



# Information Overload

Issue 41, January 2006

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## Welcome:

Let me begin by wishing all our readers a Happy New Year. I hope that 2006 has started well for you all, and you have your plans in place to make it your best year ever. Obviously goal setting is one of things on most people's minds at this time of year. What worked last year? What can you do better this year? For the team at Information Enterprises we have had a very busy couple of months. Whilst some of you may have been winding down for the Christmas season, we went into discussion about a number of major projects and undertakings that will kick off 2006 for us. The Consulting arm of the business is extremely busy with Retention and Disposal Schedules and Business Classification Schemes being written for clients. We have over 30 contractors currently working through the employment agency, several of our publications will be re-written to bring in the most up to date research and information, and our training directory has been issued for the first half of the year. But perhaps the most exciting project for the first part of 2006 is IEA's inaugural seminar on Electronic Document and Records Management Systems - EDRMS - Local People, Local Knowledge to be held at The University Club, UWA between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> June 2006. The program is almost in place, so as soon as it has been finalised, we will send you the details. But in the mean time, all new information will be added to our web site - <http://www.iea.com.au>, and something I have always wanted to say - a case of "watch this space"!!

So the question was - what topic do we choose for the first edition of Information Overload for 2006? Whilst we have received a number of fantastic suggestions, including preservation and open access material, we thought the most logical topic for this edition would be EDRMS.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site - <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use. If you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au):

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Why do we have to keep business records anyway?
- Standards and Benchmarks
- So which system do you use?
- Notes
- A Thought to ponder.

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## Why do we have to keep business records anyway?

The answer surprisingly enough is not LITIGATION – well not entirely. Whilst we may live in a litigious society, where a company can get sued for selling its coffee too hot (Stella Liebeck vs. McDonalds (1) ) we keep business records for a number of reasons. Every organisation regardless of its size, creates, receives and uses records in relation to business activities on a daily basis. These "bits of paper" form the framework around which an organisation conducts its business, complies with regulatory requirements and can provide necessary accountability of business activities. **The record, subject to a test of reliability, is proof of how things were at any given point in time.**

"Information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transactions of business."  
*AS/ISO 15489: 2002: Information and documentation – Records Management, Part 1: General*

As more and more records produced and received by an organisation are done so in electronic format, it is essential that your organisation is able to handle:

- a) the formats used
- b) the quantity of documents produced and received
- c) the ability to retrieve the information quickly and easily, now and into the future
- d) the accuracy of the information being retrieved.

Any record created or stored electronically. Included in this term are those records, which are "born digital", as well as those records, which have been scanned into an electronic record format and stored on "the system". Within this category of record are e-mails, interactive messages (for example MSN Messaging) and any SMS text messages which are sent and received as part of a business transaction and should be subject to the same retention and disposal schedules as the rest of the electronic and paper based records managed by an organisation. *Section 1: What is a Record? Australian Record Retention Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005*

If that is the case, then it would make sense that all business records would need to be input into a suitable system (database) in a systematic manner to ensure that it can be readily accessed when it needs to be. The classification and indexing of business records using controlled vocabulary ensures that everyone speaks the same language. But what does this mean in real terms? Imagine a room full of people all diligently working away adding new information to the database. The only problem is that each person is using slightly different terminology to classify and index the same kinds of documents. Person A thinks that the most logical term to describe the document he is looking at is Personnel records, Person B thinks Human Resources would be the better term to use, yet another person uses the short form "HR" when typing the information into the system (because they're in a hurry), and so on. Imagine trying to retrieve all the information relating to employee information based on the above scenario. Could you satisfy a judge and a jury that you had managed to locate all the information they required in order to make a judgement? – hopefully in your organisations favour. Or would there be a nagging feeling somewhere that said – well your honour, we think we found it all.

"And what about the e-mails my client says he sent to you?"

"Ah well, we were rather hoping you wouldn't ask about the emails. You see they're on a back up tape somewhere and ..." and I'm sure you get the picture.

Unfortunately this is not as far fetched as it sounds. And without adequate systems in place, most organisations may be faced with the embarrassment of not being able to provide all the information required, when faced with legal challenges, or when asked to provide important information to a regulatory body, or even to the person themselves when they ask to view their records (*Privacy Amendment (private Sector) Act 2000* allows access to personal records). These “failures” can result in fines, penalties and in some cases - business failure.

As most of you will be aware, there has been a lot written about the failure of large companies and organisations because of poor record keeping. Andersen, HIH, Worldcom, British Alcohol and Tobacco (BAT), Ansett and Virgin Blue are but some of the organisations who have had problems producing all their records on request. With the case of Virgin Blue – they were a victim of their own success. They had expanded their business so much they had been unable to keep up to date with their maintenance logs. As each plane has some 367,000 parts it is little wonder they were unable to adequately test and guarantee the standard of each and every part used. The Civil Aviation Authority determined that if Virgin Blue were to continue flying their aircraft and to add extra planes to their fleet – they had to install a new records management system. Until they did, they had to fly within one hour of an airport during every flight undertaken in Australia. *Virgin blue over maintenance records disarray. Image and Data Manager March/April 2004 P65*

Whilst most organisations may not be faced with those kind of responsibilities in managing their records, imagine what would happen if the car manufacturers failed to keep adequate records, or what compounds the drug manufacturers used to produce their pills and potions. As Pan Pharmaceuticals found out to their cost as a result of their failure to ensure quality control and standards. The question is how do you keep control of your organisations business records? How can you ensure you can still access those records when you need to months and years down the track? And how do you ensure that you destroy the correct records at the right time, and perhaps as importantly – how do you ensure that you have destroyed ALL the records including copies and working documents sitting on personal drives, and back up tapes?

