



Information Overload

Issue 5, January 2003

Welcome

To the first edition of the New Year. 2003 looks to be a very busy year for everyone, but especially for those of you who are involved in special projects during this year. To those of you who will be involved with the writing and production of the record keeping plans required to fulfil the State Records Act requirements, did you know that you have only 15 months left to write and submit the plans to the State Records Office?

As we prepare for the New Year, it is time for all those new years resolutions, hands up those of you who have broken them already? Hmm quite a few it seems. Well don't worry, you still have time to implement a plan or strategy to get you through the rest of the year., after all it is easy to change the way you think about things and having firm goals will allow you to achieve what you need to achieve. But you must write them down. Goals that are not written down are just nice ideas. When you put pen to paper, you must be specific. Those nice, warm goals that say I will write my collection management policy this year or my Record Keeping Plan are too large and too vague to be really useful. Break down the larger tasks into smaller achievable weekly or monthly goals, set time aside in your diary and keep the appointment with yourself, because a lack of discipline and procrastination in the short term will cause regret, sleepless nights, unnecessary stress and more time in the office and less time at home with the family in the long term. As Jim Rohn would say – "Don't mistake movement for achievement. It's easy to get faked out by being busy. The question is: Busy doing what?"

We look forward to hearing about your many successes in 2003.

In this issue...

We will be looking at the various storage mediums on offer that will assist you cope with the storage revolution.

- Scary Stuff
- Formats to Emulate
- Libraries aren't immune
- Records Storage guidelines available
- The Life and Times
- A Thought to Ponder.

Scary Stuff

In the 2002 survey of Commonwealth Government record keeping, 87% of record creators reported that their electronic files were located on their computer network or shared drive, only 49% reported that they were also located in their agency's record keeping system, whilst a mere 6% of agencies reported that they captured all

unstructured electronic records into electronic record keeping systems.

To view the full report visit –

www.naa.gov.au

*Information taken from Memento, January 2003
p6*

Formats to Emulate:

We are all aware that obsolescence plagues digital media, and it's only slightly facetious to say that digital information lasts forever – or 5 years, whichever comes first (1), we all know that organisations are struggling to cope with the mountains of digital information being generated on a daily basis, but when it comes to storage only a few organisations are looking at how to solve the long term issues of both preservation and access. These include CENSA (The Collaborative Electronic Notebook System Association), VERS, InterPARES; those organisations who are

using XML/HTML/SML such as Kodak and of course Adobe. Adobe appears to be one of the only software developers who are able to demonstrate an understanding of the needs and requirements for both backwards and forwards compatibility that Microsoft and Lotus could well take heed of.

However, PDF is not the answer to all our woes, despite their public commitment to provide 100% backward compatibility for at least 25 years. Adobe Acrobat is a proprietary piece of software, owned and run by a company that could (unlikely though it may be) go under, who would support the format then? PDF cannot cope with such things as databases, and what of those electronic records that have been created on older formats that were never converted into PDF in the first place. Who remembers 5 and a quarter inch or even 8 inch floppy discs, or the 3 inch discs used by AMSTRAD?

So what? I hear you cry, why should you be bothered with records that were created using an old piece of software, after all no-one needs to be able to read that information do they? Well did you know that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires records for demonstrating regulatory compliance to be maintained for at least 25 years. Patent records should be maintained for a minimum of 35 years, Trade Secrets eg, the formula for Coca Cola must be retained until the information is made public (if ever), medical information relating to the development, manufacture and implantation of replacement body parts (pacemakers, organ transplants and in the future, genetic therapy records) to be kept for the length of time the patient is alive, and beyond in the case of negligence. It is not simply a case that the records are retained, they must maintain their integrity and be readily accessible should the law require it. (2)

Whilst we could archive every piece of software ever used, plus all the necessary hardware required to read it, and the servers that the information is stored upon, or we can migrate the current information across the various platforms and upgrades as our organisations go about their day to day business activities, trying to maintain some

semblance of integrity along the way, we are still faced with finding a way of reading those documents that were produced on software that we don't have a copy of, and can't find anyone who still has copies of Obsolete 1.5.

Thankfully, some organisations are now looking at this very real problem and are trying to fill the gap left by other technologically challenged solutions.

The National Archives of Australia have created a new piece of software that allows original electronic documents to be viewed on computer without having the correct and original piece of software. Called Xanadu, it stands for XML Archiving Normalising and Displaying Universally, (and assuming that XML has been used as the "mark up language"). You can read the original document in its original format. Emulation software of this type will certainly be a necessity in the future. Then again, we could always print everything onto paper and store it – can't we?

(1) *Rothenburg, Jeff; Ensuring the longevity of digital documents; Scientific American, January 1995 p42*

(2) *Statistical information taken from Lysakowski, R and Leibowitz, Z; Looming information age crisis expected to cause trillion dollar losses over next 20 years. CENSA, The Collaborative Electronic Notebook System Association, Woburn, Massachusetts, USA, 2000, p7*

Libraries aren't immune:

On the contrary libraries have been struggling with the tricky problem of providing access to decaying digital media for decades. The National Library of Australia conducted a survey of its digital collection, and the results are quite staggering. In a search of its collection of material some 405 items contained floppy discs (1997), 64 were chosen as a representative sample to see if migration from one format to another was possible. (Technology Refreshing).

Due to a number of problems such as security tags being stuck over the discs, lack of correct hardware and/or software required to read the discs, only 40 could be transferred to the new medium (in this case

CD-R), the remaining 24 had to be retained in their original format until a decision made as to whether to continue with alternative means of preservation. To read the full report, go to:

Woodyard, Deborah; *Farewell my floppy: a strategy for migration of digital information*; National Library of Australia 1997;
www.nla.gov.au/nla/staffpaper/valadw.html

Records storage guidelines available

Document storage guidelines are now available from the National Archives of Australia to compliment the storage standard announced in September 2001.

The voluntary code of best practices is aimed at storing semi-active and inactive Commonwealth documents before they are legally destroyed.

Storing to the Standard: Guidelines for Implementing the Standard for the Physical Storage of Commonwealth Records is a set of guidelines for government agencies to use to arrange their in-house storage or to help with the selection of out sourced storage. Anne Robertson, assistant director of standards and policy at the National Archives said the guidelines can also be used to guide the design of storage facilities and can be used as a checklist.

The 50 page document is available as a PDF from the National Archives of Australia web Site:
www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/storage/standard.html

Information taken from IDM News Update January 8th 2003.

The Life and Times:

Medium	Approximate time until obsolete:	Approximate Physical Lifetime
Magnetic Tape	5 years	1 year
Videotape	5 years	1-2 years
Magnetic Disk	5 years	5-10 years
Optical Disk (CD)	10 years	30 years
Microfilm	-	200 years *
Paper	-	Indefinite *

* assuming that items are stored in appropriate conditions

A Thought to Ponder:

“The paperless office is not quite a reality. Statistics show that we use more paper today than at any point in our history”

Michael Lurie, Vol 18, Issue 4, Nov 2002. Informaa Quarterly

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Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd is a niche specialist consultancy group, employment agency and trainers in the records management and library fields, as well as being the owner and producer of the Australian Records Retention Manual.

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