



THE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT DIGEST

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TO DIGITIZE OR NOT TO DIGITIZE

There has been talk of paperless offices for several decades, only to see paper use continue to grow each year. Recent trending indicates that a growing number of documents are “born digital” and remain in that form throughout their useful life. E-mail is just one of many examples of these types of digital records. What is less clear to some records and information managers are whether documents that are already created as paper documents should be converted to digital format.

MORE TO DIGITIZING THAN MEETS THE EYE

When some people think of digitizing, they tend to oversimplify the process. Because the intent of most conversion activities is to eliminate the original medium, (usually paper or film), there are substantial steps related to quality control that must be followed carefully. Otherwise, digital images may not be legible or may not be captured at all. In addition, care must be taken to ensure that any documents can be retrieved. This involves indexing and capturing metadata. The National Archives and Records Administration is engaged in a major conversion of documents contained in the archive so that they can be placed in the online catalog for easier access by researchers and the public. They provide the same cautions in describing the conversion process.

“For the purposes of this document, “digitizing” should be understood not just as the act of scanning an analog document into digital form, but as a series of activities that results in a digital copy being made available to end users via the Internet or other means for a sustained length of time. The activities include:

- Document identification and selection
- Document preparation (including preservation,



access review and screening, locating, pulling, and refile)

- Basic descriptive and technical metadata collection sufficient to allow retrieval and management of the digital copies and to provide basic contextual information for the user
- Digital conversion
- Quality control of digital copies and metadata
- Providing public access to the material via online delivery of reliable and authentic copies
- Providing online ordering for reproduction services at quality or quantities beyond the capacity of an end user
- Maintenance of digital copies and metadata”.

It should also be understood that the conversion costs related to digital information do not stop at the moment the capture process is complete. There are recurring costs related to server power, cooling and maintenance. Media and format refreshment and periodic migration of data related to operating system, software, media type and hardware. Again, NARA’s project document illustrates this, in part, by holding out digitizing as an example of conversion in order to preserve information on more fragile or outdated media types.

"We continually reformat at-risk archival materials so that they may continue to be used by the public. A paper document may become so fragile that we need to create a copy for public access; or, a video recording made in an outdated format, such as Betamax, must be transferred to a modern format that can be viewed on current equipment. As supplies of traditional analog reformatting media diminish due to market forces, digitization is becoming a key activity in NARA's preservation reformatting strategy. We are in the process of adopting a digital workflow for preservation reformatting which will yield tremendous access opportunities as well. NARA commits to leveraging the work done to convert these materials by making them available online to users."

JUSTIFYING THE COSTS OF DIGITIZING

The cost of digitizing paper records can be substantial. According to one study by the City of New York records management department, imaging conversion projects for archival paper records took 16 years to break in the most optimistic scenario and in the most pessimistic scenario would not ever break even. This kind of financial investment must, therefore, be carefully considered prior to launching a project that may have very low or nonexistent return on investment to the organization.

What about preservation as a justification? Many manufacturers cannot produce sufficient test data to establish high confidence in any digital preservation medium for permanent records retention. Media types are simply too unstable at this time, or there has not been sufficient time to do thorough testing. In the example used above, the National Archives and Records administration to facilitate both preservation and expanded access. Because they are a national archive, NARA's preservation timelines are either very long or permanent. This puts them in a different category than most organizations that are preserving records for a more limited period. In cases where records may be damaged (by mold, vinegar syndrome in x-rays, etc.) digitizing to facilitate preservation would be a very good strategy.

Equally good would be selective digitization of vital records as a part of a program of protection through redundancy. In this scenario the original records would be retained but a digital copy would also be created and stored at a different location, such as in a media vault maintained by your information management vendor. This places a copy of the material outside the hands of potential saboteurs. A similar strategy has been employed by some archives using a method known as hybrid capture. In this type of approach information was captured as both a digital file for work use and also as a film image for permanent retention.

Some of the most important drivers of digital conversion today are to facilitate frequent retrieval of archival information, improve workflow in the organization, or facilitate distributed sharing of documents across the enterprise.

FREQUENT RETRIEVAL

If there is only one copy of a document in archival storage, the document must be transported to you in some way: physically delivered, sent via fax, or scanned when requested (called scan on demand) and e-mailed. Some types of archival information may be retrieved frequently. If this is the case then the costs of physical delivery or labor costs to pull and fax documents will increase to the point where digital conversion costs may be completely justified. The types of documents involved will vary widely by organization; working with your records and information management vendor to identify some of these types of documents may help reduce overall retrieval costs while improving operational efficiency.

SEARCH ENHANCEMENT

As Google™ has clearly demonstrated, the ability to search information quickly can help enhance productivity and improve workflow within an organization. According to Network World, "Butler Group, a London-based IT research and analysis organization, this week released a report titled 'Enterprise Search and Retrieval,' which concludes that 'ineffective search and discovery strategies are hampering business competitiveness, impairing service delivery and putting companies at risk.' Specifically, the research firm contends that as much as 10% of a company's salary costs is 'frittered away' as employees scramble to find adequate and accurate information to perform their overall jobs and complete assigned tasks." There are many other studies that have been mentioned online; all of them identify a percentage of employee hours wasted looking for information.

