



THE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DIGEST

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FILING EQUIPMENT

The primary directive of the filing of information is the functionality of retrieval. Regardless of the type of filing equipment selected, this axiom holds true. Without effective retrieval of information, the type of equipment selected does not matter. That being said, this issue will deal with filing equipment in both modern and ancient (if filing equipment could be considered ancient) sense.

LETTER VERSUS LEGAL

One of the most fundamental questions a records manager must be prepared to answer is the efficiency of letter versus legal sized forms. ARMA International (Association of Records Managers and Administrators) was instrumental in its opposition to legal sized (14 inch/appx. 35 cm) paper usage, to the degree that they sponsored an initiative called ELF (Eliminate Legal-size Files) to encourage the abandonment of legal sized paper and file usage. Here are some important considerations regarding legal sized files versus letter sized files.

1. According to the website of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Legal-size file cabinets cost 13 percent more than letter-size for the upright variety and 28 percent more for the mobile or hanging file cabinets.
2. Legal-size file cabinets require 16 percent more floor space than letter-size cabinets.
3. Supplies for legal-size equipment cost more than letter-size equipment.
4. Within the United States Federal Government System, legal sized files require 20% more space (on average) to store offsite.



It is important to note that a standard records carton used by the offsite commercial records industry is designed to hold either legal size or letter size files (of course a carton will hold more letter size files than legal size files).

SPACE UTILIZATION

Where real estate costs are expensive and available space is limited, the most effective and efficient type of filing equipment should be selected, in order to maximize utilization per square foot for active and semi-active records management. Because costs of storage can be greatly reduced by relocating records to less expensive non-office space and storing at a higher density than is achievable in an office environment, inactive and semi active records with a low retrieval rate should be moved offsite as soon as possible.

Floor Space Ratio is defined in the ARMA Glossary of Records and Information Management Terms as "the filing capacity expressed in cubic volume of records per square unit of floor space." In the case of a vertical

filing cabinet one should not only consider the physical space occupied by the cabinet itself, but also the space necessary to effectively insert and remove files from the cabinet. 42 inches of clearance is a minimum recommendation in front of each vertical file cabinet. Each drawer holds 20 to 25 file inches of material. This equates to slightly more than 8 square feet of required floor space for a cabinet that will hold approximately 8 cubic feet of records. The floor space ratio for this type of equipment would thus be 1.0. When four, three or even two drawer vertical cabinets are used, it is clear that the ratio will dramatically decrease. In the case of a two drawer cabinet, the ratio falls to approximately .36.

BASIC EQUIPMENT TYPES

Many office environments tend toward standardization of filing equipment in order to promote interchangeability, uniformity of appearance and use, and economies of scale. However, it is important to consider efficiencies and costs of operation when making any consideration of filing equipment or establishing new records management areas.

FILE FOLDERS

When documents begin to accumulate, they need to be grouped for the sake of organization and to facilitate retrieval. The file folder is this most basic unit. A file folder may have a top tab or side tab, depending upon the type of filing equipment used. Multiple tab widths are available. Top tab folders are used for vertical filing cabinets and some lateral filing cabinets. Side tab folders are used for some lateral filing cabinets and shelf filing applications. Both folder types are scored along the spine to produce a gusset or expansion fold that provides additional space for documents contained within the folder. A typical top or side tab folder will provide up to a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (2 cm) gusset, though other sizes are available.

In addition to side and top tab folders, other types of folders available include file pouches, expandable file pouches, and file wallets. Standard pouches provide sealed sides in order to prevent small documents, such as credit card receipts, from falling out of the file. Expandable file pouches and wallets are used to contain groups of files which are closely related – chronological files related to a single client matter number, for example.

VERTICAL FILING CABINETS

In most records management literature, vertical filing cabinets (particularly two and three drawer vertical cabinets) are generally accepted as being the least efficient and most expensive of all filing equipment to

operate. Estimates from the state of Oregon for the dollar cost of maintaining 8 cubic feet of records, (the contents of a five drawer vertical filing cabinet), in a typical state office environment is more than \$2,100 per year. For this reason, the floor space ratio is an important consideration when selecting any type of filing equipment.

Vertical filing cabinets do serve to protect records from visual identification by unauthorized persons and, if insulated, may provide fire protective properties. In addition, if the cabinets are equipped with locks these cabinets may effectively restrict access to sensitive information, such as personnel records, research and development data or protected health information.

LATERAL FILING CABINETS

These types of cabinets come in various widths and are sometimes equipped with drawers or pull out units which permit top tab or side tab folders to be used. Pull out drawers require less aisle space than is required to operate a vertical filing cabinet and capacity for storage of files is more than doubled, when compared to vertical cabinets. Like vertical filing cabinets, lateral filing cabinets can retard the spread of fire and can provide some security to files stored within the unit.

OPEN SHELF FILING UNITS

These shelving units are usually not equipped with doors and utilize side tab folders. They are very efficient, particularly when folders are equipped with color coding to minimize misfiling errors. Because there is no enclosure, files are not protected from visual inspection, fire or security so planning regarding those concerns should be undertaken prior to using shelf filing units. In addition, open shelf filing equipment is equally useful for microforms, data tapes and other media types.

