

Editorial Extract **FILEforce**

Extracted From Paperless Ponderings
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Serious Records Management

SUBJECT	Records V Document Management
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Date	January 1999
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WHAT IS A RECORD

The Australian Standard has a loose definition. But it does encompass the principles upon which we need records in the first place.

FOLDERISED RECORDS

Physical pieces of paper collected together in a file folder or retaining device for the use of a decision-maker.

VIRTUAL RECORD

The temporary assembly of documents occurring as a result of a query on a data base connected to documents, images, computer files, or data base records in such a way that they respond to the query criteria.

BASE SKILLS

Are the skills we leave school with. The ability to read, write, understand and communicate in a common language. There is no technology involved.

EDMS SKILLS

Expand on base skills by adding (i) typing (ii) keyboard skills (iii) computer skills (iv) comprehension of mutli-tasking. (EDMS = Electronic Document Management Systems)

CHANGE

We have a dramatic change from the days of "pre personal computers (PPC)" where all media was presented in a known familiar, base skill technology. What has happened is not a change in form eg from wood pulp paper to let's say plastic paper, but a change requiring the ability to comprehend the concept of a record as an amalgam of separate images presented to us on a visual display unit. Unlike the file folder, we now have to understand the concept of a file in a computer memory and displayed in monochrome presentations on a computer screen. (Visual Display).

EDMS

Electronic **Document** Management systems

ERMS

Electronic Records Management systems

IMT

Information Management and Technology

What we are now facing is not a change in needs, but a thrust into options that may or may not work in the long term.

In the 1970's I spent a good time teaching that the following hierarchy existed.

Records – a physical entity (something you can touch, feel, see.)

are made up of Documents

are made up of indexable units
(Keywords to some

people)

The nature of records management was that the folderised record of, say, a client in an accounting office, was the "Total Record". There is a degree of user confidence that this is the total collection based on the knowledge of the processes and systems going into the collection, storage and management of the records system. The user has been brought up with this level of confidence in the records system from school. This is a base instinctive reaction.

By contrast ,in an EDMS, there is no visualisation of the totality of the record. (You cannot touch it, or see all the bits at one time.) The EDMS relies entirely on the interaction of the query made by the decision-maker and the available indexing criteria satisfying the query within the data base managing the document collection. The confidence level of the majority of decision-makers is not (in my opinion) yet enough to allow , at this time, confident reliance on the result.

In simple terms we have changed the ground rules. (See table below)

There seems to be some Holy Grail about the purity of the record. It is a concept that has



always matched a physical object. A record was a collection of information either housed in (a) a file cover (b) a lever arch mechanism (c) a register or (d) a data base.

All these things had in common the ability to be placed on paper and read with what I refer to as "Base Skills".

We also have to change from the concept of dictating a letter to a secretary to the concept of preparing your own letter or dictating a letter directly to a computer using a Voice Recognition System.

Document Management

Instead of managing records tied up in red string, we are now managing the records at a smaller level of aggregation where we do not have a "visualisation" of the size of the data, collection or information base other than the "number of hits" as your result. If you have 500 client files, that is 500 folders, or about 5-6 bays of shelving.

In document management you may have 20,000 documents connected by a relational database to a "virtual record". The decision-maker who uses the device (EDMS) must have a greater degree of ability than required in the pre-PC environment ie they must have more than base skills.

Document management systems according to Rick Barry, Barry and Associates www.rbarry.com, compare as follows

"EDMS vs. ERMS

"One way or the other, organisations will have to employ systems to satisfy electronic records needs unless, of course, the problem is defined away by declaring that all records must be maintained in non-electronic form and thus there would be no such thing as an electronic record. This is certainly a legitimate option, although few people believe that this is practical or cost effective in the long run. But this may not represent a viable solution in some jurisdictions where the law requires that all copies of records receive the same disposition treatment as the original."

He continues "The down-side of the argument is that there are very few EDMS systems yet available on the market which have sufficient functionality to support ERM needs and IMT specialists are often unfamiliar with such systems or related technologies. Thus, for those choosing an integrated EDMS/ERMS approach it will be necessary for the vendor to customise its product, at additional cost and time, or provide toolkits for the organisation to use in developing its own ERM functionality.

Most organisations do not wish to pay for the vendor's development of ERM functionality which

it can then turn around and sell to many others, more than recovering the development costs, as part of a highly enriched EDMS package. Until the developers of commercial EDMS products hear the demand for ERM functionality, however, they will continue to ignore such needs. This paper assumes a unified approach in a single EDMS."

The conclusion both Barry and I come to is the inevitability of not only the use of EDMS but also the need to develop both the technology and the skill base of the decision-maker to come to grips with the technology not just at a technical level but also at a cognitive level.

This view is shared by Nichols in his dissertation (NICHOLS, Gerald E. On the Nature of Information Management in Management Accounting, pp 9-13,15 - APRIL 1969)

"The primary purpose of a management information system is to expose significant relationships that will decrease uncertainty in organisational decision-making with a corresponding increase in organisational resources". Consideration must be given to the type and quality of information needed throughout the organisation.

Here we have a collection of thinking over 30 years that comes to the same conclusion. To expose significant relationships, we must be capable of

- * Comprehending the collection
- * Trusting the completeness of the collection.

Document management can only replace records management when the decision-maker permits it to happen. When that will occur, I am not sure.

Change

As we have a technical skill and ability to produce EDMS, what we have to do to harness this technology is to embrace change and train the decision-makers in, not only, the technical skills but also the conceptual skills of document management and "virtual records".

The technology works. The great challenge in using it is getting decision makers to understand and trust it.

We must have an attitude towards, and an aptitude for, paperlessness.

EDMS suits the following types of records at the present time. This is a result of both (a) the nature of the record source and (b) the skill levels that can be taught to the decision-makers and (c) the relatively small number of decision makers concerned in the training and understanding process.

- * Short term records



- * Workflow records
- * Claims processing
- * Contract management
- * Voucher capture
- * Desk-bound users



Records Management	Document management.
<p>The documents are collected together into a file relating to a client, subject or event. The cover of the file will indicate the need to seek additional files. There is a physical limit observable by the decision-maker as to the quantity of documents in a file and whether that collection, based on past experience, meets our expectation of the collection size. Size and shape, smell and feel have an impact on our ability to make decisions.</p>	<p>The documents are collected together into an electronic storage device, either as digital data (word processing documents, Email) or as images (of incoming documents). The decision maker must form a query on the database that will present a number of "hits" and may present a selection of displays (images or WP documents). The decision requires a degree of trust in the system and the ability to formulate a query, as to the "hits" meeting their expectation of the collection size. Unlike the paper file, where you have the belief that the total file is in your hands, the digital file does not give that "feeling".</p>
<p>The decision-maker must have confidence in:-</p>	
<p>Base skills + Experiential learning</p>	<p>Base skills + experience + Confidence in the ability to interact with the data base.</p>