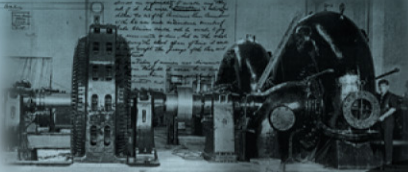


BUSINESS



Archives



Promoting Efficiency & Effectiveness

Remember that task force on the future direction for the company? The information was useful, but where is it? Does any member of the task force know where the records went?

Your company has been accused of using someone else's idea for a new product. Where is the development file which will prove that the idea was all yours, and not theirs?

Your PR group has decided that it wants to show how socially responsible their organization is. They are looking for details on how your firm has contributed to the community over the last 20 years. Where can they find the details? Is the information still around? What happens if it can't be produced?

A corporate archives and records management program can help answer these questions; ensure that the corporate memory is retained; and contribute to developing an invaluable corporate knowledge base.

Let us show you how...

BUSINESS ARCHIVES

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Introduction

This booklet has four purposes:

- to introduce archives management as an integral part of proper records keeping
- to discuss the importance of preserving permanently valuable archival records
- to outline some of the requirements for an archival program
- to provide information on where to obtain additional assistance

I Your Records and Their Management

Records as Assets

Records and the information they contain are valuable assets to any business. They are used to:

- document transactions, decisions and activities. They are also used as the basis for other transactions, future decisions and for new activities: “Why did we decide to invest in that product?”
- establish legal precedents and establish rights and obligations: “Can we prove we own the land that our factory is on?”
- develop public relations campaigns, advertising campaigns for new products, and for the celebration of historical events such as an important anniversary: “Do we still have a copy of our first corporate logo?”
- document specifications, scientific research and inventions, and innovative work: “Where are the original engineering drawings for the Gismo we marketed in 1980?”



Fire insurance plan of Bowen's farm in Coaticook, Quebec, 1892. (National Archives of Canada, C-143190)

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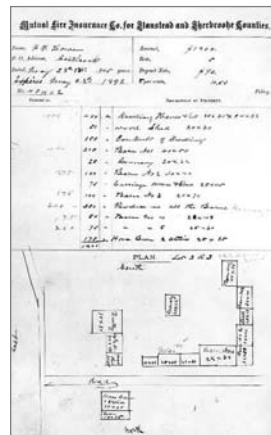
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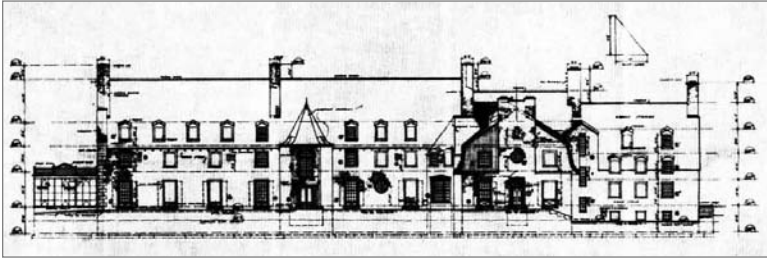
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Types of Records

Every business produces records in many physical forms, including paper, photographs, videos, blueprints, maps, drawings, sound recordings and electronic information. There are two broad categories of records.



A south elevation of the Arvida Inn designed for the Aluminum Company of Canada in Arvida, Quebec. (National Archives of Canada, C-95384)

Administrative records document the routine activities carried out within any organization, and relate to personnel, finance, facilities, equipment and supplies. Examples of such records are vouchers, purchase orders, employee files, requisitions, invoices and receipts, equipment maintenance and repair logs, payroll information, etc. Few of these records need to be retained permanently.

Operational records are those that document the core functions of a business. These records reflect the way organizations develop and grow. They document essential activities, decisions, legal obligations and responsibilities. Many of these have long-term or permanent value. Examples of these records are policies and procedures, minutes of Board of Directors and important committees, records of assets, legal agreements, etc.

