Uniting digital and sustainable transformation agendas

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Foreword

Sustainability and digitisation are two of the key business challenges of our time yet in my opinion these two words are not spoken about together enough.

The world today faces many sustainability challenges, from the climate emergency and biodiversity loss to our throwaway culture and widening social inequality. At the same time, our world and way of life is undergoing a digital transformation – from how we shop and how we work to how we play and how we communicate. These two agendas are not unconnected, digitisation has an important role to play in tackling sustainability challenges yet also has the potential to add to them if unchecked.

At Crown Information Management, we have been transforming our business, and bringing sustainability and digitisation together to solve business problems and create financial, environmental and social benefits from changing how we manage records. In this report, we share the experiences and learnings from our digitisation and sustainability journeys to date. We explain the steps businesses embark on to digitise records management and the

potential sustainability impacts of each. We also acknowledge that digitisation has a social and environmental footprint and look at how to minimise the negative impacts of this business transformation process.

We are evidently not alone in believing these worlds are coming together but what is the future vision of sustainable and digital records management and how do we get there?
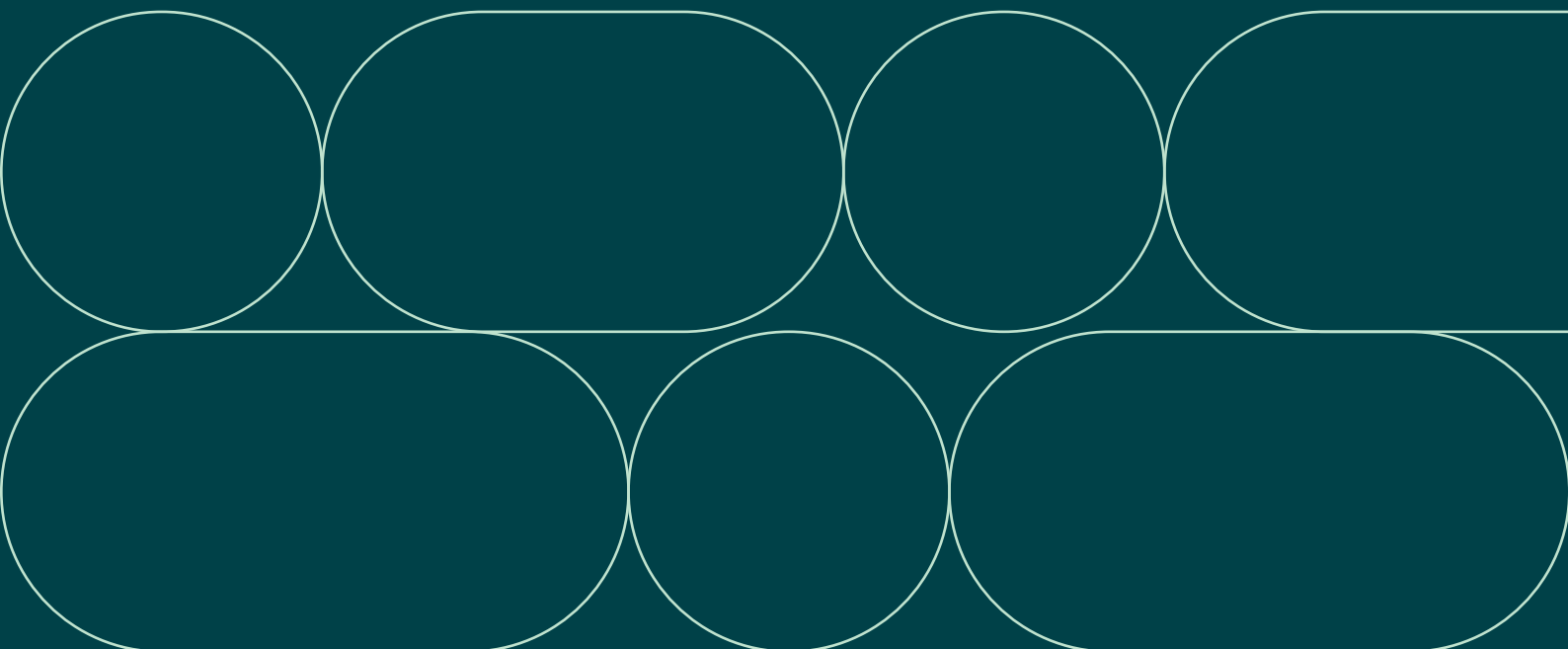
We don't claim to have all the answers, this is a work in progress, but in this report we share our thoughts so far. We hope these are helpful and would love to continue this conversation with you.