COMPACT/MOVEABLE SHELVES

This type of equipment consists of open shelf type systems arranged on tracks. They may be either mechanized or manually operated by handles located on the end of each shelving unit. Because only one aisle space is created within the unit, space savings of over 40% are possible through the use of this type of system. However, floor loads are extremely important when installing this type of system since the distribution of weight is much more concentrated. The same concerns identified in open shelf units regarding visual availability, lack of security and enclosure to prevent the spread of fire are applicable to this type of system. These types of systems are more expensive than other types of filing equipment

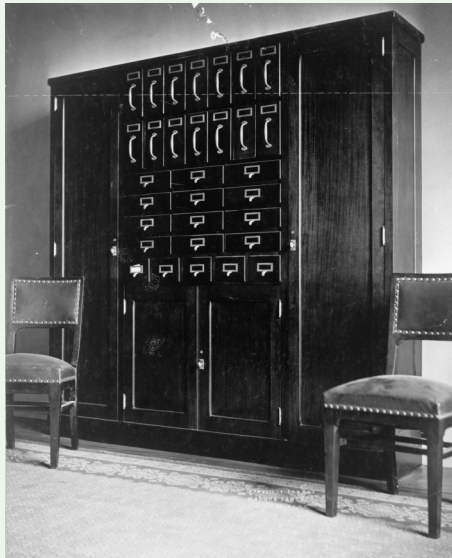
ROTARY FILING EQUIPMENT

This mechanized filing system delivers records to the user through a circular motion. Like Compact/Moveable shelves the densities of files are greatly increased through the use of this system. Also like compact systems, floor loads are greatly increased. These systems are also very adaptable to other types of media such as CDs, Microforms or data tapes. In addition to added expense when purchasing this type of system there is another important consideration when making a buying decision for equipment that is completely mechanized. How significantly will retrieval be affected in the event of an equipment breakdown?

HELPFUL HINTS

Here are some important considerations when making purchases of filing equipment:

1. Is an efficient and effective records and information management system in place? If not, seek guidance from ISO 15489 or records management consultants
2. Have you inventoried records to determine if some holdings can be stored offsite? Storage costs can be greatly reduced if semi-active or inactive records can be relocated from higher cost office space to lower cost offsite storage.
3. Are building floor loads sufficient to hold a more compact system?
4. Are you placing records series which require more protection in the appropriate type of filing equipment?
5. Have you talked other records managers or your offsite records storage partner about your information management goals and how best to achieve them?



THE HISTORY OF FILING EQUIPMENT

Do you know where the term “pigeon hole” came from? Ever had to engage in spindle filing? Do you have any idea about the origin of the clip board file? If you’re in the mood for a treat, check out www.officemuseum.com. This fascinating website provides some wonderful photographs as to the origins of the modern office and modern office equipment. Here are a few tidbits.

Early filing cabinets were constructed of wood and were of either the “pigeon hole” type where letters or bills were placed in nooks, or were a letter file type where documents were stored flat in shallow drawers. In 1875 Cameron Amberg and Co. introduced its first cabinet letter file, which won a medal at the centennial exposition the following year. Steel filing cabinets were a relatively late entry, appearing on the scene in 1886. A 1906 advertisement for steel filing cabinets proclaims that they provide “absolute protection against loss of your records by fire.” And, in case you were wondering, the vertical filing cabinet was invented by Edwin G. Siebels in 1898. The Smithsonian Institution has one of the originals.

Where fire protection and theft were a concern, the safe was put to use. The earliest advertisement shown by the museum dates to 1847 and displays an advertisement for the C. Rich & Co. Salamander Safe. Early safes were partitioned to hold ledgers and other critical business information as well as currency and other items.

We’ve come a long way from those heady days of solid brass pencil sharpeners and filing spindles, but imagining yourself folding legal documents twice prior to filing them under a clasp in a pigeon hole letter file cabinet will give you something to be grateful for.

Historian Accused of Altering Lincoln Archives

The National Archives says that Thomas P. Lowry, Abraham Lincoln researcher tampered with historical Lincoln documents. According to an article on NPR, Lowry changed the date of the presidential pardon issued by Lincoln to a military deserter. Lowry was accused of changing the date on the pardon from April 14, 1864, to April 14, 1865 the date of Lincoln's assassination.

The National Archives said the change made it look like Lowry had discovered Lincoln's final official act before his assassination at the Ford's Theatre. According to the NPR article, the document was hailed by historians when Lowry presented it in 1998 and the National Archives even gave the document prominent display by adding it to the tour of Lincoln documents.

Archivist, Thomas Plante became suspicious after noticing that the color of ink in the "5" appeared to be darker than the other numbers. Plante checked the document against an authoritative collection of Lincoln's writings and found that the presidential pardon had, in fact, occurred in 1864.

According to the National Archives, Lowry initially refused to speak with them on the matter, but later admitted to altering the document so it would appear that he had uncovered a historically significant document. Lowry has said he was pressured to confess by federal agents.

A spokeswoman for the Archives, Susan Cooper said that tampering with a document is a federal crime and that the archives referred the case earlier this month to the Justice Department for prosecution. According to the NPR article, officials were told that the statute of limitations had expired so Lowry cannot be prosecuted. However, the Archives has banned Lowry from its facilities.



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