Record-keeping Systems

All information should be managed in an effective, efficient and secure manner. Every business should maintain a filing system which:



Massey-Harris bicycle shop, Victoria, BC. (British Columbia Archives, HP080662)

- identifies the corporation's records and their location, particularly those vital records whose existence will enable the business to continue should a disaster occur (fire, flood, etc.)
- classifies the information the records contain by subject or function, to allow for ease of retrieval
- controls access to records and monitors their use
- contains retention and disposal information for each record or group of records

All records have a life span or life cycle. Information is received or created, used and disposed of according to the needs of the business. Most records can be destroyed when they are no longer needed for the purposes for which they were created, or for legislative or regulatory needs. However, a small percentage of business records will have enduring value and should be transferred to an archive. The retention and disposal process must be completed in an authorized systematic manner as part of an established, documented business practice. Disposal should not be carried out haphazardly or without legal authorization.

II The Value of Keeping Business Archives

Why should a business have an archives?

The need to protect corporate assets has long been recognized. Records are created and maintained at considerable expense, to serve many purposes, and are the backbone of any business. Archival records can answer questions such as:

- Why was a policy developed?
- Why did the corporation make that purchase?
- Why was a facility built in that location?
- How has your environmental policy changed over the years?
- Why were these investments made, and how have they been performing over time?

Information is an asset. It makes good sense to protect records with permanent value, and thus invest in the future of your organization.



Aircraft Manufacture (DigitalVision stock photo)

Who uses business archives?

Archival records are of primary importance to the business which initially created and used them. They will be used by you and your employees, including those in the legal, personnel and public relations departments, the Board of Directors and the stockholders. The policies, facts and figures they contain can be quickly retrieved, and the reasons for decisions can be easily reviewed.

Your business archives may also be used by individuals outside the corporation for studies in management, economics, sociology, history, biography, etc. These researchers may include:

- economists interested in the development of the specific industry
- researchers gathering information on the role of the business in the community
- business historians hired by the company to write an official history
- biographers writing about the life and work of a former employee

Bearing in mind that records received or created by a business are its property, and may be accessed by external users only with the permission of the business, users may be anyone with a legitimate need to use the archival records.



*Grain elevator at
Fort St. John, B.C.
(British Columbia
Archives, I-28802)*

III Other Archival Records Relevant to Business

In order to maintain a proper historical record of the activities of a company, it may be necessary to preserve records from subsidiary companies, or records relating to shareholdings in other companies. The personal records created by the executive may also have long term value to the corporation.

Presidents, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers and other executive officers of the corporation are key players in the decision-making process of

any business. They also lead lives outside of the business. They are often leaders in their communities. This community involvement can have an impact on their corporate activities and decisions. Their personal records relating to the non-business side of their lives, such as their activities on boards of charitable foundations, the local sports team, or their



*Bailey Bakery, Prince Rupert, B.C.
(British Columbia Archives, A-01526)*

church, may very well provide insights into the way they manage the business. In turn, these records place the activities of the business in a broader context. The preservation of the permanently valuable personal archives of key leaders in the business will ensure a more complete understanding of the corporation and the community in which it operates. Records of allied and subsidiary companies and key corporate officials complement the archival records of the parent business. The more complete the archival records, the greater the benefit to the corporation.

IV Why Do You Need an Archivist?

Archivists are knowledge-management professionals. They have specialized training in both making the most of and protecting your information assets. They manage permanently valuable records by:

- appraising records with the help of those who originally received, created and/or used them. This process identifies which records have long-term value, and allows for their transfer to the archives
- arranging and describing these selected records in order to allow efficient and effective access and retrieval
- preserving records and applying conservation techniques to those which are damaged or deteriorating
- providing expert advice on the care and management of specialized media, e.g. electronic records
- providing assistance to a variety of researchers who wish to make use of records in many different ways
- meeting legal obligations in areas such as copyright, patent protection and privacy and freedom of information



Electricity Power Plant (DigitalVision stock photo)

V Establishing an Archival Programme

Once your business has decided to preserve its archival records, you must determine whether to establish your own archival programme, or to develop a contractual arrangement with an established archives for the preservation of your material.