Labor is the most significant cost item for most organizations. If there is an identified problem with time wasted in searches for archival information, overall productivity may improve when information is digitized. A cost comparison of labor savings versus the cost of digitizing could make a digital conversion pay dividends to the organization.

ENTERPRISE USE

One of the most obvious reasons for digitizing information is to make it accessible to multiple persons in different locations at the same time. If there is a need to use archival information across the enterprise then this is clearly a circumstance where the business imperatives of the company far outweigh the costs of conversion.

CONCLUSION

Conversion from physical copies of archival records to digital copies is an expensive process that is not likely to return the investment for many years, if ever. However, there are certain business needs that may be more important than the costs of conversion. Being able to distribute information across the enterprise, protection by redundancy, enhanced search capability, frequency of retrieval, and conversion to a digital medium to preserve fragile or obsolete media types are all good reasons to consider an imaging conversion program.

National Archives Lawyer Jason R. Baron Receives Emmett Leahy Award

John Phillips, presenting the Emmett Leahy Award for Outstanding Contributions and Accomplishments in the Records and Information Management Profession to Jason R. Baron, Director of Litigation at the National Archives. Earl McDonald, National Archives.

Washington, DC...In a ceremony at the National Archives today Jason R. Baron, Director of Litigation at the National Archives was awarded the prestigious Emmett Leahy Award for Outstanding Contributions and Accomplishments in the Records and Information Management Profession. Mr. Baron is the first federal lawyer to receive the award.

Established in 1967, the Emmett Leahy Award honors the spirit of innovation, dedication, and excellence in records and information management of Emmett Leahy, an icon in the development of the life cycle approach to managing records and information.

The award was presented to Mr. Baron based on his outstanding achievements, including:

- Contributing to the development of the first government-wide regulations governing the preservation of email, which has had an enormous impact on federal and state governments of the United States;
- Promoting best practices in email and records management and preservation from the standpoint of legal issues;
- Promoting through venues such as The Sedona Conference® the use of efficient and effective strategies and methodologies that support searching through an exponentially increasing volume of electronic records;
- Developing the TREC Legal Track for the National Institute of Standards and Technology Text

Retrieval Conference, as well as creating the international Discovery of Electronically Stored Information Workshop Series (DESI workshops), that focus on interdisciplinary efforts to assist lawyers in improving searches in litigation contexts.

At the ceremony Judge Facciola said, "Jason Baron has made an invaluable contribution to the way our society considers how to find what we need from an ever expanding source of information. No one has confronted that question with more creativity and imagination."

Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero also praised Mr. Baron saying, "In his time at the Department of Justice and the National Archives, he has become what many people regard as the "go to" lawyer in the government on issues involving preservation of electronic records under the Federal Records Act." Mr. Ferriero went on to say, "Jason has been a thought leader in pushing the federal government to adopt smarter forms of electronic archiving, and in finding better ways to search through large volumes of the government's electronically stored record information."

Mr. Baron came to the National Archives in 2000 from the Department of Justice to fill the newly-created position of Director of Litigation. Previously, he was a trial lawyer at the Department of Health and Human Services, senior counsel with the Federal Programs Branch, Civil Division of the Department of Justice, and a Visiting Scholar at the University of British Columbia.



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While a lawyer at the Justice Department in 1995, Mr. Baron's early contributions in the field of records management were acknowledged when the National Archives presented him with an Achievement Award for his work on National Archives email regulations. In addition to many other awards received during his time in public service, his advocacy for e-discovery was recognized with a Fed 100 Award in 2008. As an internationally-known expert, Mr. Baron has published numerous scholarly articles and has been invited to lecture world-wide on the subjects of record-keeping and e-discovery.

In accepting the award, Mr. Baron stated as part of his remarks that being Director of Litigation at the National Archives has been his "dream job." He added, "It has been such a great privilege to be able to work on important issues involving electronic records during my time as a lawyer at this agency." He challenged records managers, archivists, and lawyers to find smarter ways to leverage automated technologies to eliminate wasted time and effort in performing record-keeping functions.

For more information, contact the National Archives Public Affairs Staff at 202-357-5300.

LITCON'11

Please join us for LIT-Con '11 on Sunday, October 16, 2011, in Washington, D.C.!

At LIT-Con '11, the industry's best and brightest minds will be leading discussions on:
Challenges and best practices for cloud computing, Managing attorney and client mobility, Knowledge management and universal search, Compliance with data security and privacy regulations
E-discovery technical challenges, Managing electronic records.

Leave prepared to tackle your pain points and add value in real time to your organization. LIT-Con '11 schedule.
<http://www.arma.org/LitCon/2011/Schedule.aspx>

As a special bonus, LIT-Con attendees who remain in the D.C. area overnight will have free access beginning at 10 a.m. Monday, October 17, to ARMA International's 56th Annual Conference's Expo Hall, which will be packed with more than 200 relevant exhibitors, education, activities, and networking opportunities with nearly 4,000 industry professionals!

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