

So your organisation wants to digitise?

Many organisations are eager to digitise (scan or image) their paper records. If digitisation programs or projects are implemented well they can certainly offer many advantages, including:

- enabling the prompt location and retrieval of information
- facilitating the accessibility and sharing of information
- enabling better, faster delivery of client services
- enabling records to be integrated with digital systems
- promoting business efficiency
- reducing the costs associated with keeping paper records
- ensuring better business continuity.

However, it can be complex and expensive to digitise well. Many programs and projects fail because they are not carefully planned and managed or they are inadequately funded. Poorly implemented digitisation programs and projects can actually put organisations at risk by jeopardising the integrity of official records.

This short guide seeks to outline what needs to be in place to mitigate key risks in digitisation programs or projects to ensure that benefits are realised and records provide authentic, complete and accessible evidence of the business conducted.

Make sure that the program or project is suitably resourced

Digitisation does not involve simply buying a few scanners and using them. It requires a skilful team to consider an array of complex elements to ensure that digitisation is fully integrated into business processes and the information infrastructure of the organisation.

The team leader needs to have project management and leadership skills. Team members should include a mix of people with technical, information management, business analysis, change management and/or project management skills. All should be trained to meet their defined responsibilities. Health and safety issues for staff involved in digitisation should be managed appropriately.

The time required to establish programs and projects and the costs involved, including longer term costs, should not be underestimated.

Make sure that the program or project is well planned

The digitisation program or project needs to be well planned. It should be aligned to organisational priorities and the aims, benefits, costs and risks should be clearly defined in a business case. Choices regarding what needs to be digitised need to be made carefully – poor selection choices can jeopardise program or project outcomes. Decisions regarding the extent of digitisation required, the level of integration with current business systems, the way records will be accessed and the need for derivative images should be made in light of project aims. Planning should include identifying legal requirements, including requirements under the *State Records Act 1998* for the management and/or disposal of records. With back-capture digitisation projects organisations will also need to evaluate whether to conduct digitisation in-house or outsource to a service provider.

Note: If records required as State archives are to be digitised, State Records NSW should be contacted for advice and assistance.

Make sure that the program or project includes the management of change

Digitisation may bring about business process change and reengineering, and staff will need to adapt to digital modes of business. Changes may also impact on clients. Change management strategies should form part of program or project planning.

Make sure that the program or project defines appropriate benchmarks and quality assurance measures

Organisations will need to determine benchmarks for the quality of digital images. Specifically they will need to define the:

- technical specifications required to ensure that the images are fit for purpose and reproduce the essential characteristics of the records
- metadata required to ensure the images are described sufficiently and will be accessible and useable and how this will be collected
- hardware and software required to meet technical specifications and metadata requirements.

Quality assurance measures and procedures need to be defined and responsibilities assigned to ensure that benchmarks are met in practice. These are critical steps as they affect whether digital images can be authentic representations of the original paper records and function as evidence. Benchmarks and quality assurance measures need to be documented and tested prior to commencement of the program or project to ensure they produce acceptable results.

Procedures for digitisation should include processes for conducting digitisation and implementing quality assurance measures. These can guide staff and provide evidence of digitisation decisions and processes.

Make sure that digital images are managed well

Digital images need to be managed as part of a planned framework and stored in a system that is secure, permits access to the images in context with related records and associated metadata, is backed up and can safeguard the images' integrity and authenticity. This is particularly vital if original paper records are destroyed as the digital images will become the official records, required as evidence and for future business action. Projected storage requirements for digital images need to be considered in planning so the ICT infrastructure and system architecture can support their management.

If digital images replace original paper records they must remain accessible for the entire retention period that the original records were required to be kept for under current retention and disposal authorities. Any disposal of images must be planned, authorised and documented in accordance with the organisation's Records Management Program.

Make sure that original paper records are managed well

Original paper records should be protected and managed before, during and after digitisation. For original records to be destroyed after digitisation, the records must be able to meet the requirements and conditions of, and not be excluded from, the *General retention and disposal authority: imaged records*. They should be retained for a predetermined time after digitisation to allow for quality checking. Disposal practices should be in accordance with the organisation's Records Management Program.

Make sure that the program or project is monitored and reviewed

Digitisation programs and projects should be monitored and evaluated to determine how they can be improved.

Further information

See State Records' guidance *Managing digitisation programs and projects* at www.records.nsw.gov.au/recordkeeping for further information or contact State Records NSW on telephone: 8257 2900 or email: govrec@records.nsw.gov.au or your local records and archives authority.

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