Tim Rushent
Director of Digital EMEA
Crown Information Management

Contents

The changing landscape

Environmental and social challenges front of mind

Our world faces a host of environmental and social challenges, mostly of our own making. Against this bleak landscape, the world is changing and so is what we expect from businesses. Pressure from stakeholders, increasing regulations and the stark reality of our situation are driving organisations to be more responsible and integrate sustainability into what they do and how they do it. And with this new way of operating, sustainability is becoming everyone's role as organisations look to deliver social, environmental and economic benefits to their communities and beyond as part of business as usual.

The single biggest health threat facing humanity.

United Nations on climate change

69%
average decline in wildlife populations since 1970[3]

Richest 1% own
46%
of world wealth

And that wealth is increasing faster than for everyone else[6]

98% of world exposed to higher temperatures in 2023

Made twice as likely by carbon dioxide pollution[1]

Global water demand to outstrip supply by
40% by 2030[4]

Rising inequality affects
70%
of world's population

With income disparities creating division and discontent, hampering economic and social development[7]

10 hottest years in UK, all since 2002

None of the ten coldest years have occurred since 1963[2]

700 million
people risk being displaced by drought by 2030[5]

[1] https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/nearly-all-worlds-population-exposed-global-warming-over-june-sept-study-2023-09-08/

[2] https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2019/state-of-the-uk-climate-2018

[3] https://www.worldwildlife.org/press-releases/69-average-decline-in-wildlife-populations-since-1970-says-new-wwf-report

[4] https://turningthetide.watercommission.org/

[5] https://www.zurich.com/en/knowledge/topics/climate-change/how-climate-change-will-impact-business-everywhere

[6] https://inequality.org/facts/global-inequality/

[7] https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1055681

An increasingly digital world

At the same time, our world is becoming increasingly digitised, with big data and interconnectivity integral to our everyday lives.

Technological innovations such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, automation and blockchain are disrupting and evolving society and whole industries. Digitisation is changing how we do things, from how we manage our money and how we communicate to how we access healthcare, exercise and learning opportunities.

It's changing what we think, with algorithms reinforcing our existing beliefs. Living our lives increasingly through technology is changing how we behave, with both positive and negative effects on our brains, mental and physical wellbeing and our relationships.

And digitisation is changing how businesses operate – how they gather and manage intelligence, carry out and integrate processes, connect with their employees, clients and whole value chains - and ultimately how they deliver value. In this new era, every business is expected to be a technology business and digitally transform to differentiate their products and services, improve the customer experience, increase productivity, drive efficiencies and reduce costs, and better enable flexibility and security. The global pandemic accelerated this expectation, with many businesses now accepting hybrid working as the norm post Covid. There is a real challenge to enable employees to work equally effectively both in the office and remotely, and digitisation is at the heart of this.

Global digital transformation market to hit

$1,010 billion by 2025
Up from $470 billion in 2020[8]

The interconnection of digitisation and sustainability

These two worlds don't exist in isolation, with the interconnection of digitisation and sustainability creating both opportunities and threats to our world today. On a positive note, digitisation is enabling sustainable development across many industries and communities through big data, smart systems and other new digital tools that are providing greater intelligence, improved efficiency, wider access to services, and better monitoring. These technological developments are supporting everything from sustainable food production and industrial manufacturing, access to clean, safe drinking water and better healthcare facilities, to green energy production and efficient energy usage, and climate and ecological research and monitoring.