As you can imagine there are many schools of thought, especially when it comes to the long-term preservation of electronic records. Including – printing out a copy of every business record and adding it to the paper file(s); migration of the documents across system upgrades, and conversion of documents to XML or PDF and hope Adobe's PDF/A can ensure access no matter what version of windows (or other system) you are using at the time. However, as some organisations have discovered, it is almost impossible to use old legacy systems to manage the latest electronic media. How do you capture SMS messages for instance? And work completed using a blackberry or other palm pilot – unless systems are in place to capture the information, and the people using the electronic medium understand the need to download business information into the records management system, gaps will always occur in the data.

Electronic Document and Records Management Systems are perhaps the best way (so far) of managing organisations business information. Encompassing both the Records Management needs and requirements of accountability and community expectations, these systems can manage both hard copy and electronic records, with an Electronic Document Management system to ensure fast, efficient and effective document workflow, along with the management of “versions” (version control) and emails.

## Standards and Benchmarks

A great deal of work has been, and is still being carried out by the information community worldwide in order to try and formalise good records management practices. Whilst the Australian Standard AS 4390 and the International Records Management Standard ISO 15489 have made a significant impact on the records management industry, other benchmarks are also being applied to ensure compliance and accountability.

### **VERS – Victorian Electronic Records Strategy**

Specifies a single, minimal framework for the management of electronic records. The VERS standard specifies a long term format for the capture of records which need to be preserved for an extended period. This is achieved with the use of the PDF (Portable Document Format) to ensure they can be viewed in the future regardless of the system that created them. VERS specifies methods to automate the capture of records from the desktop and agency business systems. VERS uses XML as the format in which information about records is captured and encapsulate with the records to ensure that they will be understood in context in the future. The use of electronic signaturing technology ensures that changes to records using the VERS methodology are detectable.  
<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/vers/standards/default.htm>

### **Dublin Core Metadata Standard**

The Dublin Core is a 15-element metadata set intended to facilitate discovery of electronic resources. Originally conceived for author-generated description of Web resources, it has also attracted the attention of formal resource description communities such as museums and libraries. <http://dublincore.org/>

### **AGLS – Australian Government Locator Service**

The National Archives of Australia also produce the AGLS Standard. This standard contains a set of 19 descriptive elements which government departments and agencies can use to improve the visibility and accessibility of their services and information over the Internet. It is based upon the leading international online resource discovery metadata standard known as the [Dublin Core standard](#).

AGLS was published as Australian Standard AS 5044 by Standards Australia in December 2002. [http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/gov\\_online/agls/summary.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/gov_online/agls/summary.html)

### **DIRKS (Designing and Implementing Record Keeping Systems)**

The DIRKS methodology is an eight-step process developed by the National Archives of Australia, and is used as a method to improve Record Keeping and information management practices in Australia. This includes how to design and implement a record keeping system within an organisation.

<http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/dirks/dirksman/dirks.html>

## So which system do you use?

Well that depends on a number of factors, not least of which:

- Scale ability – Will the system grow with you as you grow?
- The number of documents you need to capture (now and in the future)

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- The technological support you will receive, and the ability of the organisation to keep pace with the new formats (please bear in mind that companies do go out of business!!)
- How big your budget is;
- The size of your organisation, and number of “seats” you will need to purchase;
- Can you integrate this system with the other systems you are using? Can it be done easily? What is the learning curve required for the users – you will need to bear in mind that if something is too complicated then the users will not use it. No matter how many “sticks” are brought to bear.

Other factors to consider when planning your EDRMS Strategy are:

- Who will manage the project?
- Do you have support from all parts of the organisation, or just bits of it? Whilst support from senior management is vital (they will be funding the project after all), it is important to get the support from the people who will be using the system.
- How do you “market” the benefits of the new way of doing things?
- Do you need outside support? What level of support? Consulting? Project Manager, Case workers – to assist with the rollout, training or extra pairs of hands to ensure that the information is input in the correct manner?
- Who will train the users? What is the learning curve required for the users – you will need to bear in mind that if something is too complicated then the users will not use it. No matter how many “sticks” are brought to bear.
- Do you have an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule – so that you can add destruction dates to the records as they are input into the system;
- Do you have an approved Business Classification Scheme – does everyone “speak the same language?”

## Notes:

- (1) Actually this case has become somewhat of an urban myth. Did you know that McDonald’s sells coffee at 180 to 190 degrees Fahrenheit? A scientist testifying in the case stated that any coffee hotter than 130 degrees could produce third degree burns. From 1982 to 1992, McDonald’s received more than 700 reports of burns from scalding coffee; some of the injured were children and infants. As a result of her injuries, Ms. Liebeck spent eight days in a hospital. In that time she underwent expensive treatments for third-degree burns including debridement (removal of dead tissue) and skin grafting. The burns left her scarred and disabled for more than two years. Before a suit was ever filed, Liebeck informed McDonald’s about her injuries and asked for compensation for her medical bills, which totaled almost \$11,000. McDonald’s countered with an offer of \$800 [http://www.citizen.org/print\\_article.cfm?ID=785](http://www.citizen.org/print_article.cfm?ID=785)

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### A T hought to Ponder:

“The shortest way to do many things is to do only one thing at once”

**Samuel Smiles (1812-1904)**

Scottish author and social reformer

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Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au). Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues’ friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au) with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au). If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au) with “unsubscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

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