



Use of Network Drives for Government Records

State and local government recordkeeping systems must be designed to support the creation, capture and management of authentic, accurate, complete, unaltered and useable records in accordance with legislative requirements and best practice.

Methods for capturing and managing digital records

The acceptable methods for the management of digital records are to:

- capture electronic documents into an Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS); and
- integrate Business Information Systems (BIS) with recordkeeping systems or build recordkeeping functionality into business information systems to ensure that the records are captured and managed appropriately; or
- where no electronic means of capture is possible, print and file the document.

The use of shared or network drives for storage and management of digital records is not recommended by the State Records Office.

Why?

Network drives do not provide the necessary functionality to manage records in accordance with the Standards and Principles under the *State Records Act 2000*.

- **Records stored in network drives can be easily altered making it difficult to demonstrate the authenticity, integrity, and trustworthiness.**

For evidential purposes, it is essential that an access history or log (i.e. metadata) is retained in the recordkeeping system to indicate who has viewed the record, extracted a copy, or modified the content.

In the event of a dispute about the content of a document, the ability to prove that the captured version of the document is identical to the version that was sent or received is paramount.

- **Records saved in network drives can be easily deleted.**

An organisation's records must only be disposed of in accordance with an a Retention and Disposal Authority approved by the State Records Commission. An EDRMS or compliant BIS will have the ability to restrict any unauthorised deletion.

- **Records saved in network drives lack version control.**

Version control is particularly important if you are dealing with documents that undergo numerous revisions or have input from several different contributors. For example, when dealing with policy documents it is particularly important to know which version of a policy is currently in force, or which version of a policy was in use at a specific time.



- **You cannot link related documents on network drives.**

When using an EDRMS links between records can be established which help records to be understood in context now and over time and supports their value as evidence. For example, a Development Application can be linked to the Council Approval in another file, Complaints in another file, Heritage Precincts and so on. This enables the full picture to be understood when reviewing a Development Application's approval or rejection.

- **It can be difficult to locate relevant documents when required**

Network drives can be difficult to manage. Rules need to be developed and adhered to by all users for folder hierarchies and naming conventions otherwise content will be duplicated, documents will be left in a user's personal drive or desktop and things will rapidly become unmanageable.

Being unable to locate a document when required is frustrating for business purposes and can pose a reputational risk.

What if our organisation has no information management systems?

Whilst the State Records Office does not recommend the use of shared network drives for storage of information, it is understood that for some small organisations the cost of introducing an EDRMS outweighs the benefits. In these instances, it is essential for the organisation to have adequate policies and procedures in place to minimise the above risks. These policies and procedures should include:

- training and communication with staff about the correct use of drives
- proper file and folder naming conventions
- monitoring of the network drives by records staff
- error corrections by records staff
- reviewing and updating security controls
- regular clean-up of network drives.

For further information, contact the State Records Office via email at sro@sro.wa.gov.au.