

Editorial Extract FILEforce

Extracted From Paperless Ponderings
File Force International Pty Ltd
1 300 300 395 (Australia)
theboss@fileforce.net

Serious Records Management

SUBJECT

WHAT IS THE RIGHT FILING SYSTEM?

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While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the attached information it is given to you as an expression of opinion of the author. File Force does not purport to be nor is it an expert on the topic. Paperless Ponderings in the periodic publication of FILEforce International © 2003., Harry E Haxton BEcon, FRMA, AFAIM. Editor.

Well, the answer is there really isn't ONE system capable of providing you with everything you want for your information retrieval system.

Each and every organisation consists of various parts, each with differing information retrieval requirements.

In general terms there are at least five such parts

- o Manufacturing or services
- o Sales
- o Finance
- o Personnel
- o Administration

History tells us these various sections are generally managed by a variety of high-level people and they are mostly in physically discernable sections of the physical office. To some extent they tend to operate in isolation, and we don't see their different needs. Then some "consultant" comes along and suggests you need a "centralised" filing system. That's as may be, but no one system will work for the whole organisation.

Manufacturing or services...

Requires that there is information on the processes of manufacture, suppliers, raw materials, orders. In the case of, say, a legal or engineering firm, the services are the completion of a "job". Consequently you will have files about "things", either referred to by numbers, allocated from a register for jobs, or by alphabetical files for suppliers, materials, plant etc.

Sales...

Is all about getting the money from the customer to your bank account by the shortest possible route. Customers are either businesses or people and they are generally organised alphabetically. For your prospects (the people you want to buy from you but who have not yet bought), you will need a "prospects" system to help you get them to "customer" status ASAP. Generally, a good CRM will do the trick - see our previous newsletter for more on that. Sales can also need research materials on trends, demographics and potential users or, in the case of materials and chemical supplies, on potential end users. Here we could be looking at a hierarchy breaking down industries and users into demographic areas. So a subject file system is more appropriate.

Finance...

Is about accounting for the money people put in to and take out of your bank. Creditors and debtors are accounted for in an accounting system using a combination of numbers and alpha indices (cheques, invoices and names) to make it work. Then, to confuse matters, events like fiscal years, and topics like Auditing Policy bring us to the use of "subject" related filing and some "people" related filing for the bad payers who may become litigants.

Personnel...

Is usually pretty simple (the system not the people) and is about the people who work for you. Their files are arranged alphabetically. You will also have files about things like "Affirmative Action" and "Workplace Health and Safety". These topics generally come in a hierarchy or subject filing system.



Administration...

Is the potpourri of all the areas with everything from the minuted information from Board Meetings, to files about Facilities, Buildings and Equipment, Information Technology, Legal and Policy. Legal can be organised in a "case based" system, the same as the Job files for the manufacturing people. Policy is about concepts and needs, those hardest of all subjects, and is generally organised in a hierarchy of words.

"What about the equipment?" you ask

Well, the equipment filing can vary from business to business. In Engineering we often see either lateral shelf files or Lever Arch File/Two-ring Binders being used as the major storage device. In Personnel we mainly see the shelf file. In Finance we see a combination of binders and lateral files, as well as computer binders, CD storers, and Images-either scanned or electronic. In Administration, we can say with some confidence the majority of files should be in shelf files, but then along come the facilities people and they have awkward things like drawings, samples and diagrams to worry about. The training people have videos and brochures and books and binders.

Is that the answer?

After a zillion years of research, I can tell you there is no "One System". So, before you purchase another four drawer cabinet, or Lever Arch File, or Two-ring Binder, look around, talk to the FILEforce professionals and take their considered advice on a **better mix of equipment, consumables and systems** suitable to YOUR particular needs. (Remember you get independent advise – because FILEforce does not sell equipment or consumables – only good service and good advise.)

So what is the answer?

The answer is finding the **right mix** of all these things.