

City of Elgin Unifies Records Management with Smarsh





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“*Finding something that was completely agnostic, that just sits on top of our systems, was huge for us. With Smarsh, we can let our employees keep using the tools that work best for them while still archiving every message.”*

Aaron Cosentino

Chief Technology Officer
City of Elgin, IL

Customer profile

Located just west of Chicago, the City of Elgin serves over 115,000 residents as Illinois’ sixth-largest municipality. The city employs approximately 1,000 employees spanning departments from public works and utilities to code compliance and public safety. As Elgin delivers these mission-critical services, it needs to govern an increasingly complex communications landscape to deliver on its commitment to its constituents.

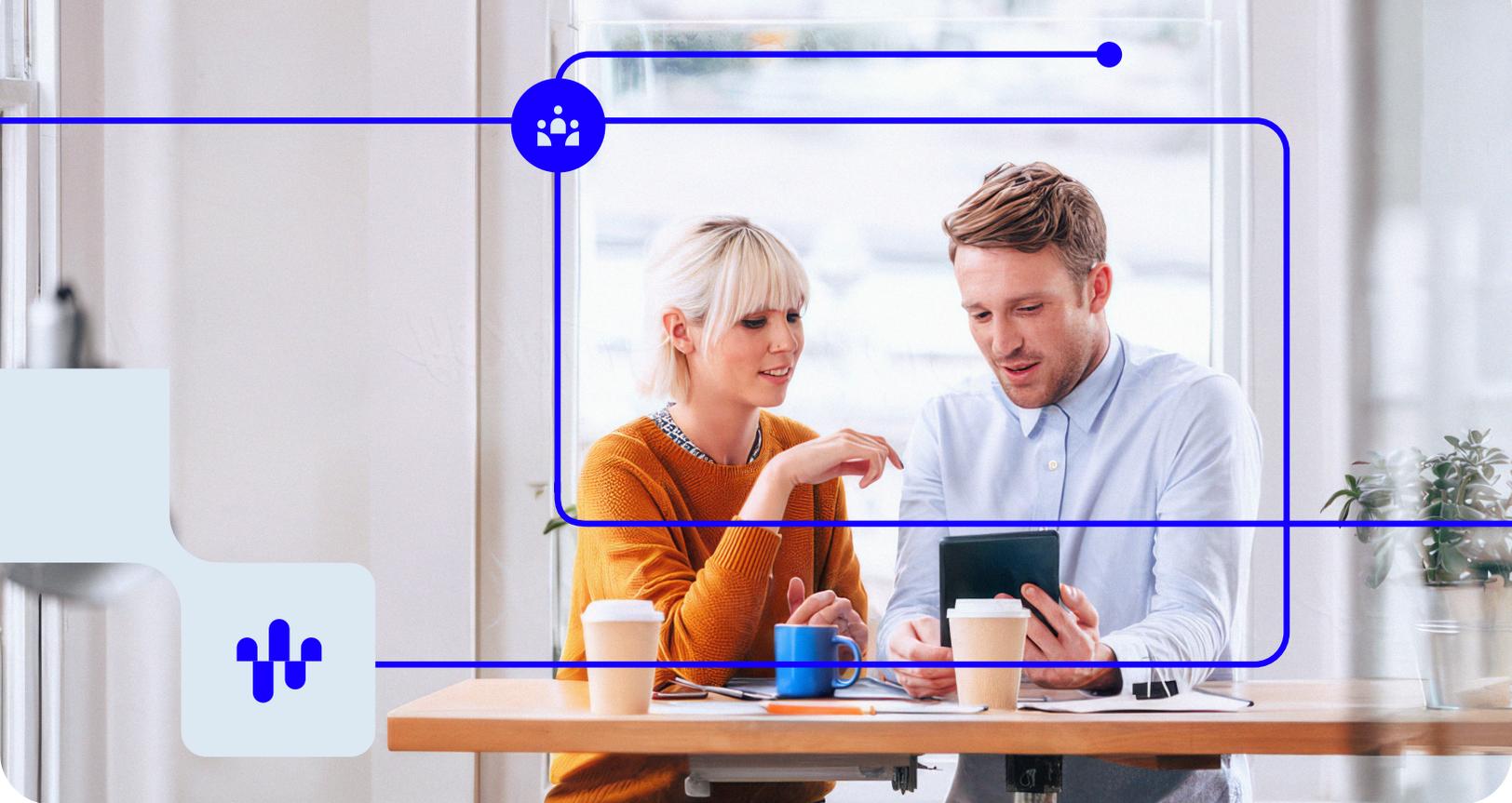
The challenge: Fragmented communications creating records management burden

Like any local government agency, the City of Elgin is mandated by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to give public access to official government records. This is a vital component of local government accountability and trust.