An Internal Programme

A successful archival programme needs a professional archivist and adequate financing for supplies, computer hardware and software, furnishings and space for storage and research.

Where does an archives fit into your organization? In the information management unit? The public relations branch? The legal department? The library? To flourish, archival programmes should be associated with the unit which can provide appropriate support, and where the records will be used to best advantage.

Alternative Approaches

You may wish to donate or deposit your records with an established archives. A formal agreement can be drawn up to cover the provision of archival services such as appraisal, acquisition, arrangement and description, storage, retrieval and access. Some agreements cover records management as well as archival services. Donating records to an established archives usually means that ownership and control is transferred as well, but each agreement takes into account the needs of both the archives and the business. This approach may be less expensive than establishing an internal programme, and could be a cost effective solution to your information management needs.

Or, you may wish to partner with businesses similar to your own. Such an arrangement might involve sharing facilities, professional staff and budgets. Costs could be shared equally or on a proportionate basis. Each business would retain control over its own records.

VI Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know if my business needs an archival programme?

Every organization creates permanently valuable records. They are worth being preserved and made available. Do you have control over these information assets? Do you have difficulty finding and using records? If so, then an archival programme is a necessity.

Our business had a commemorative history written a few years ago. Why do we need to keep the old records any longer?

While it is true that archival records should be used in producing histories, they are also used in on-going operations where historical knowledge is crucial to current and future planning and decision-making.

Why do we need a professional archivist to do this work? We have retirees who know the business well. Why not use them to preserve our records?

Volunteers and retirees can provide valuable assistance in preserving the corporate memory, but they are not a substitute for dedicated professional staff whose job it is to establish and sustain the archival enterprise. When a director of an organization wants information, she/he usually wants it immediately. A volunteer who is “not in this week” is not a substitute for an employee who is on the job. Likewise, a volunteer will be able to retrieve files, but may not understand the context in which they were created, accumulated or preserved. Archival management is information management. It requires professional skills and knowledge. Retirees from one part of the organization are not necessarily trained and experienced information management professionals. For example, accountants or engineers are not educated and trained as professional archivists, as archivists are not educated and trained as accountants or engineers.

Why would researchers outside the business use our records?

Archival records are most valuable when they are used. Businesses do not live in isolation from society. By making archival records available for research, businesses demonstrate good

citizenship and contribute to society's understanding of itself. This also contributes to the development of the business's own corporate culture and public image.

Should confidential records be preserved in an archives?

Yes. Confidential records, even those which contain personal information, should be preserved in an archives. The important consideration is whether the information contained in the record is permanently valuable. If it is, then it should be preserved as an archival record. The archives will enforce access restrictions as part of its mandate. As time passes, the confidentiality of most of the records will diminish and the records can be made accessible.

Are our records worth anything and will anyone be willing to buy them?

Archival records of businesses are assets. Their value is determined by factors such as their potential research worth and completeness. However, most archival institutions do not have acquisition budgets to purchase archival records. Income tax credits are available for the donation of cultural property under certain circumstances. It is advisable to consult Revenue Canada or a local archives about this.

Surely not all of our records are permanently valuable! We can't keep them all. How much material warrants permanent preservation?

Not all records are permanently valuable. In fact, permanently valuable records constitute only between 5% and 10% of the records received or created by most organizations. However, some businesses may need to keep more records indefinitely because of government or legal requirements. A records survey and a quality records-scheduling process which includes archival appraisal will identify the permanently valuable records in your organization. Many people mistakenly believe that archival records are always 'old' records. The value of information does not depend on its age. Generally, the most important offices in your organization will produce the most important records.

What costs will I incur if I establish an archival programme?

