



IT Security

Obsolescence – A Challenge In Today's Digital Age

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Biography

Howard Frear has been at the forefront of major trends in the software industry for close to 18 years. He joined EASY Software (www.easysoftware.co.uk) in 2001 and during that time he has been instrumental in developing and overseeing a highly successful strategic partnership with SAP, a relationship that today accounts for more than 50% of EASY UK's software sales. Howard is also credited with many of EASY's largest customer wins including Serco Group, Cable & Wireless and Barclays Capital.

Howard is a very successful and experienced sales and marketing professional and is the driving force behind EASY Software UK's go-to-market and business development strategy. Day-to-day Howard is charged with managing the direct sales force, directing key marketing activities and overseeing strategic partner liaison.

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Abstract

We are generating a huge volume of digital content from mobile usage, the Internet, and come the Internet of Things expect a lot more. In this article, the author has been thinking about how change in recording media affects the big problem of business archiving.

Introduction

When Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry departed this planet, many more of his words were discovered on floppy drives stored in boxes. The big problem – modern computers don't read 5.25 inch floppy drives. On top of this the majority were formatted in CP/M, or Control Program for Microcomputers, which went out in the early 1980s. The data recovery company was forced to re-engineer the disks. Then each file had to be painstakingly converted into a readable text file, all of which took months.

This high profile data recovery episode shows how fast data formats have become obsolete – and when they do disappear how difficult it can be to access the data.

Rescuing your data

Archiving data is paramount to the way organizations work. It is essential to efficient information management, gives business greater control of their processes



and is often necessary legally and for governance and compliance. Data that is not archived is often almost impossible to locate and secure.

In this digital age we are generating gargantuan amounts of content. Every day, according to IBM, we are producing 2.5 quintillion bytes of data and it isn't slowing down. Take for example video; according to Cisco, it would take more than five million years to watch the amount of video that will cross global IP networks each month in 2020.

We have been helping customers with business archiving for some time now and understand the hurdles that companies face. I'm a big supporter of an emerging standard developed to preserve paper content in electronic format, dubbed PDF/A¹. I think it offers a viable long-term solution for preserving documents.

But there are always some practices that remain unchanged. The UK Parliament, for example, will continue using vellum as a medium for recording the country's laws, after the House of Commons voted in favour of keeping it. Matthew Hancock, Minister for the Cabinet Office & Paymaster General said that vellum gave a durability that can't be guaranteed by the digital world. Some practices never die, and if it was good enough for the Domesday Book and the Magna Carta, who are we to question its use today.

Data archiving take-aways

We should take a leaf out of the vellum book here. The first lesson for an archivist is that if the medium you are saving information to won't last the test of time, you have failed in your role.

The second thing – returning to Roddenberry's disks – archiving only works if you actually have the means to access the data, be that voice, video or words.

Why should business care?

Properly archiving data is essential for any business to run smoothly and efficiently. With the amount of data being produced, it is essential companies know what data they want to archive, how long it will be kept and who exactly will have access to it. Remember, data today is much more than just information, it is a key company asset.

Companies can be very laissez faire about archiving, until they are actually required to find a file. If floppy disks that were used back in the 1980s can only be read today with difficulty and data discovery experts, companies should start to note the archiving risks they are running with their current methods.

Information is the lifeblood of organizations. By not managing documents properly they are leaving themselves exposed to security breaches, not to mention governance and compliance issues. Who can afford to take such risks in a world where data is now king?

Reference

¹ <http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/formats/fdd/fdd000125.shtml>