



Future Proof

protecting our digital future

News for NSW Public Sector Chief Executives

State Records NSW
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Public offices unaware of digital information loss

I am concerned that many public sector organisations are at risk of losing vital digital information because they do not have adequate systems and controls in place.

All government organisations need business information to:

- deliver services now and in the future
- improve efficiency
- meet expectations for transparency, reporting and openness.

To meet these needs, organisations may need to rely on aspects of their information infrastructure for periods of between 5 and 50 years. Some require information for even longer periods.

Unless you actively maintain digital information, it will be lost.

"Digital information lasts forever, or five years, whichever comes first."

Jeff Rothenburg, *Scientific American*

Few organisations are taking the necessary steps to protect themselves against major information loss.

The long term availability of government business information is an emerging threat that will impact on the NSW public sector.

A recent survey revealed that 67% of New Zealand public sector agencies have digital information that they can no longer access.

Information loss may have devastating consequences for organisations and the community.

Last year in the United States, poor recordkeeping resulted in the deaths of eight people and the loss of 38 homes.

The National Transportation Safety Board condemned "the lack of reliable

recordkeeping" at the Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

The company's "almost non-existent" information about the construction of their older, decaying pipelines led to catastrophic explosions when defective pipes ruptured, with the risk of more to come. Financial liabilities for the company are expected to reach \$600 million.

San Francisco Sentinel, 23 Oct 2011

Within NSW we have evidence that some Government digital business information is already at risk.

My office recently surveyed information management experts from across the NSW public sector. 80% of respondents reported a lack of confidence in their organisation's ability to maintain key business data for more than 10 years.

This newsletter looks at some major risks that may result in information loss and some strategies your organisations might use to mitigate these risks.

Alan Ventress
Director, State Records

Risks to information

Common risks

Risks that threaten information longevity include:

- lack of strategic vision for information management and poor investment in information infrastructure
- business systems that do not adequately maintain ongoing records of business
- new technologies that make information capture and management difficult
- accumulating volumes and silos of information.

Contracted-out business including Web 2.0 services

When high risk business is performed by contractors, risks may increase.

Some critical information compiled by contractors has been returned to organisations in inaccessible formats or never returned, preventable losses that have cost organisations large amounts of money and time to rectify.

In cloud arrangements, data loss, loss of ownership of Government information and the complexity of reintegrating data into corporate business systems are emerging risks.

Be strategic with your information

Use risk management

To mitigate risks to business information your organisation should:

- identify high risk areas of business

- know the critical information needed to support business in these areas
- have strategies in place to capture critical information, including having information provisions in contracts
- ensure that systems and processes can support critical information for as long as it is needed.

Think collaboratively

In its report, *Key Issues for Enterprise Management*, the Gartner Group predicts that 75% of global organisations are likely to establish information governance teams, comprising of technology, information and business expertise. These teams will need to navigate the maze of platforms and systems so that organisations meet their client, reporting, information, security, privacy, governance and compliance needs.

This trend demonstrates that information management is at the heart of organisational accountability and business effectiveness and that collaboration is essential to achieve these objectives.

Consider the 'I' in ICT

Incorporating information strategies into technology and business processes can help protect high risk, high value information.

- Consider long term information accessibility at system design or selection.
- Enable data partitioning so that key long term information can be exported and preserved and time-expired data destroyed.

- Ensure business applications can adequately protect and manage business information.

Administrative change and shared services

- Ensure that essential information will not be lost during administrative change.
- Maintain strategic responsibility for business information when shared service arrangements are in place.

A shared responsibility for long term information management

State Records is helping to guard against information loss. In March 2011, funding was received for a three year project to deliver a digital archival facility for the NSW Government. The digital archive will store, manage and provide public access to records of ongoing value to the State.

The project is still in its early stages but State Records plans to work closely with NSW public offices to develop long term solutions for the protection and accessibility of their digital information assets.

How we can help

State Records has guidance on how to address major risks.

- For an overview on good digital recordkeeping principles see the *Standard on digital recordkeeping* and *Managing digital records* on our website.
- For discussion of current digital recordkeeping issues and strategies see our *Future Proof* blog.

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