Costs will vary depending on the volume, complexity and diversity of the archival record, and the size of the organization. In most instances, the costs are small relative to that of receiving, creating, using and storing other records. If records are efficiently managed throughout their life cycle by a trained professional, costs may actually be reduced. Valuable storage space is released through the destruction of non-archival records.

How do other organizations use archives?

Archival records are used in strategic planning, and in personnel and financial management. They are used for legal purposes. They are used for public relations and the marketing of goods and services. Archival records are used in training programmes designed to build or enhance a corporate or organizational culture. They are used to write commemorative and community histories. In fact, they are used in almost every aspect of daily work within the business.

Where can I get advice?

Advice and assistance are readily available. Each province and territory has a provincial or territorial archives and a professional association of archivists or council of archival institutions. All are willing to assist. National institutions or organizations such as the Association of Canadian Archivists, the National Archives of Canada, the Canadian Council of Archives and the Association des archivistes du Québec are willing to provide advice and support. Advice is also readily available from other business archives. A list of other archives in your area is available from the organizations mentioned above.

VII Conclusion

In an era when gaining and maintaining that 'competitive edge' is all-important to the success and growth of any business, every corporate resource must be fully exploited, including information assets. Speed, efficiency and accuracy in service delivery to clients has become critical, and good records are the key to protecting your company's important legal rights and obligations. The establishment of an archival programme can provide significant cost savings to your corporation by reducing records storage requirements, eliminating duplication of effort, accelerating information retrieval time and preserving an essential corporate asset. Without the use of the latest information management methods and products, you may be left behind by competitors who have made the decision to invest in themselves.

Continued developments in the area of computer-based information systems offer new challenges. Businesses must be able to take advantage of new technology, and to preserve information that is stored on a wide variety of media. This requires someone with specific skills and training. An experienced archivist/records manager can ensure that your valuable information resources are protected, preserved and accessible in the long term.

Finally, there can be no history without documentary evidence of the past. Biographers, business writers, historians, genealogists, sociologists, economists and many others use archival materials to analyze the past, understand the present and prepare for the future. The story of your business is worth preserving and telling. Secure a place in the future for your business—keep a record!

Appendix 1

National Associations and Councils

Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ)
C.P. 423
Sillery, QC
G1T 2R8
www.archivistes.qc.ca

Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA)
P.O. Box/C.P. 2596
Station/Succursale D
Ottawa, ON
K1P 5W6
www.aca.archives.ca

Canadian Council Of Archives (CCA)
344, rue Wellington Street
Room/bureau 1009
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0N3
www.cdncouncilarchives.ca

Appendix II

Sample Archives Mandate

The mandate of the archives should be set out in the form of a resolution adopted by the company's board of directors. It will outline the mission of the archives. For example:

The mission of the (company name) archives is to acquire and make available records of the company deemed to be of long term or permanent value, so as to preserve the corporate memory of the company.

The mandate may also outline the role and responsibilities of the archivist. For example:

- The archivist will administer the archives, and will:*
- *systematically identify and acquire records of long term or permanent value*
 - *assist management in determining the disposition of all records and coordinate the identification of materials of long term or permanent, and therefore archival, value*
 - *serve as a member of appropriate committees, especially those concerning the management of information*
 - *make archival records available for research in a controlled setting*
 - *ensure the arrangement and description of archival materials in accordance with professional archival standards*
 - *ensure the preservation of archival materials through the implementation of appropriate conservation measures*
 - *foster awareness of the archives, its functions and research uses through presentations, tours and displays.*

Appendix III

Examples of Records Usually Having Permanent Value

- minutes of meetings of boards, committees, working groups, task forces, etc.
- annual reports, staff reports and special reports
- year-end financial statements and auditors' reports
- maps, blueprints and plans of buildings
- photographs, films or videos of staff, buildings and events
- personnel records (a planned selection)
- legal papers and contractual documents, such as charters, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcy proceedings, etc.
- personal papers of former company presidents or other policy makers
- in-house newsletters, company histories, advertising, promotional literature and other publications
- product and equipment design specifications