Brief Overview of Document Management

Introduction

This book is about document management. The perspective of the book is the transition of document managers from managing paper documents to managing paper and digital documents. This book assumes some understanding of the management of paper documents and does not assume any background in the technology of digital document management.

One System for Paper and Digital Records

All of the problems of managing paper documents are found in managing digital documents. There are relatively few new problems unique to digital documents. Often people are introduced to document management because they have experience in digital systems and a digital document management system is being implemented. People learning document management in a digital environment frequently assume that the problems of cataloging and indexing are unique to the digital environment, when in fact, the problems (and solutions) have existed for many years in paper document management.

While the number of problems introduced by digital documents are relatively limited, it is not wise to mix problems that are unique to the management of digital documents with the problems of poorly managed paper documents. For this reason, reviewing and cleaning up the management of paper documents is important to the success of any digital document management system intended to include the contents of the paper documents.

In another close parallel, setting up the organization of a digital document management system is very similar to organizing paper documents, and good intellectual control of the digital document organization is essential to the success of a management system for digital documents.

Having two parallel systems, one to manage paper documents, and a second to manage digital documents, is very expensive. Eventually (and often very quickly), the need to cut expenses eliminates one of the two systems. This either causes the loss of the investment in the digital system or causes the loss of all of the documents that are only accessible via the paper based system.

Because the management of paper and digital systems are very similar, it is relatively easy to have one system manage both paper and digital documents. This ensures that it is not necessary to recreate the paper based cataloging and indexing systems, usually saving a considerable expense. The old paper based system can be cleaned up using a small part of the digital system funding (paper systems operate on a small fraction of the budget of digital systems). Both the paper and digital systems benefit from the thorough review and cleanup. It is easy to tie the digital version of a document to its paper version, so tracing a history and uncovering conversion problems is greatly simplified. Finally, because there is only one system, it cannot be eliminated in the hopes of getting by on an unreviewed and often incomplete 'other' system.

The Word Document

The word document comes from the Late Latin (3rd to 6th century) documentum meaning official paper and from the Latin lesson or proof.

Today there are many definitions of document. Certainly, each person should have their own definition. The following is the working definition in this book.

A document is an identifiable recording of information. Any recording medium can be used, as long as it persists over time. Information is more than data, so a document includes some elements of contextualization, organization, and analysis.

Documents may also be iconic or evidential in nature. This is particularly true for old documents being archived. In this case, the rarity (small number) of old documents often dictates that they be saved, even when other aspects of the documents might indicate that they be discarded, or even argue that they are not documents.

Recordings of data are not documents, unless the recordings include contextualization, organization, and analysis. Examples of data is the error map of a DVD (Digital Versatile Disc), the speed of each car passing a given point on a road, or the exact weight of each can of soft drink produced in a factory.

Libraries and Books

Data needs contextualization, organization, and analysis to become a document. With sufficient contextualization, organization, and analysis, a document becomes a book.

Archives and History

Archives store the records of a society. A history of a society is created by an analysis of the records of a society in the light of the context of the society in the global history, as the global history is known at the time of the writing of the history.

A history is local to the time that the history is written. Contrary to popular belief, there is no single, accurate history. History is a reflection of the present in the past. History is created in the moment, and become inaccurate in the next moment.

Creation of a Library, Records Center, and Archives

A library, records center, and archives are intellectual concepts, and are created in an instant. As soon as someone in authority says we must have a library, records center, or archives, one comes into being. As soon as someone in authority says we do not need a library, records center, or archives, it goes out of existence.

Books cease to be books, records cease to be records, archival materials cease to be archival materials. They are managed as waste paper, at best. Portions of the New Mexico archives were once sold as kindling at a penny per pound. A record series that has been microfilmed ceases to be the official copy as soon as a policy is adopted making the microfilm the official copy, no matter how good or bad the microfilming process was. Similarly, the digital copy can become the copy of record, even if the digitizing was only done at a very low web-page-resolution.

Management and Professional Responsibility

Documents are ultimately the memory of a society. Not all documents, but some documents. At least some members of society have a professional responsibility to identify, manage, and preserve the documents that a society depends on for its existence.

