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Celebrating 20 years 1989-2010

Records Management Journal

***RMJ* 20th anniversary
commemorative volume –
issue two: records
management – the state of
the nation**



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Records Management Journal

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***RMJ* 20th anniversary commemorative volume – issue two: records management – the state of the nation**

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Professor Julie McLeod

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As I write my editorial air travel over large parts of Europe has been suspended because of safety fears as a result of the volcano beneath the Eyjafjallajökull glacier in Iceland erupting. Planes are grounded and there is an unfamiliar silence in the skies – living close to an airport it unusual to have seen only one very small, presumably privately owned, light aircraft in the last week. The “cloud” of volcanic ash blowing east across the north Atlantic Ocean and Norwegian Sea is making a significant impact worldwide. The timing, just after Easter, means that many of those affected are holiday makers, either preparing to return from holiday or looking forward to a holiday; but business travelers are also affected. Despite global information and communications technology much business is still done face-to-face, necessitating travel, but of course that same technology is coming to the “rescue” in some instances as face-to-face meetings are being replaced by virtual ones. It will be interesting to see if the experience changes our habits.

Having returned myself from Iceland just a day before the eruption the risk of this happening, and the potential consequences, were topics of discussion with professional Icelandic colleagues and tour guides. But fellow visitors, some of whom had enjoyed rather exciting and breath-taking twilight visits to the volcano just prior to departure, seemed unaware of the potential impact of a more serious eruption. I confess I did not think I would be so close to being one of the thousands “stranded” in a place remote from home.

It is pure coincidence that the same day I left Iceland their Special Investigation Commission (SIC) published its report on the enquiry into the collapse of three of the country’s main banks. Presented to the Icelandic Parliament (Althingi) on 12 April 2010, the word “risk” appears frequently in the report’s executive and the opening slide of the SIC’s press conference about the enquiry’s findings stated:

The main cause of the failure of the banks was the rapid growth of the banks and their size at the time of the collapse. The big three banks grew 20-fold in size in seven years. Such growth is commonly associated with poor underwriting or *record-keeping*, which can lead to solvency-related difficulties within a few years (SIC, 2010).

The emphasis above is mine but it will no doubt prove to be a popular quote for records professionals in the financial sector and others as support for better recordkeeping.

It is not entirely coincidence, however, that one of the articles, in this second issue of the *Records Management Journal*’s 20th anniversary volume, is about risk and that another is about information governance and security. This is because the Editorial Board was keen for this issue to offer a “state-of-the-nation” focus in the context of wider global issues. Risk management, security and technology developments are all part of the wider context. With that in mind, the articles by Victoria L. Lemieux and Elizabeth Lomas look at risk and at information governance/information security, respectively.

Victoria, an academic at the University of British Columbia and formerly a practitioner in the financial services sector, examines the nexus between records and risks through an analysis of the discourse captured in articles from leading archives and records management journals since 1984. The methodology she employed to do this, visual analytics, is one that is increasingly attracting attention in many fields and

will be valuable to practitioners, academics and users of records alike. It aided her in identifying a typology of seven different topics in the discourse and lead her to conclude that the records-risk nexus can be positioned in the context of the emergence of what some call the “risk society” and our ever growing preoccupation with risk and risk management; and that we need to do more research into what is an important and now central concept within the information and records management discipline.

In her article Elizabeth Lomas, an experienced practitioner currently studying for her doctorate, aims to demonstrate that by embedding both the international standard on information security (ISO 27001) and the international standard on records management (ISO 15489), in conjunction, organizations can deliver an holistic information governance strategy and also align records management to wider information management objectives. Her comparison of the two standards clearly highlights their respective strengths and whilst she takes the UK as her context as her focus, much of what she suggests will be transferrable to other jurisdictional contexts. Whilst Elizabeth’s article does not focus on risk it does discuss risk in the context of information governance and security.

Rick Barry, a long time Board member and previous contributor to the *RMJ*, and Lawrence W. Serewicz, Principal Information Management Officer in a UK local government organization and new contributor to the journal, provide two different and very interesting opinion pieces.

Rick briefly reflects on some of the topics he considered in a 1997 article on electronic records management before turning to current contemporary issues from a North American perspective. Amongst these are some global political, economic and social events; changes in society and in the workplace; innovations in the information management and technology space and generational attitudes to the use of technology; as well as the loss of digital records. Rick begins to look to the future calling for greater integration of cultural heritage resources, at both the ontological level, via shared finding aids, metadata and portals to improve the user experience, and the organizational level through policy and operations to improve efficiency and management. He cites Library and Archives Canada as an exemplar, recognized in some parts of the world, Europe being one of them, but not necessarily in other parts. For all those grappling with how to manage the impact of continued and ever more rapid technological innovation Rick offers a very positive mantra.