[8] https://newdigitalage.co/technology/five-trends-changing-the-future-of-digital-transformation

Digital technology contributes towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 17 global goals adopted by all United Nations member states to create a better and fairer world for all by 2030[9]

But the relationship isn't entirely positive. Our new digital world is creating environmental pollution and extensive carbon emissions. Production of electronic products that give us access to the digital world – and the e-waste generated at the end of their life – is causing ecological destruction. Whilst embracing digitisation is a necessity for all of us, there is unarguably a need to reduce the damaging carbon, ecological and societal footprint of these developments, and actively manage data proliferation, to ensure that digital technologies are and remain a force for good.

Carbon footprint of the cloud larger than entire airline industry[10]

Whilst enabling so much of our digital activities

Data centres can consume electricity of 50,000 homes[11]

With cooling accounting for more than 40% of electricity consumption

[9] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969721036111

[10] https://computing.mit.edu/news/the-staggering-ecological-impacts-of-computation-and-the-cloud/

[11] https://computing.mit.edu/news/the-staggering-ecological-impacts-of-computation-and-the-cloud/

Records management
in this new era

Whilst the negative sustainability impacts of businesses (in particular, environmental) are often associated with traditional sectors such as energy production, manufacturing and transport, we need to be thinking about sustainability in relation to new sectors and new ways of working. Indeed, we hope we have shown that these two agendas cannot be seen in isolation.

The digital transformation journey

Businesses going digital need the right records management solutions and services, aligned to their business problem and digital maturity. A digital transformation service will build a digital journey that identifies and solves your business problems, and take you step by step to a 'digital for all' future.

Digital transformation journey by digital maturity

Digital Maturity	Records Management Solutions and Services									
Digital Beginner Getting Started No Strategy	Business Process Review						Digital Mailroom Services	Data Cleansing Classify	Workflow Solutions	Doc Management Content Services
Digital Champion Completely Digital Strategy in maturity	☑	Paper Reduction Audits	Scan on Demand	Bulk Scanning	Day Forward Scanning	Simple Cloud Hosting	✉	⚙	⇄	💼
Digital Enthusiast Mostly Digital Strategy in infancy		🗄	⊡		📄	☁				

◄─── **Knowledge services** ───► ◄─── **Quick wins, simpler project and business case** ───► ◄─── **Largerproject, more complexity strong ROI** ───►

Overlaying a sustainability journey

A sustainability journey needs to follow a hierarchy of elimination, reduction, substitution and, finally, compensation (see the IEMA Greenhouse Gas Management Hierarchy as a useful guide). Planting trees and carbon offsetting might sound great but they are not going to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of records management or solve the sustainability challenges we face. These controversial compensation activities will be seen as greenwashing if not carried out in addition to the earlier stages of the hierarchy.

Applying IEMA Greenhouse Gas Management Hierarchy to records management

Eliminate
Stop printing paper and rely on the digital record

Reduce
Destroy outdated physical documents and reduce infrastructure

Substitute
Convert to digital, remove physical handling and increase collaboration

