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## RM Tips

Email:

1. Capture email messages with their attachments
2. Implement email naming (subject line) standards
3. Spend at least 10 minutes a day cleaning out your inbox and sent items (moving them to folders, and deleting ephemera, messages to other staff in your organisation that you've been copied into, etc.)

## Digital Data Disposal Dilemma...

Article read time: 4 mins

### Why aren't we implementing a disposal program for our digital information? What are the risks if we don't?

As records and information management professionals in Australia, we are developing and implementing a records disposal program for *all* of the records we maintain, right? Wrong! Or so it would seem. Many of us simply aren't implementing a disposal program for our newer, digital-format information. So, why is this?

It would seem that the brave new world of digital recordkeeping is posing new challenges for us as we try to come to terms with the myriad of information which forms part of our organisation's digital information holdings. Take for example emails, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, wikis, blogs, and information stored in the 'Cloud', some of which may form part of the records collection we, as professionals, are required to hold and maintain for our users. Let's face it, implementing disposal decisions is much easier, and more clear-cut, when applied to hard-copy, paper files.



The world of technology is changing so rapidly, it's hard to keep up. I purchased an iPad2 only a couple of months ago, now Apple has released an iPad3. When will the madness stop, or at the very least, slow down a little so we can all catch up?

It would seem that whilst many organisations have developed records disposal authorities and embedded them within their EDRM systems, the actual implementation of disposal decisions appears to be the issue. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, unlike in the paper-based records world, where we might have had a colossal backlog of records awaiting sentencing, the visual clues for digital disposal are not so apparent or obvious. Or perhaps it is because an electronic document needs to be deleted, removed from all back ups, and cleared from the system to ensure data cannot be recovered - it's not a one-stop shop to the shredder!

So, what are the risks if we don't implement a disposal program for our organisation's digital information? Well, the risks, it would seem, are not unlike the types of digital information itself, many and varied.

By not carrying out disposal of digital records, we are leaving ourselves vulnerable to not being able to meet legislative or other obligations required of us. We won't, for example, be able to meet privacy requirements to routinely destroy records. We may find it increasingly difficult (and onerous) to respond to discovery orders, Freedom of Information or Government Information Public Access (GIPA) requests as we struggle to sift through an ever-increasing mountain of digital information.

In addition, our retention of just too much digital information will mean our backups will take longer -much, much longer. Some data centres have reported that data is doubling every 15 months! As a result, the retrieval of a particular record for our users will be akin to searching for the elusive needle-in-the-haystack.

***"Let's face it, implementing disposal decisions is much easier, and more clear-cut, when applied to hard-copy, paper files."***

In an environment of ever-decreasing budgets, the over-retention of digital information may force us to spend more money in order to preserve this digital information over time – think system migration costs and you get the picture. Why would we want to spend more money on records which may not really need to be kept?

As records and information management professionals, we will, over time, rise to meet the challenges that the disposal of digital information presents to us – we just need more time and money to do it!

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## When Size Does Matter

Article read time: 4 mins

### When size does matter and when one size definitely doesn't fit all: Implementing compliant information management solutions for small organisations.

Small organisations, often strapped for time and with no money to throw at complex or highly sophisticated information management solutions, are required to perform just as well as their larger counterparts. With limited time, and even more limited budgets, small organisations with few or no dedicated records staff must fulfil legislative and other obligations placed upon them—a burden not proportionately shared by much larger organisations.

Some of the difficulties faced by small organisations concern:

**Classification:** Traditionally, generic, 'off-the-shelf' classification models have been designed to accommodate business activities and detailed processes usually represented in much larger organisations. These models, apart from being expensive, have not always been easy to adapt or successfully implement in small organisations.

**Records Management Software Solutions:** Specialised eDRMS are generally too costly for small organisations to acquire, implement and maintain.

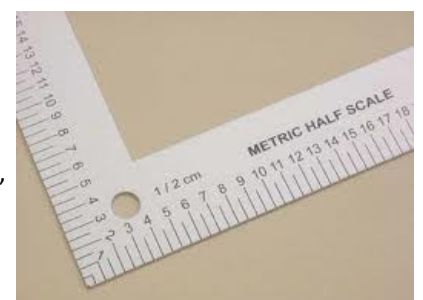
**Registration and tracking:** Often, the processes of records capture and tracking have fallen to the records users themselves to maintain, and as in any 'honesty system', this is liable to break down without proper training, education and monitoring.

**Indexing and retrieval:** Using existing office software, such as MS Word, Excel or an Access database, poses its own set of problems, with no ability for small organisations to accommodate interactive controlled vocabularies or records disposal authorities.

**Disposal:** Small organisations with few or no dedicated records management staff find implementing a compliant disposal program awkward if not impossible! Often this function is relegated to the back-burner.

So how can small organisations implement compliant information management solutions with a limited budget, staff and time?

There is no silver bullet for overcoming the challenges that small organisations face. However, the following pointers may help your small organisation comply with relevant records standards and codes of best practice.



**Classification:** Forget about complex thesauri and other sophisticated classification schemes, simplicity is the key! Develop a list of standard file titles which all users have access to. Use this list when titling your organisation's documents and files. Also, set up classification rules/standards for titling emails and your organisation's folder structure in shared network drives. This way, everyone will know and understand how information is titled and stored. (Make sure your users don't store corporate information in personal drives.)

**Registration and tracking:** If these activities are undertaken by your users, then training and education are paramount. Your users must be aware of the importance of capturing all corporate business information, preferably in an electronic system. The ongoing noting of physical records' locations in this system is also important (if not critical) and will save your organisation time searching for records down the track. Holding short, but frequent, training sessions will convey and reinforce this message.