Before implementing Smarsh, the City of Elgin struggled with a fragmented approach to records management that created significant inefficiencies, especially when responding to public records requests.

Aaron Cosentino has 17 years of institutional knowledge with the city, which provides him with unique cross-departmental perspective on records management challenges.

“I’ve been down in the city manager’s office as assistant city manager and served as our neighborhood services director. I have a pretty wide array of experience when it comes to FOIA [responsibilities] and the impact that has around municipal operations,” explains Cosentino.



Now serving as the City of Elgin's Chief Technology Officer, Cosentino oversees the city's IT strategy, infrastructure, and new technology initiatives.

"What we were experiencing is probably not uncommon," notes Cosentino. "We have a wide variety of ways that employees communicate with each other. E-mail was the primary one historically. But over the last decade, we've been slowly adding more and more – [Verizon text messaging](#), [Slack](#) as our primary instant messaging platform, and [Salesforce](#) as our CRM."

This proliferation of communication channels created a substantial burden for the IT department when records needed to be retrieved. For each FOIA request, staff had to:

- 1 Search Salesforce separately for case information
- 2 Search [Chatter](#) (Salesforce's messaging platform) for related discussions
- 3 Conduct independent email searches
- 4 Perform separate Slack searches
- 5 Manually collect text messages from city-issued devices

"One of our primary pain points was having to go into each system for any given FOIA request and then doing those separate searches manually," says Cosentino. "It was incredibly time-consuming and unsustainable. We have our legal department who would go through it after the fact. But the initial finding of those records and retrieving those and putting them in a format that business users could actually use... that fell on IT."



To complicate the matter, different departments have different needs. Utilities relied heavily on Slack for equipment malfunction alerts, while the 311 contact center depended on Salesforce for case management. Forcing uniformity could lead to shadow IT problems – such as shadow conversations that fall outside official systems – rather than solving compliance challenges.



Think about what happens if we don't do this. There's going to be a day when someone asks for information and our response can't be, 'We just didn't capture that.' The reputational damage for a public body like the City of Elgin would be too much. The risk doesn't outweigh the cost."

Aaron Cosentino

Chief Technology Officer
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The solution: A technology-agnostic approach to records management

Rather than forcing standardization across all departments – which could drive communication to unsanctioned channels – the City of Elgin sought a solution that would adapt to existing workflows while ensuring comprehensive records capture.

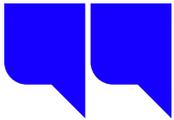


What Smarsh lets us do is meet employees where they already are – Slack, email, Salesforce, text – without forcing major behavior changes, but still capturing everything we need for compliance."

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The city implemented [Smash Professional Archive](#), which provides local government agencies with a centralized, automated solution to capture, store, and easily search employee communications, streamlining compliance with the Public Records Act and reducing manual effort for records requests. This allowed them to automatically capture communications across their approved channels – email, Slack, Salesforce Chatter, and text messages from city-issued devices – creating one searchable repository for all business communications.



We needed a way to just literally go from five systems and five separate searches to just one system and one search. And that's what Smash did for us."

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Chief Technology Officer
City of Elgin, IL

The result: Streamlined records management

Since implementing [Smash Professional Archive](#), the City of Elgin has dramatically overhauled its records management processes. The platform now automatically captures communications across all approved channels, removing the need for manual collection and consolidation.

Key operational benefits:



Automated capture:

Employees don't have to manually archive text messages as they are automatically captured and archived with Smash.



Confidence to meet FOIA requirements:

Cosentino and his team don't have to think about records management as Professional Archive keeps it ready for search and retrieval.



