

Recorded Information Management

Electronic Documents: Filing Fundamentals

A RIM Reminder

Since approval of Management Board Directive 7-5, managers have been responsible for ensuring that all records in their area remain fully accessible to those who need them. Among other things, this means that managers must ensure that program staff understand how to organize and identify computerized text so that ongoing retrieval is smooth and simple and so that important documents are not lost.

RIM Fact Sheet #5 suggested some key guiding principals for program managers in managing electronic records. Remember?

- *Analyze* all present and future data communication needs, before acquiring new systems technology.
- *Determine retention periods for electronic records* just as you would for paper files and get them approved. Talk to your ministry records management staff.
- *Refresh your data* regularly by copying onto a new disc or tape.
- *Eliminate waste* by removing personal or temporary records.
- *Save and protect the software, systems documentation and*

data management tools needed to operate the present system.

- *Protect systems* from unauthorized access or loss.

This RIM fact sheet looks at access to electronic records and offers specific suggestions for naming and organizing them.

The Name Game

Here are some tips for organizing and identifying textual records (reports, studies, memos, etc.) that are stored on PCs and networks.

As everyone knows, word processing packages require that a user give a newly created document a name before it can be saved. What many people *don't* realize is that these names should follow standard rules so that files remain easily accessible.

Since system defaults usually allow only a few key strokes for a name, the names used can be pretty cryptic. Hence the problem, months later, of having to search disks holding hundreds of files those whose names are forgotten. (This is all the more difficult when someone else is doing the looking.) Use standard, widely understood abbreviations

abbreviations in file names wherever possible (such as "MNR" for Ministry of Natural Resources or "DRF" for "draft".)

So what do I do?

A. First, you need to understand what should be included:

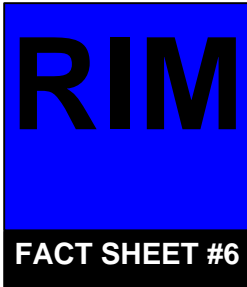
- Author or originator (when various people share the database)
- Recipient(s)
- Subject
- Type of document (Optional)

B. Then, you need to consider what most computer systems provide:*

- Eight alpha/numeric characters
- A delimiter (usually a period)
- An extension (usually three additional characters)

*Many systems do allow the option of longer names, but these can be very awkward.

The idea is to find a standard way to label records, expressing the essential information concisely.



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Confused? Here's an example:

The document is: A draft guideline regarding health transfer payments sent by Dave Chen to Jane Brown for approval.

Here's some appropriate "naming conventions": The first two characters could be used for the receiver's initials, the next three to indicate the program, and the last two to show the type of document. The extension could be used to identify the draft number.

The computer name becomes: JBHTPgdl.3

If you don't use directories, create them!

Finding records will be even easier if you also take the time to arrange existing files into directories. Generally the best way is by program or overall program activities, or by using major subject categories from your ministry records classification scheme, if one exists. *Subdirectories* allow you to get even more efficient, by establishing even more exact categories in which to group records... by specific rather than overall program activities, by type of document, by author, by geographic area, or by whatever category or combination works best for you.

For example...

Remember Dave Chen's memo?

This finds its home under: *Directory Name:* POLICY.HTP
(denotes Health Transfer Payment Policy Development)

Subdirectory Name: HTPGDL.APP
(denotes guideline circulated for approval)

It really doesn't matter what conventions you choose, as long as they're logical, consistent, flexible and easy for you and others to figure out.

But don't go overboard!

Too many directories can be really confusing. If say, you've got more than twenty main directories, create a file called "**index**" that you can use to describe your files. Then you can later search for file by subject.

Remember...

RIM applies to all records, including those that are stored electronically.

Unless you and your staff take steps to **identify, organize and maintain** your electronic records carefully, they won't be available and accessible when you and others need them.

Stay tuned for **Fact Sheet #7**. It will outline some simple guidelines for managing e-mail... such as deciding what to keep and what to discard.

For more information about this **Fact Sheet**, contact the **Archives of Ontario Policy Unit** at (416) 327-1568 or (416) 327-1570 or rim@archives.gov.on.ca