Compensate
Protect natural resources, invest in renewables and carbon capture

Combining these two journeys

As you progress through your sustainability and digitisation journey, there will be many opportunities to reduce negative sustainability impacts and create positive ones. Transitioning from physical to digital records management will enable reduced vehicle usage and the need for new vehicles, reducing both tailpipe emissions and embodied carbon. Less vehicle use will also reduce air pollution and congestion in the local area. With fewer physical records being stored, less warehousing is required and energy consumption for lighting, heating, dehumidifiers etc is also reduced.
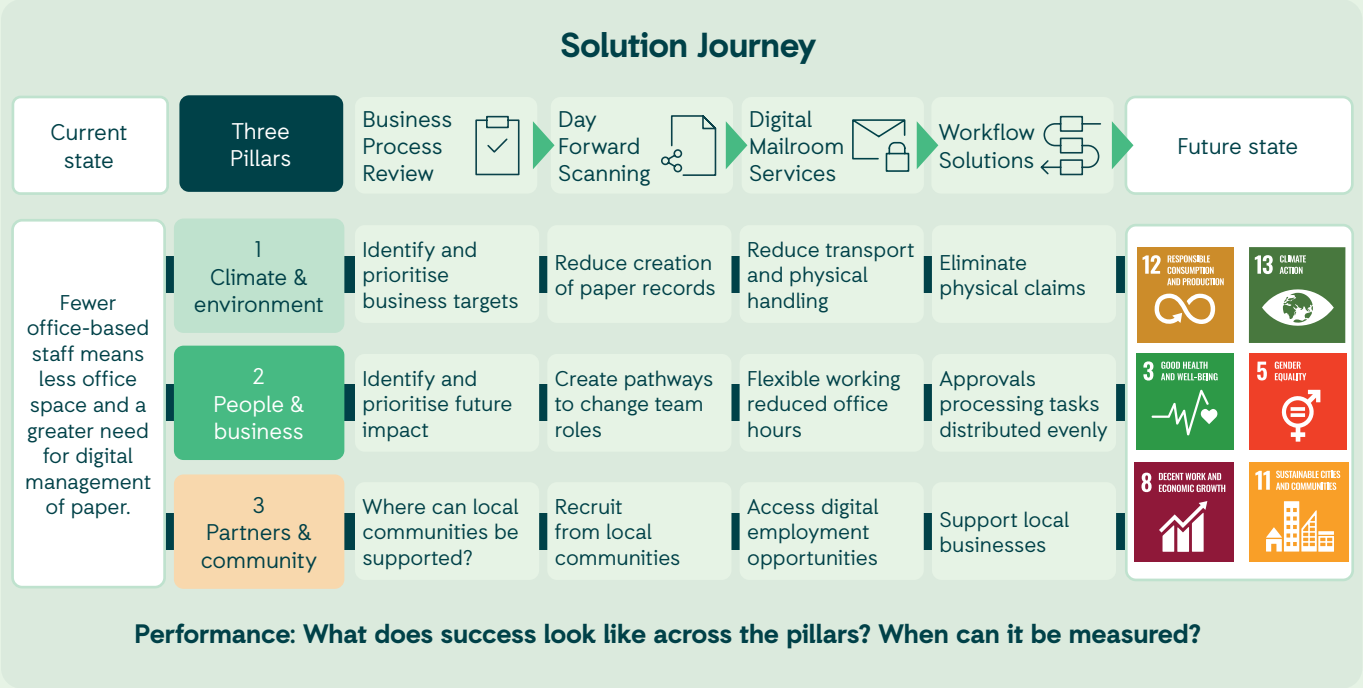
A reduction in stored items will also require less packaging material for storage. As a digital transformation progresses, less paper and ink will be used, reducing resource consumption and waste (though the latter is likely to increase in the short term as physical records are destroyed and recycled).

Whilst some traditional records management job roles such as drivers are likely to be reduced over time, there will be opportunities for role enhancement for other roles, presenting training and development prospects for existing employees. With digitisation enabling flexibility and different ways of working, there may also be the opportunity to create new jobs that deliver greater social value, providing roles for those more disadvantaged in the community. We summarise the business and sustainability opportunities in the below table.

Blend digital and sustainable journeys

Solution Journey

Current state	Three Pillars	Business Process Review	Day Forward Scanning	Digital Mailroom Services	Workflow Solutions	Future state

Fewer office-based staff means less office space and a greater need for digital management of paper.	1 Climate & environment	Identify and prioritise business targets	Reduce creation of paper records	Reduce transport and physical handling	Eliminate physical claims	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION / 13 CLIMATE ACTION
	2 People & business	Identify and prioritise future impact	Create pathways to change team roles	Flexible working reduced office hours	Approvals processing tasks distributed evenly	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING / 5 GENDER EQUALITY
	3 Partners & community	Where can local communities be supported?	Recruit from local communities	Access digital employment opportunities	Support local businesses	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH / 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Performance: What does success look like across the pillars? When can it be measured?

