

# Editorial Extract

Extracted From Paperless Ponderings  
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**Serious Records Management**

SUBJECT	<b>In the beginning was The Word – “Keep the faith, drop the copies.”</b>
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In the beginning was the word. We spoke it, and if it was considered important enough, we created a file note.

I remember in the late 1980's a friend and I had a debate about the need to have a copier and a fax. By then the fax was fairly much embedded in the Australian business community as one of the great ways to make sure you could get the written word interstate faster and more reliably than the Postmaster General (PMG), as Australia Post was known those few years ago. The fax was faster and cheaper than the post so we used it a lot. We then copied the fax (as early faxes, on treated paper would quickly fade) and then put the copy in a file. It is still with us today. *(And the telex, remember the telex, disappeared).*

The email arrived in the 1990's and has become a staple business tool. This was even cheaper than the fax, as, basically, it was free if you were connected permanently to the Internet. This posed a storage problem as we felt emails had to be printed and put "on the file". This was an advance on the fax in terms of transportation costs, but no advantage over the fax in the storage cost.

The email became more popular than the fax, as you could send copies of files attached to the email and it could all be printed at the other end. Now we had electronic file copies with the sender, electronic file copies with the receiver and electronic file copies with all those to whom the email was copied. In the beginning we would print the electronic files and place them "on the file" (and most of us still do this today). However, as the cost of storage lessened, we decided to not only store the printed version, but also retain the electronic version, along with all the other electronic and printed versions we sent to other people as "FYI" (For your Information). We all receive them, save them, print them and - maybe - even refer to them again.

What have we achieved so far? We have reduced the transportation cost, but increased the number of copies being kept. "Oh, I'd better keep that in case I need it!" (We all say the same thing.) *The fax has not disappeared – and still has a full life ahead of it.*

Technology is great, but it finds it hard to discriminate between what is a record and what is gossip and news. No matter how hard you set up your email filtering system, there will still be hundreds of copies of the same information being stored, quite legitimately the filters believe, on our email servers. Take for instance, a church, or a company, which sends out minutes of meetings electronically, particularly those with "internal emails". We have, say, twenty people on the committee, twenty copies of the minutes sent out to 20 machines, twenty of them copied to a directory and saved, or even worse printed and put in a paper file, as well as being saved. This is a massive duplication we never saw in the "office of the past."

We enter a new Millennium and communication technology delivers the new, faster, more instant, sexier, written word communication system - the SMS (Short Message Service or, in the USA, Instant Messages). I read on an electronic grapevine (List services), there is a movement to collect all the SMS messages and retain the information – as it could be a business record. (Wow, the whole 160 characters of abbreviated message! G3 gives us even more capacity).

Don't get me wrong, I love new technology, but, in my business I promote just one copy of the "stuff that matters" for the file (Electronic or otherwise).

*Do we really need to keep all these records to run our business? Just how much duplication disguised as accountability) do we need?*

(Harry's note:- We at FILEforce are doing our bit – **don't save this email**. If you ever want to refer back to it go to [www.filing.com.au/newsletter\\_archive.html](http://www.filing.com.au/newsletter_archive.html) - we keep one copy for everyone to share.)