



Future Proof

protecting our digital future

News for NSW Public Sector Chief Executives

State Records NSW

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Survey flags digital business risks

Today digital technology provides the platform for all core government business.

State Records has recently finished assessing the results of a public sector-wide survey on digital information management.

Some of the results from this survey are very concerning, and indicate significant information risks across the NSW public sector.

I have focussed on some of the key issues in this newsletter.

State Records is already working with a number of public offices to identify and address high priority information risks and we will share this work with others.

I encourage you to get involved and ensure that high value information within your organisation is being enabled and managed to best support business.

Jenni Stapleton
Acting Director

Poor management of information about high risk business

One of the most concerning findings of the survey is that only 47% of public offices across the sector have identified the digital information needed to support their high risk business processes.

The ultimate success of ICT projects depends on understanding an organisation's information needs and ensuring key information is protected.

The survey results suggest that these needs are often not considered in ICT implementations, even though decisions will be made over a system's lifecycle which could expose organisations to:

- degradation of information integrity
- limitations on information accessibility or reuse potential
- significant information loss.

The fact that the majority of public offices are not defining what core information is needed to

support short and long term business operations is a critical risk to government, with the potential for long term business ramifications.

Purging time expired business information

The survey results show that large numbers of risk-averse organisations are keeping all digital information indefinitely, creating extensive legacy data management issues to resolve in the future.

Only a small proportion of public offices have deployed strategies to routinely enable long term value information to be maintained and short term value information to be destroyed, but this is a core requirement for a sustainable digital future.

The costs of keeping all digital information indefinitely are unsustainable. Organisations must implement more risk appropriate means of keeping the information they need for ongoing business needs and routinely destroying the information which is no longer required.

Future Proof is a State Records initiative for the NSW Government

Blog: <http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au/>

<http://twitter.com/FutureProofNSW>

Planning for the future

With the current rate of technology change, most high value digital business information will need to outlive the system in which it is presently stored. Yet the survey shows that only 25% of public offices have policies or procedures for migrating their digital information.

Such strategies are vital for ensuring organisations can continue to maintain the information they will need to operate through system transitions. These strategies are also critical for mitigating information risk.

Mitigating risk in legacy systems

The costs and risks associated with legacy information systems can be high, as identified in a number of recent reports on the problem.

From the UK's National Audit Office:

"As budgets are reduced, departments with large legacy ICT estates have found it challenging to reduce costs and improve customer service through better use and sharing of information."

State Records' Digital Archives program will be moving from pilot to normal operations in mid 2014. Where information is required to be kept permanently as part of the State's archives, we will

work with public offices on migrating legacy systems no longer needed for business purposes into the archives environment.

All public offices will be able to utilise the tools and guidance developed by State Records' Digital Archives program to assist with all business systems migration and decommissioning projects and to manage core business information successfully through these transitions.

Reducing reliance on short term data backup systems

Many public offices report in the survey that their short-term data backup systems are used as a means to maintain core business and accountability information for the long term.

Because organisations need to maintain investment in current systems to continue access to data backup systems, these systems are not solutions for long term information management.

While backups serve a crucial business continuity role, the conflation of this with long term information management purposes is another very concerning and unsustainable aspect of the survey results.

How to manage information risk in your organisation

Better information accessibility and management supports better business, better services, better customer engagement and better whole of government outcomes.

State Records is working with the Department of Finance and Services to ensure strategic, consistent and practical approaches to information management are successfully deployed across government.

Contact State Records to discuss better information management practices in your organisation, particularly strategies to mitigate the risks discussed in this newsletter.

To manage information risk in your organisation it is important to:

- ensure you know what information is required to support your high risk business processes
- plan for core information to be managed through any system transition
- routinely and appropriately destroy any time-expired information
- deploy effective strategies for sustaining long term value information
- liaise with the State Records digital archives team about long term management strategies.

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