Tips to bring sustainability into your digitisation journey

At Crown, we're still in the early stages of our journey, learning as we go. While we don't have all the answers, we're sharing the insights we've gained so far to help support your digital transformation:

Recognise the opportunities

Working with our carbon specialist, we estimate that going digital from start to finish can achieve a 98% reduction in carbon footprint compared to the traditional storage of paper records, largely achieved through reducing the amount of paper created in the first instance. We also estimate that each year in the UK, the storage of redundant physical records is responsible for approximately 8,300 tonnes of CO_2e. There are huge opportunities to reduce the impact of records management on our planet, even just by ending the storage of unnecessary records, whether physical or digital.

Sustainability is everybody's job now

We provided carbon literacy training to all management and client-facing staff, empowering them to identify opportunities and drive change within their areas of the business. Appointing a skilled sustainability champion within our team has been key to driving progress and keeping sustainability a top priority. It's essential to engage your entire team in the sustainability journey. Relying solely on individuals or consultants to address sustainability is not enough—without full team involvement, meaningful change is unlikely to succeed.

Start small and easy then think big

Small, quick wins such as offering scan on demand services has created huge learnings for us, providing confidence and showing the potential for future gains. Starting too big can cause projects to stall, sustainability gains to be marginalised, and good intentions to fall by the wayside. From our small start, we are now able to think big, integrating sustainability into digital transformation to enable us to protect nature, create less waste and pollution, create better socially valuable jobs and reduce carbon emissions at all stages of our transformation and across the whole lifecycle of records management.

Encourage behaviour change from the start

We see raising awareness of the opportunities of digital and sustainable transformation and the commercial, environmental and social benefits that can arise as an important part of our role. There are many tools available to you to encourage stakeholders to change behaviours such as introducing incentives for sustainability, or practices such as digital signatures as standard. We are collaborating with our colleagues, clients, suppliers and other partners to ensure that digitisation and responsible business are central to the way we do business going forward.

Minimising the negative impacts of digitisation

Digitisation presents the opportunity for many sustainability benefits but it's also important to take steps to minimise the negative impacts of the digitisation process:

Replace paper, don't duplicate

The focus needs to be on transitioning away from paper completely, recognising that this may be a phased approach. Making paper use reduction a key part of the strategy is critical to avoid increasing emissions.

Facilities running on renewable energy

Whether it's digital facilities as you transform, or physical facilities for short term storage of remaining paper records, look for service providers with facilities that run on renewable energy.

Service providers with strong sustainability credentials

Assess the sustainability credentials of the service providers you work with and ensure they are aware of their impacts and taking steps to maximise their positive sustainability impacts and minimise their negative impacts.

Low carbon transport for what still needs transported

Where you still need to transport documents physically, can low carbon transport options such as electric vehicles or bikes be used?

Good recycling contracts

Digitisation will result in increased waste in the short term as documents are shredded and recycled. A contract with a reputable waste management provider that prioritises the circular economy and waste hierarchy will help ensure the paper is recycled effectively.

Destroying records no longer required

Whether records are held physically or digitally, storing records that are no longer needed has a substantial environmental impact. Tools for viewing records remotely can help make quick informed decisions about what to keep and digitise and what to destroy.

Consultation and support in the transition

While a digital project may lead to organisational changes, providing consultation and support during the transition can help ease the impact on individuals and offer retraining or new opportunities. Additionally, understanding the social issues of the local area can create opportunities for those who are more disadvantaged in the community.

Managing devices for longevity

Whilst your organisation may not be able to use laptops, phones and other devices for their whole lifecycle, you may be able to pass redundant items on to others to benefit society? We regularly refurbish for resale, or donate items, to good causes within our communities.

Consider the whole lifecycle of records

Whilst certain steps in the digitisation process may create greater impact in the shorter term such as destroying paper records creating more waste, the long-term impacts of digitisation will greatly reduce those impacts.

