

3.00 Electronic Records:

Professional archivists have just begun to tackle the problem of preservation and accessibility of electronic or machine readable records. Currently, common electronic record storage media, that is, computer tapes and disks, are susceptible to damage and cannot be considered permanent. New computer technologies may bring some answers to long-term archival needs. But new technologies may create another problem, which is accessibility of records with outdated or absent software or hardware. Therefore, to maintain records in an electronic form, a commitment must be made to update continually and convert all records to the newest formats, disks or tapes

3.10 What is Electronic Records Management? A lot of mystique has built up surrounding electronic records management and what it involves. The management of documents we create electronically require the same sound records management principles applied to them as our paper records. The risks of not controlling electronic records are similar but different to those risks of not controlling our paper/hard copy records.

Managing our electronic records on the computer is not a "quick fix". It cannot be seen as a technological solution to the reduction of records retention or the saving of space.

3.20 What are electronic/digital records?

Records created digitally in the day-to-day business of the organisation and assigned formal status by the organisation. They may include for example, word processing documents, emails, databases, or intranet web pages.

3.30 How does the preservation of digital records differ?

Retaining digital records over time is different to retaining paper copies for these reasons:

- A dependency on specific hardware and software to access over long periods of time.
- The speed of changes in technology means that the timeframe during which action must be taken is reduced from centuries with paper opposed to perhaps only 2-5 years with digital records.
- Obsolescence of technology is the greatest technical threat to ensuring continued access to digital material.

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- Fragility of the media. Floppy disks, CDs & DVDs and tape digital materials are stored on inherently unstable materials and can deteriorate very quickly.
- The ability to change digital material from one software programme to another means that continued integrity, authenticity, and history of the digital materials is vulnerable.
- A digital resource which is not selected for active preservation treatment at an early stage will very likely be lost or unusable in the near future.
(from: *The Preservation Management of Digital Material Handbook*)

3.40 Can we retain our electronic documentation in that format?

The simple answer is NO. Floppy disks, CD's and DVD's continue to be a vulnerable medium to retain our information. There is a very real threat that the digital materials will be created in such a way that not even their short-term viability can be assured, much less the prospect that future generations will also have access to them.

3.50 What are we to do?

The short-term answer to storage of electronic records is to store paper copies as **back up** for all correspondence, reports, and minutes. Parish membership lists and other data that are updated often should be printed and dated regularly. For both long- and short-term storage, back-up copies should be made regularly and stored separately, in a separate building, if at all possible. Data loss can occur for a variety of reasons during active use or in storage. Adequate back up will ensure that a high percentage of data can be restored for current activities.

All significant documentation should be printed out in hard copy format

3.60 What should we print out?

The Retention and Disposal Schedule below is a good guideline. The material that is recommended for permanent Archives preservation will be the material that should not remain in digital format.

- If the records use is primarily for reading/reference and its value is **permanent**, print and preserve a **paper copy** as the original.
- If the record is required to follow-up our legal and evidential activities, in other words a paper trail retain a **paper copy** as the original
- If the record is primarily for reading/reference and its value is temporary, preserve in whatever form is most convenient for use at the active and inactive stages of its life.
- If the record is primarily for data control and manipulation (e.g. accounting files, membership databases), preserve standard reports (such as annual

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financial reports) in **paper form**. Preserve the computer records in electronic form. However, these records must be maintained on media (e.g. disks) compatible with current hardware and **kept compatible** with upgrades or changes in software.