It is also a professional responsibility to know how any managed documents relate to a society, and to ensure that all of the members of the society know about the importance of documents to society and the importance of preserving documents that are important to society.

Even if one's job is just the management of documents for some specific corporate purpose, it is a professional responsibility to know the relationship of those documents to the greater society. In a very small number of instances, one's actions may be directed mainly by this professional responsibility.

Metadata, Documents About Documents

The first think in document management is to document the document management operation. These documents are the meta-documents about document management. Ideally, the document management operation is related to the organization in which the document management operation exists by a policies and procedures document. This policies and procedures document is a meta-document for the organization and covers all aspects of the operation of the organization.

Within document management, a retention schedule provides a listing of all of the types of documents used by the organization. For each document type (record series) the retention schedule lists the following: the owner, creator, use, description, method of indexing, location, retention period, and reason for the retention period assigned. Further, records may be placed

in subgroups and groups to further classify records.

One of the record series includes the already listed metadata meta-documents.

This metadata maps easily onto the metadata repositories of digital systems, for example, data dictionaries in databases. Another example is the EAD (Encoded Archival Description), which maps archival finding aides into XML (eXtensible Markup Language).

The metadata for active current documents is often stored in a system that is incompatible with the long term storage systems used for records management. And, the metadata storage system for records management is often incompatible with the metadata storage system for the archive to which documents are transferred if they have permanent value to the organization beyond the operational and legal requirements for the documents. Viewing the previously unnamed information about the documents as metadata is the first step in seeing that all document management systems contain the same types of information, and that by making the systems compatible, the effort of managing documents can be greatly reduced.

Digital Documents

Digital documents are often digital versions of existing paper documents.

Maintaining intellectual control over digital documents is just as important as maintaining intellectual control over paper documents, and is often overlooked by people skilled in the management, movement, and storage of digital data. Digital data has not had a meaning component, until the introduction of digital documents.

To use a digital document, the exact format of the document's digital representation must be known (e.g. it is a PDF (Adobe Portable Document Format) file), and every single one of the stored bits must be read perfectly from the storage medium. These two absolute requirements are mixed in with the operation of an organization's computing environment. The organization's computing environment is dependent on the function and evolution of the world wide computing environment. A records manager that is responsible for digital documents is also responsible for the effect that the document formats, storage media, and computing environment have on the ability to present the document to a user in a useful manner.

Bio

Steve Gilheany, BA in Computer Science, MBA, MLS Specialization in Information Science, CDIA (Certified Document Imaging System Architect), AIIM Maser, and AIIM Laureate, of Information Technologies, CRM (Certified Records Manager, ARMA) has seventeen years experience in document imaging and is a Sr. Systems Engineer at Archive Builders.

Author

Steve Gilheany is a Sr. Systems Engineer at Archive Builders. He has worked in digital document management and document imaging for twenty years.

His experience in the application of document management and document imaging in industry includes: aerospace, banking, manufacturing, natural resources, petroleum refining, transportation, energy, federal, state, and local government, civil engineering, utilities, entertainment, commercial records centers, archives, non-profit development, education, and administrative, engineering, production, legal, and medical records management. At the same time, he has worked in product management for hypertext, for windows based user interface systems, for computer displays, for engineering drawing, letter size, microform, and color scanning, and for xerographic, photographic, newspaper, engineering drawing, and color printing.

In addition, he has nine years of experience in data center operations and database and computer communications systems design, programming, testing, and software configuration management. He has an MLS Specialization in Information Science and an MBA with a concentration in Computer and Information Systems from UCLA, a California Adult Education teaching credential, and a BA in Computer Science from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. His industry certifications include: the CDIA (Certified Document Imaging System Architect) and the AIIM Master, and AIIM Laureate, of Information Technologies (from AIIM International, the Association of Information and Image Management, www.AIIM.org), and the CRM (Certified Records Manager) (from the ICRM, the Institute of Certified Records Managers, an affiliate of ARMA International, the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, www.ARMA.org).

Contact:

SteveGilheany@ArchiveBuilders.com
Tel: +1 310-937-7000 Fax: +1 310-937-7001

For more information, courses, and papers:

http://www.ArchiveBuilders.com