Case study: Crown Information Management journey so far

Crown Records Management sustainability priorities

Since 2020, Crown Records Management and all Crown UK & Ireland brands have shared a sustainable business strategy and a unified approach to the sustainability agenda. We looked at what our different stakeholders want from us, where we can have the biggest positive impacts, and created a vision of what responsible business means to Crown. This led us to identify our sustainability priorities under three core pillars which now define how we do business, and how we further develop and deliver our services.

Our climate and environment

- Net zero
- Circular economy
- Natural resources

Our people and business

- Health safety and wellbeing
- Equality diversity and inclusion
- Employment and skills

Our partners and community

- Giving back
- Driving the agenda
- Supporting our communities

Governance   **Strategy**   **Transparency**   **Communication**

13 CLIMATE ACTION | 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | 5 GENDER EQUALITY | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Our group highlights so far

Net zero by 2040 target for Scopes 1 & 2

Against a 2019 baseline

Awarded Investors in People Silver in 2023

For second time

Maintained CDP's B-List

Achieved in 2023 for 2022 data

52% reduction in Scope 1 & 2 CO2e emissions since 2019

Achieved in 2023 for 2022 data

83% of employees recommend Crown as great place to work

In 2024, up 5% from 2023

Ecovadis Gold Sustainability Rating 2024

For second time

Reporting 4 Scope 3 categories in 2024

1,374 volunteering hours

Used by staff in 2023

Awarded Silver by the 5% club in 2023

For commitment to professional development

Working with BITC

to create Social Impact Strategy

Records information management highlights so far

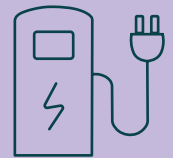**Trained all management and client-facing staff in carbon in 2023**

Transferred 12 of our 13 sites to renewable electricity tariffs

Acquired first 3 electric vans in 2024

Installed 6 EV charging points in 2024

These are now available at 5 out of our 13 locations

41% of properties with solar panels

Our scanning bureau is powered by in house solar and produces close to zero emissions.

Destroyed **60,000** boxes of redundant records,

saving 10t CO_2e per annum by encouraging clients to recycle records no longer needed.

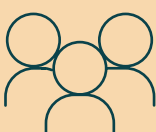**Driving circular approach to Media tape management**

Enabling certified Media Tape reuse in partnership with Insurgo

Our ongoing strategy includes sharing our experience and raising awareness

by speaking at the IRMS conference in 2023 and 2024 and publishing thought leadership content.

Encouraging client behaviour change

by adjusting our pricing structure and raising awareness of the impacts of records management

Closed one of our most energy intensive sites in 2023

Saving what would have been electricity consumption of 541,000 kWh per year

Navigating our way forward

We are now using our three pillars as a sustainable development lens for innovation. We have mapped each of our services against our pillars to identify where we need to tackle the negative impacts and where we have a greater positive impact.

We looked at our paper-based services against our digital services to understand the points of differentiation and the opportunities and challenges they presented. Our findings so far feed into this report and are shaping the future of records management at Crown.

"We have so far invested over £1m in digital transformation services and will continue to evolve our business model and collaborate with clients to reduce the carbon impacts of traditional records management.

We are committed to leading this agenda in our industry and being the service partners of choice to support the transformation for the next era of business.

