

Editorial Extract

Extracted From Paperless Ponderings
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Serious Records Management

SUBJECT	HAVING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE
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HOW SME'S (Small to Medium Enterprises) CAN USE RECORDS MANAGEMENT.

"We're too small", "Not large enough", "Not enough paperwork" are all responses heard from small to medium enterprises when discussing records management.

Good Records Management doesn't require a Records Manager. It requires attitude.

At many business colleges they still teach filing as putting things away. Out of sight and out of mind. Records Management is about getting information out, not just putting it away. The key to a good records management system is a good indexing system, management of the business's information.

In small business this starts with the accounting records and works it's way into the various other departments.

GST WILL CHANGE OUR ATTITUDE

I will not point the finger, but there are many people "out there" with the shoe box attitude. They may have a four-drawer cabinet or a computer but it is still the shoebox attitude. Other than working out the profit and loss and the tax, there was no URGENCY in the retaining of records. As long as the tax went in on time with no penalties - no worries.

From 1J2K (1st July 2000), you will have to record all purchases with tax inputs so that you can deduct these from the tax paid at the end of the quarter.

Tradesmen, Restaurateurs, and other similar type enterprises can no longer simply dump everything on the accountant once a year. They must do it at least 4 times a year - to lodge their GST Return.

PERSONNEL - NEW ATTITUDE

Most industrial relations related claims made on employers '*succeed because of a lack of records*' held on the staff member who is suing them.

Some large organisations take exceptional care to ensure their personnel records are in order. Some are as unaware of their responsibility to shareholders as are smaller enterprises.

Compulsory Superannuation, Long Service Leave and other entitlements are just some of the problem areas. Claims made by staff are now extending beyond the traditional seven years to almost any time in the future.

Retaining any records regarding potential litigation is essential until at least the employee has reached a theoretical age of 75 or 80 years. These include WorkCover claims, OH&S reports, contracts, performance reports, EEO complaints etc.

INDEXING ATTITUDE

Only 15 years of desktop computing, and we have finally managed to survive without the 5" x 3" index card. At least in one part of records management most companies with a computer can now use the free and user friendly facility of their spreadsheet to make an index (Excel, Quattro Pro, Lotus 123 and others). They can all be used as the world's least expensive - and easiest to learn records management indexing software.

Most organisations don't need expensive specialised records management software. That is an industry now only servicing government and semi-government.



Private enterprise is looking for more user-friendly, shareable and training-free means of indexing and finding files.

Several of my clients with up to 200 staff, are working with Excel to index files, archives and reference books. They are very happy because little training is required and most staff accepts it as a product with which they are already familiar.

KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDE

The new term all the 'techo's' are talking about at the conferences is 'Knowledge Management'. It is available to all and, in fact, will work very easily and inexpensively in small to medium businesses.

What 'Knowledge Management' is, in simplistic terms, is the creation of one index (your spreadsheet), with sub-collections (your worksheets within the spreadsheet), on various collections of data you have in your office. One might be the archived files, held on or off-site, another your active files, another your client or job files and another your collection of reference materials in the library. If you have a really interesting article you can index some keywords of the article into the spreadsheet for easy retrieval.

THE 5 YEAR ATTITUDE

"We have to keep this for five or seven years" I hear you say, "No we don't" - but most businessmen and women are still under the impression we must keep financial records for a period of years, as required by the Income Tax Act - "Yes we do", but it is (in most cases) only five years not seven - the Act was changed in 1990. [Many FBT records are required for seven years under separate legislation].

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Whether you need records management for two hours a week or 38 hours a week (regardless of the size of your business), good records management principles should be practiced each day of the week.

Keep enough information to enable you to effectively make good business decisions. Our anecdotal evidence, from hundreds of small businesses, is they keep too much

information out of ignorance of their information requirements. "File that, we may need it" - is the attitude.

Change your attitude - "File only those records **you will use.**"© **Harry Haxton**

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