**Indexing and retrieval:** Whilst small organisations have generally used a combination of network drives and existing office software as 'de facto' electronic recordkeeping systems, office software products can be tailored to allow for indexing and retrieval on records' metadata, such as title, subject, author, date, location, disposal details, etc. Whilst these systems aren't as sophisticated as 'turn-key' eDRMS, if tailored specifically to your small organisation, they do possess powerful searching and retrieval capabilities.

**Disposal:** Bear in mind that the problems associated with not carrying out records disposal will only increase with time. The results of not disposing of records just grow larger, and larger, and larger! As such, it's best to try to set time aside and use all available resources to tackle records disposal. Take the time to develop a records disposal authority. The time spent in writing a disposal authority and setting up a compliant disposal program (including regular records sentencing) will pay dividends in the future – you'll save money by not storing records which (legally) can be destroyed, and you'll save time when searching for a particular record, as you'll be searching through a smaller volume of material.

Above all else, allocating responsibilities for certain recordkeeping tasks to staff, defining and describing these tasks in a corporate procedures manual and policy statement is critical, and forms the basis of a compliant information management system. And importantly, obtaining managerial support and backing, and/or a receptive corporate culture, is free!

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## Upcoming Training

Training dates for *Retention and Disposal of Public Health Sector Records* in 2012 are as follows:

- 11 September—Sydney
- 17 October—Dubbo
- 22 November—Sydney

*Note: SSA will also deliver in-house training courses on demand (minimum of 6 attendees).*

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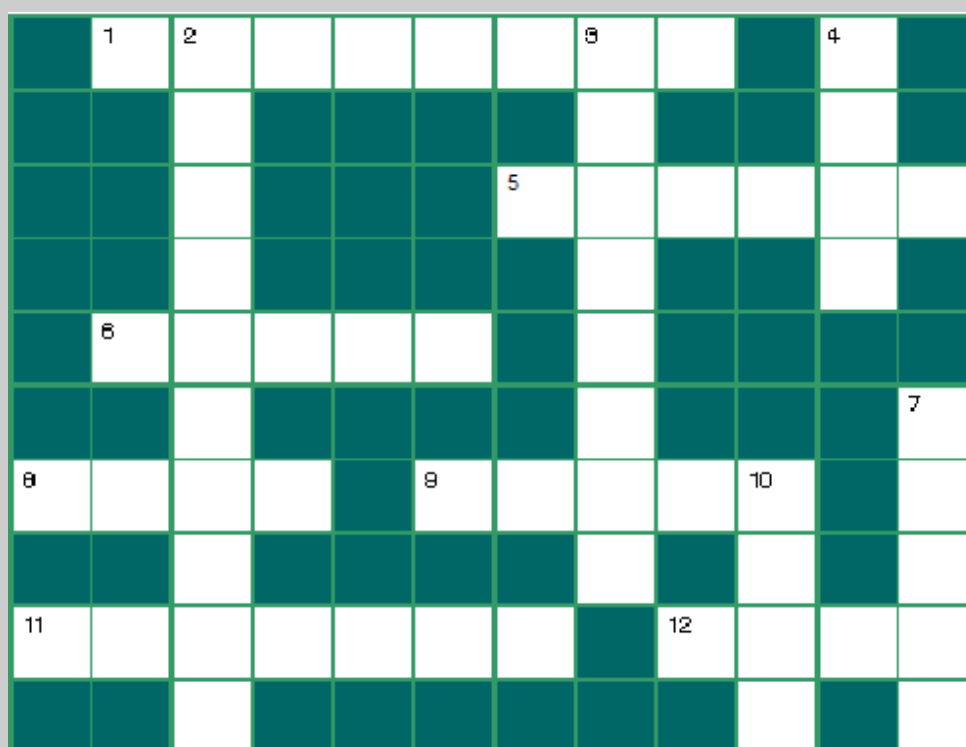
## Our Services

SSA offers a full array of information management services, including (but not limited to):

- records management systems performance and compliance reviews
- compilation of classification schemes/thesauri, disposal authorities, policy and procedure manuals
- information management training (including TRIM training)
- records and document management technology needs analysis, including software specification and evaluation
- records and information systems configuration, design and implementation
- **new service**—a.k.a Training

To find out more about SSA's services (including our new services) , visit our website at [www.siller.com.au](http://www.siller.com.au), email us at [siller@siller.com.au](mailto:siller@siller.com.au), or contact one of our consultants on (02) 9979 9974.

### Quick Crossword



#### Across:

1. Records ensure we have this if somebody questions our actions (8)
5. We struggle to manage the volume of these received each day (6)
6. Using an externally-hosted computing environment is also known as “working in the \_\_\_\_\_” (5)
8. When we remove inactive records from active one, we undertake one of these.(4)
9. The network \_\_\_\_\_ can impact on the ability to retrieve information (5)
11. Records disposal authorities can be regarded as a corporate \_\_\_\_\_ (7)
12. The main language used for web pages (abbrev.) (4)

#### Down:

2. Contracts, payroll records, licences, etc. would be identified in \_\_\_\_\_ Record \_\_\_\_\_ (5,5)
3. The introduction of this meant major changes in the way information was processed. (8)
4. A fire\_\_\_\_\_ provides data security (4)
7. Appropriate workplace training will provide this. (5)
10. Records can also be in this form (4)

**Note:** Go to [www.siller.com.au/crossword.pdf](http://www.siller.com.au/crossword.pdf) to get the crossword answers

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