Dave Fathers
Regional Director,
Crown Information Management
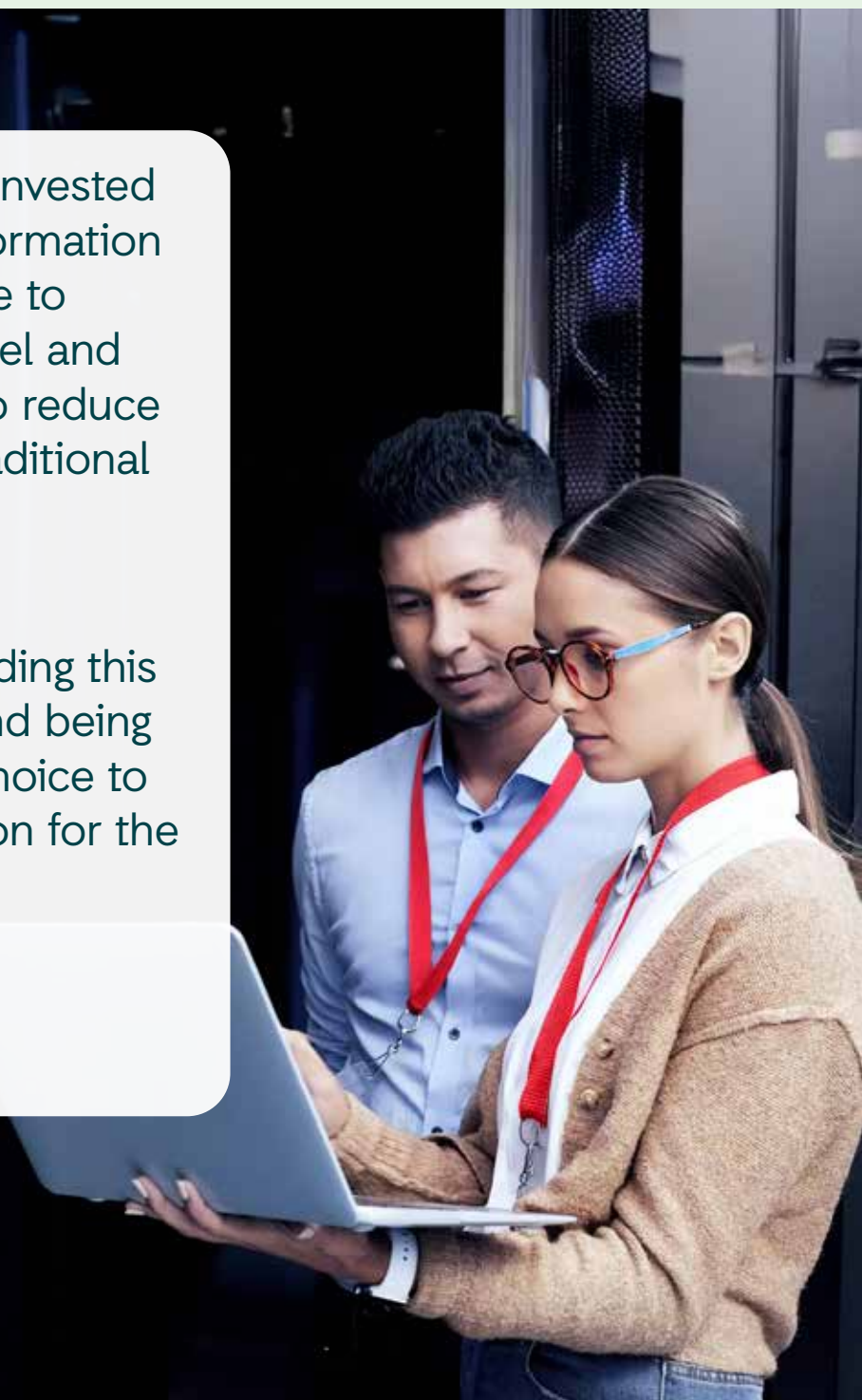
Want to know more? We will continue to share our experience and learnings to drive change across our industry and demonstrate the benefits of responsible business. We welcome a dialogue with anyone who shares our vision and wants to know more about our journey so far. Wherever you are on your journey, Crown Records Management would love to support your digital and sustainability transformation.

Contact: Tim Rushent, Director of Digital EMEA
Email: trushent@crownww.com

Crown Information Management, helps clients to maximise the value of their "corporate memory" through the storage, active management and timely distribution of information assets. Operating in 40 countries, Crown provides secure storage and retrieval of information in physical and electronic format, as well as digital imaging, media management and data destruction. Crown helps companies to remove paper at source, delivering expertise and solutions, driving the digital agenda, ECM solutions and business process reviews, to achieve a digital nirvana.

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