Lawrence W. Serewicz offers his opinion on the question what happens if we collect everything and retain it forever? This is a topic which has been debated recently on blogs, podcasts and at least one major conference I have attended but not one that has, to my knowledge, been the subject of a peer reviewed piece (Dale and Bailey, 2009; Carnahan, 2008). He considers the question from a philosophical perspective, a practical one and a societal one, in the context of what technology developments now offer in terms of choices (or indeed the ability not to have to make choices). Seemingly limitless storage capacity he points out means that the most recognized discipline or driver for us to manage our records has disappeared and also erodes the relationship between records management and archives. His viewpoint touches on a wide range of issues, beyond the obvious one of retention, including better ways of organising and finding information and records, the impact of the semantic web, the whole notion of what records, archives, and our memory mean and hence the shape of our discipline in the future. It is a very thought provoking article.

Katharine Stuart and David Bromage, based at the National Archives of Australia, explore cloud computing and what working in the cloud means for records management. Many records managers are now assessing the benefits and potential risks of cloud computing solutions and what additional or different procedures and policies may be needed to safeguard their organisations' information. Katharine and David consider how records management can work "in the cloud" and suggest that policies and codes of practice, developed jointly by records and IT professionals, should focus on user behaviour and address issues such as information confidentiality, integrity and access to information. Their practical advice and reference to recent debate, surveys and other literature on cloud computing will be a useful starting point for many.

The current global economic situation is presenting many challenges for governments, organizations and individuals alike. Gordon Reid, formerly Director of the Scottish Council on Archives, looks at the challenge of making archives services relevant in the context of financial constraints. He uses an example of a Scottish local authority and looks at how one city's archives services can align itself to the local and national agendas and remain not only relevant, but also vital to support future growth and prosperity. His approach to analyzing the wider agendas and suggestions for action are ones that could be applied by others, not only within a cultural context of public archives services, but also in commercial, private sector contexts. And his conclusion about needing to be advocates of archives, records and/or information management is one which cannot be contested. Whilst the economic climate is challenging it could offer us huge opportunities to be radically different and to make a difference.

I am delighted to say that Dr Johanna Gunnlaugsdottir, Professor in Information and Records Management and Electronic Communication in Organizations at the University of Iceland, has joined the Board. Dr Gunnlaugsdottir will be known to the journal's readers as she has contributed articles on the implementation of electronic document and records management systems in Iceland. We now have three new members of the Editorial Advisory Board in our anniversary year.

Reading through the contributions in this issue I noticed that different authors had, quite independently, referenced the same sources or discussed similar issues from different angles or perspectives. One example is Rick Barry and Lawrence W. Serewicz's reference to the visionary thinking of Vannevar Bush in the 1940s and his concept of the "memex" device for storage and fast retrieval of personal information collections. Today's mobile devices and storage in the cloud offer a twenty-first century realisation of that concept. And, in the final anniversary issue of the journal, published towards the end of the year, we will focus on the future and include discussion, views and developments that may include similarly revolutionary ideas to those of Vannevar Bush over 60 years ago.

Julie McLeod

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Opinion piece – electronic records: now and then

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Electronic
records

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to share the author's opinions on notable electronic records achievements over the past two decades in the USA and current issues and views on the future.

Design/methodology/approach – This is an essay that is based on the author's 50 years in the field of information management, technology management, and records management as a researcher, manager, and consultant. It reviews different technologies used by the typically four generations of workers collaborating in the workplace at the same time, and what this portends for electronic recordkeeping.

Findings – Information managers, archivists, and records managers can gain insights into current and future issues managing electronic records by becoming good observers of changing technologies and their uses by generations soon to enter the workplace. Suggested options for addressing some of the more critical issues are offered, including approaches to technological designs for recordkeeping and a broader view of the potential for better integration of cultural information of all kinds in archives, libraries and museums, as a means of better serving researchers and society.

Originality/value – Evolving technologies and trends in their social usage have presented and will continue to present newer platforms for both personal and organizational work patterns, communications and record making. Modern information technologies and related analytical practices also offer opportunities for addressing some of the long-standing issues encountered in planning and implementing electronic records systems in such an ever-changing business world. Recent recordkeeping professionals can benefit from sharing experiences and stories in identifying and making use of such opportunities to move forward from a planning environment to an enterprise implementation environment.

Keywords Records management, Electronic media, Communication technologies

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

About midway in the period of the existence of the *Records Management Journal (RMJ)*, in 1997, I authored an opening essay for a special international issue at the request of its editor. For this issue, I have been invited to reflect on the current state of play of some of the topics raised in that essay and other contemporary topics in keeping with the current, national orientation of this issue. Therefore, though reflective to begin with, I will speak mainly to the status quo in keeping with the theme of this issue, speaking only to a few portions of the earlier essay to help keep some perspective. Similarly, this writing will reflect one more representative of US developments, but mindful that changes in the global landscape projected in the earlier essay have come about in ways that have made international political boundaries become less and less relevant in the world of technology, information management, and recordkeeping.

Discussion of today's state of play begs to first take note how monumental the changes have been in technology, the workplace and related work patterns, and the

