Websites and Web Content as Records

Purpose

ACT Government websites are used to communicate and provide information and services to individuals and businesses. Evidence of the establishment, maintenance and decommissioning of websites is required to be captured as records. Websites are also important government publications and care needs to be taken to ensure that significant information is preserved for the long term. This Records Advice has been prepared to assist staff to identify what artifacts need to be kept as records, how to capture them and whose responsibility it is to capture them.

The management of records relating to websites needs to be planned, considering the significance of the activities and information documented by the website, and the risks of not preserving evidence of their content. There can be several different strategies for managing records about websites, and these can involve technologies such as an Electronic Document Records Management System (EDRMS) and web content management systems (CMS) such as Squiz Matrix.

Types of Web Content

There are three types of information that contribute to a website.

Content – This is the information published on your website, e.g.:

- documents, advice, alerts
- data, images, audio or video
- resources, forms.

Context – Information about what is published. Contextual information can be system information such as metadata that is recorded, stored, and maintained in the CMS as well as administrative information about the management and operation of the website. Context includes:

- metadata about the content such as date and time of publication, revision, or removal
- author of the content
- policies, procedures, and audit logs relating to the website
- evidence of transactions made on the website
- records of decisions made about the website including requests or directives to publish information.

Structure – the information about the website as a whole and how it is arranged into understandable formats, such as:

- a site map for the website
- snapshots of the constituent pages.

What to Capture

You need to capture any records of business activities created and kept, or received and kept, as evidence and information by a person in accordance with a legal obligation or in the course of conducting business.

You will need to capture enough content, context, and structure to give an accurate picture of website activities, such as what transactions were processed through the site and what was published, when it was published and who it was published by.

A risk assessment of the website should be undertaken to identify any recordkeeping risks. This assessment should involve the website owner, website manager and the agency records manager to determine the:

- functions and activities conducted, or information conveyed, by the website
- significance and legal requirements of the activities and information
- associated risks of not preserving evidence of the content.

The risk assessment will assist in determining where records, information and data are created in the process of establishing and maintaining the website.

The Territory Records Office has published a Records Advice, 'What is a "Record"?', and provided an interactive tool, What is a Record? to assist staff to determine what is considered a record.

When and How to Capture

The findings of the risk assessment will inform what records are created or published by the website and the frequency that the records, information and data from the website need to be captured. A static site created for an event may require less frequent capture than a website that conveys time-critical information to the public.

The risk assessment outcomes can also be used to develop an appropriate strategy for capture that reflects the function and significance of the website and web content. This can also involve the use of more than one tool, such as an EDRMS and a CMS like Squiz Matrix.

EDRMS can be used to save records such as:

- content created for a website such as word documents, PDF's or forms
- approvals relating to publishing content
- policies, procedures, and governance documents for websites
- manually captured snapshots of websites.

CMS can be used to capture:

- metadata about the website and web content that can show who published a page or content and when
- version control for website pages and content
- website snapshots automatically generated and captured by the CMS.

The strategy used for capture should be documented for each website.

Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibility for managing and maintaining websites and web content is a joint effort across a few roles. The below table outlines the roles involved and responsibilities they undertake.

Role	Responsibilities	Example of records created that require capture
Website Owner	• Ensure website content is reviewed, at a minimum, once in any given 12-month period.	• Records relating to the review of website content.
Website Manager	• Complete all activities necessary to ensure compliance with the website policy and associated guidelines, and provide this policy to any parties undertaking development or maintenance of websites. • Coordinate content reviews with the appropriate content creators/maintainers.	• Evidence of website activity such as metadata in the CMS. • Records and correspondence relating to the management of websites created outside of the CMS. • Records relating to content reviews.
DDTS Online Services	• Maintain and revise website policy. • Maintain a register of ACT Government websites. As and when information is supplied by directorates pertaining to their individual websites, add this information to register. • Monitor traffic consumption of websites that are hosted by DDTS.	• Records of the development, approval, and final version of website policy. • Information Register
Content Creator	• Create content for website that is provided to the website managers.	• Finalised content approved for publication. (It

		should be noted that this may be changed by website manager for readability and accessibility when published on the website).
Agency Records Manager	• Provide advice on recordkeeping policy and retention requirements to website owners and managers in their Agency.	• Records of advice provided to staff in Agency.

How long to keep them?

The retention period of records is determined by assessment that identifies the function and activity the records relate to and the corresponding requirements documented in the appropriate Records Disposal Schedule. Websites often contain diverse records with a variety of retention periods. Given this complexity, any assessment should involve the agency Records Manager to ensure that records are retained under the correct records disposal schedule for the appropriate retention period.

References

ACT Government Website Policy Version 3.10 May 2022

Advice for Managing Websites Records – Public Records Office Victoria

Web Content, Websites and Online Resources – Queensland State Archives

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