Reduced IT burden:

By automating the capture and consolidation of records, IT staff can focus on strategic initiatives rather than manual retrieval.



Security and peace of mind:

Data is securely stored and meets the most stringent requirements across highly regulated industries.





Policy and training: Supporting technical solutions with human processes

The City of Elgin recognized that technology alone couldn't solve its records management challenges. Comprehensive policies and training programs ensure employees understand their responsibilities regarding electronic communications.

“Training and etiquette is vitally important,” Cosentino emphasizes. “When we start talking about using Slack, IMs, or what have you, I think folks get lulled into a false sense of security. They feel as though there’s a privacy element there, when there’s not.”

Key lessons:

1. **Communication awareness:** All business communications, regardless of platform, are subject to FOIA and may become public.
2. **Modern communication norms:** Staff learn that elements like emojis are also captured and archived.
3. **Clear policy boundaries:** The city clarifies which communication tools are currently approved for business use and those that are not.



Beyond compliance to institutional knowledge

While regulatory compliance initially drove Elgin's search for an archiving solution, they discovered additional benefits beyond meeting FOIA requirements.

"Retention has tremendous benefits from institutional knowledge and from knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing," Cosentino explains. "Especially when we are now in the world of AI and we have these language models that they still need to be trained on something. Smarsh helps us preserve that so we can learn from our own history and operate smarter."

The city is now working through a "fine balancing act" of determining optimal retention periods and weighing knowledge preservation against potential risks. While certain correspondence must be retained for 15 months, Cosentino sees value in strategic longer retention.

Practical approaches to text messaging

To ensure text messages are properly captured, the City of Elgin issues city-owned phones to many employees.

"For city-owned cell phones, text messaging is captured," Cosentino says. "For personal devices, we are not capturing people's text messages. And that's why, if you're going to give them the option to use text messaging, putting a city-owned device in their hands is going to make your life a lot easier."

This approach offers clear boundaries between personal and business communications and helps the city avoid gaps in recordkeeping.

Looking ahead: Preparing for emerging technologies

The City of Elgin is proactively addressing emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, with broad guidelines around large language models in development.

By implementing Smarsh, the city remains flexible, no matter which new communication channels appear. Their technology-agnostic strategy ensures they can comply with records requirements while allowing employees to use tools that support effective public service.

"Having a flexible partner like Smarsh — one that can integrate with new tools as they emerge — is incredibly reassuring. It gives us confidence that we're covered now and in the future."

Aaron Cosentino

Chief Technology Officer
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However, this wasn't just about compliance — it was about reflecting how government communication actually happens in a digital era.



“What’s your alternative?” Cosentino asks. “You have these communications occurring constantly and you’re just asking for trouble if you’re not getting ahead of it. I think it’s absolutely worth it. Smarsh makes sure we’re not caught off guard when those inevitable requests come in.”

In a modern municipal environment with 1,000 employees communicating electronically across multiple platforms, comprehensive archiving isn’t optional – it’s essential.



There’s going to be a cost for archiving – that’s just part of doing business in a modern, digital environment. For us, the cost is far outweighed by the value Smarsh provides in compliance, transparency, and knowledge retention.”

Aaron Cosentino

Chief Technology Officer
City of Elgin, IL

By implementing Smarsh Professional Archive, the City of Elgin has improved its approach to records management, moving from fragmented, manual processes to a unified, automated solution that preserves institutional knowledge for the future.

Ready to enhance your organization’s approach to records management?

[Contact Smarsh today](#) to learn how to modernize your records management processes.



Smarsh® enables companies to transform oversight into foresight by surfacing business-critical signals from the most in-demand communications channels. Regulated organizations of all sizes rely upon the Smarsh portfolio of cloud-native digital communications capture, retention and oversight solutions to help them identify regulatory and reputational risks within their communications data before those risks become fines or headlines.

Smarsh serves a global client base spanning the top banks in North America, Europe and Asia, along with leading brokerage firms, insurers, and registered investment advisors and U.S. state and local government agencies. To discover more about the future of communications capture, archiving and oversight, visit www.smarsh.com.

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Customer Story - 11/25

