



Records Advice

No 05

Electronically created records

Records are made to meet the needs and protect the interests of the Territory, its clients and other people affected by its actions and decisions. All Territory agency records are subject to the *Territory Records Act 2002* as well as other legislation such as the *Freedom of Information Act 1989* and to legal processes such as discovery and subpoenas.

The Common Operating Environment (COE) used throughout many Territory agencies includes Microsoft Office. Within this product there are several programs including Word, Excel, Access, Project, Publisher, PowerPoint and Binder. Documents created using these products, that are evidence of a business transaction, are agency records. Other systems may contain evidence of business activities that are not being managed as records, such as work-flow programs, database applications, shared drives and web applications. Documents created using these products, that are evidence of a business transaction, are agency records. See *Records Advice No.1 - What is a record?*

The IT systems that create and store these records only allow for the management of the documents, not for their ongoing management as records. An electronic document management system can be identified by the following criteria:

- it allows documents to be modified and/or to exist in several versions;
- it may allow documents to be deleted by their owners;
- it may include some retention controls;
- it may include a document storage structure, which may be under the control of users; and
- it is intended primarily to support day-to-day use of documents for ongoing business.

This kind of management allows documents to be altered, which means that they will not be accepted as evidence of the business of government. Documents created using these systems need to be captured into the agency recordkeeping system which does not allow alteration, unauthorised access, etc. and contains audit trails of actions on the records. See *Records Advice No.4 - What is a recordkeeping system?*

Records created electronically need enduring evidential value and to be accessible and useable over time, despite the fact that computing systems have a short life span and information can be easily corrupted. Some of the problems related to the ongoing accessibility and useability of records created electronically are:

- the format of the document becomes unreadable in future formats;
- electronic records may not be captured because most capture processes are paper based;
- the context of an electronic record, and its relationship to other records, can be easily lost; and
- capturing context can be expensive.

Records created electronically need to be captured into an agency's recordkeeping system at the time of creation for several reasons:

- a record is more reliable as evidence if captured at the time of creation;
- there is more chance that the record will be captured if it is done immediately; and
- information capture that is done at the time of creation is cheaper than information captured later.

For evidentiary purposes, it is necessary to be able to establish a record's context, including who created the record and when it was created, and that it has not been subsequently altered. This is to guard against forgery and alteration of the record by the creator, the administrators of the system or others. Proof of who created the record and when it was created must be maintained over time. See *Records Advice No.3 Email as a record* regarding context.

The format of the records created electronically must be able to support itself over time. The record must be in a format that can be easily migrated to new versions, or copied from one medium to another, without loss of quality. As well as maintaining context, records must remain accessible; they are of no use if they cannot be located, and must be able to be viewed as the creators originally saw them. Records created electronically need to be captured into the agency recordkeeping system.

In a paper based recordkeeping system all records need to be printed out and placed on the appropriate file. Shared and group drives on PC networks are not recordkeeping systems. See *Records Advice No.4 - What is a recordkeeping system* for further information. Records may also be stored electronically to allow for ease of accessibility but, in a paper based recordkeeping system, any version change must be added to the paper file.