

Strategies for managing email – a multi-pronged attack at the University of Sydney

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A colleague recently commented that email is the most unofficial official record generating system. Significant evidence of corporate decision making is contained in email messages, but the ease with which workers send and receive email, and the volume of email in the typical worker's account, makes it difficult to identify records of enduring value. As some of our devoted readers will be aware, we have been talking about the challenges associated with capturing and keeping records from email systems for four and a half years! We know that this is still a challenge for agencies, and that there are no

magic bullets.

We are currently talking to a variety of NSW Government agencies about their strategies for capturing and keeping records of business transacted by email, and plan to publish a series of case studies describing some of these strategies. We hope that we can crowd source some useful strategies for different scenarios.

The first of these case studies briefly describes the multi-pronged strategy for capturing records from email systems that the University of Sydney is pursuing.

According to its latest annual report, the University of Sydney has more than 50,000 students and more than 6,400 academic staff. Ensuring that records of the correspondence between students and staff are captured and kept for as long as needed is a key challenge for the University's Archives and Records Management Services (ARMS) team.

The University's recordkeeping manual states that faculties and departments must create and keep adequate records of the teaching and assessment of students to provide evidence as to why certain decisions and actions were made. Records need to be kept to document interactions with students about courses,

subjects, difficulties students encounter, applications for assistance, assignments and assessments, and complaints or appeals. Many of these interactions occur via email.

The ARMS team is implementing a combination of strategies to ensure that key email messages exchanged with students are captured and kept as records. The team considers that a combination of strategies is likely to be most effective, and has decided to prioritise the capture of high value and high risk information.

The ARMS team also tries to implement 'behind the scenes' strategies for capturing email, where possible. By limiting the actions a user needs to take, they consider that capture is more likely.

Systems and software in use

The University of Sydney has Outlook as its email system and HP RM8 as its EDRMS.

Outlook is integrated with the EDRMS, and users can set up mapped folders in Outlook to make it easier to capture records to the recordkeeping system.

Communications with students

The University communicates with students in three main ways:

- The student administration system includes the ability to send email messages to students.
- Individual teaching staff email students.
- Some teaching staff also communicate with students through the learning management system.

The ARMS team uses different strategies to capture records of these communications, depending on the systems used.

Integrating business systems with the EDRMS

A lot of communication with students occurs through the student administration system instead of through Outlook. This system is integrated with the EDRMS so that records are automatically captured.

The system generates a unique student identification number (SID) for each student. This SID facilitates the capture of relevant email messages to the appropriate container in the EDRMS.

Workflows

The ARMS team has set up workflows for certain student-related processes that capture email messages to the EDRMS. These are set up on demand to meet a specific problem identified by business areas.

Workflows ensure that email messages sent as part of a process or transaction are automatically captured to the appropriate container in the EDRMS.

Workflows also have important business benefits, as they ensure that the actions of teaching staff comply with university policy and procedures. Once a user initiates a workflow, they cannot deviate from the established process.

Capture software

The University uses Ezescan software to process and capture email messages sent to students by teaching staff.

The ARMS team works with individual schools to set up the software to automatically capture messages with a SID in the subject line or body of a message. These messages are indexed and moved to the relevant container in the EDRMS.

User training

The ARMS team provides a lot of one-on-one training with users to help them set up mapped folders and understand how to capture email messages to the EDRMS.

The team can set up a folder for each student. When teaching staff move email correspondence with that student to the folder, it is automatically captured to the appropriate container in the EDRMS.

Thank you very much to May Robertson at the University of Sydney for taking the time to share their strategies with us!

Photo by: [card karma](#)

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