

FROM DIGITAL DINOSAUR TO DIGITAL DIVA

Over the last two years, the National Blood Authority has transformed its organisational culture and records management function from a paper-rich model to a digital-first culture where over 98.5% of records are born digital, managed digitally and will eventually be digitally retained or cremated.

By Peter O'Halloran

Responsible for the safe, secure and affordable supply of blood and blood products across Australia, the National Blood Authority's 78 staff manage contracts worth \$1.2 billion per annum with not-for-profits and commercial companies to ensure that appropriate blood and blood products are available to meet all appropriate clinical demand.

Established in 2003 as an Australian Government statutory authority under the National Blood Authority Act 2003 (Cwlth), the Authority is subject to the *Archives Act 1983* (Cwlth) and Australian Government policies and guidance.

story
snapshot

A case study of digital transformation of a small Commonwealth statutory authority

THE PROBLEM

The Authority's record-keeping over its first decade of operations was a highly traditional print-to-file style of operation, combined with an increasing reliance on ICT line of business systems to record some approvals and decisions. Over 10 years, 530 shelf metres of records were created, split evenly between off-site storage and on-site storage based on usage and sensitivity of the relevant records.

An internal review of the records management function in 2012 identified a range of issues including:



- ◆ extensive time spent by officers printing off records to file and an associated back-log in some teams
- ◆ the growth of on-site file storage facilities included each desk having one or more filing cabinets in addition to a compactus and file-storage room and the associated costs of leasing such space and moving accumulated files when officers relocated desks
- ◆ excessive time to retrieve files, including regular lost files 'somewhere in the office'
- ◆ an inability to access records when not physically onsite
- ◆ a potential loss of key records covering multi-year, multi-billion dollar contracts if the building was destroyed by fire
- ◆ a lack of appropriate records management controls over records contained in line of business ICT systems.

THE SOLUTION

The appointment of a new head of the Authority in April 2012 resulted in an increased focus on internal business process efficiencies. This, combined with an impending office relocation in early 2013 provided the ideal opportunity to move the Authority's record keeping to a digital-first model.

A two-year project plan was established with a modest amount of additional resourcing that aimed to:

- ◆ improve real-time access to information from both inside and outside the office
- ◆ enable the agency's operations to continue uninterrupted if the Authority's only office was unavailable for any reason
- ◆ reduce the amount of time required by staff to locate information and to eliminate the tedious and time-consuming process of printing to file
- ◆ reduce direct costs through a decrease in the floor space required for records storage and off-site storage requirements.

*Problem:
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Establishing the project

A small project team led directly by the Authority's chief information officer was established and a full-time experienced records manager was recruited to fill a long-vacant records management position within the Authority. Limited resourcing meant that the records manager was the only member of the project team solely focused on the project – all other team members juggled their other responsibilities with their new obligations as part of the project team. As the project progressed this became a clear benefit to the project, helping to ensure that the project was always focused on meeting the end business need, rather than being side-tracked into IT or records management centric demands.

The development and implementation of a new information management strategy, framework and policy was the first tangible delivery from the project team. This new suite of



documents provided a clear roadmap to all Authority staff on upcoming changes, timelines and the desired end-state. From a compliance perspective, it also clearly documented how the Authority would implement the Australian Government's Digital Transition Policy issued in July 2011.

Strong communication focusing on the objectives of the project, honest assessments of progress and setbacks and the impacts on all staff quickly became a hallmark of the project. Fortnightly updates were provided along with highly visible floor-walking and training (both in groups and one-on-one) for all staff assisted greatly in the change process.

An early decision was made to insource the majority of work on the project, enabling it to be delivered with minimal resourcing and to enable the project team to have both strong control and an ability to rapidly evolve the methodology as the project progressed.

Executive support

The support of the Authority's head from day one was critical to the success of the overall project. Simple actions such as all senior managers making clear to staff that they would only review files or documents if provided to them electronically through a link to our EDRMS system demonstrated to staff that this was a project with complete management support.

The appointment of the Authority's chief information officer to directly lead the project delivered a range of benefits including:

- ◆ an elimination of the traditional us vs them mentality between records management and ICT staff – the co-location of these staff physically side-by-side also led to considerable cross-pollination of skills and understanding and enabled issues to be dealt with quickly and easily
- ◆ a strong champion for the project, able to interact with other managers readily to address issues, encourage uptake and explain the business benefits for the work.

The establishment of a standing agenda item at the Authority's weekly senior executive management meeting provided a forum for the Authority's senior staff to discuss the project in detail, in addition to providing a forum for any issues or concerns from staff to be addressed in a timely manner. Although at times this felt like both a blessing and curse for the project team, it was critical to our success constantly driving the project team to deliver a high quality outcome.

Technical solution

The Authority's existing HP TRIM system was expanded in scope, moving from a basic file registration and management system to a full-blown EDRMS. Like all such functionality migrations, this required considerable effort to upgrade the back-end infrastructure (such as storage, new virtual servers and upgrades to the then latest versions of TRIM) in addition to the front-end including upgrading to the then latest version of the HP TRIM end-user client.

The engagement of iCognition (our long-time support partner for records management guidance and HP TRIM support) in this stage was crucial – enabling best-practice approaches to be quickly adopted whilst reducing the burden on the project team.



The provision of an excellent end-user experience was a key component of the project and our analysis of the issues and feedback from staff indicated that they needed both hardware and software enhancements to ensure an optimal experience.

The opportunity of a hardware refresh for end-users by our ICT infrastructure team was seized upon and all staff were provided with dual 24" monitors. This enabled staff to readily view the contents of files and individual documents on one monitor, whilst working on other documents or systems on the other monitor.

A web-based front-end was also nominated by many staff as a key requirement, and the team implemented iCognition's RM Workspace (formerly Diem Portal) as a web-based front end to TRIM.

Known across the Authority as 'DREAMS' following a staff competition to name the tool, it enabled us to:

- ◆ provide a user-friendly interface where we could suppress many features not required by staff on a daily basis to reduce the screen clutter and confusion
- ◆ enable staff to quickly limit searches to certain records types through a simple drop-down selection – feedback from users was that this reduced their returned results often from thousands down to a handful in two or three easy mouse clicks
- ◆ replicate a network file storage-type hierarchy through individual team-based tabs so that users can access records whether they prefer to search, tag or browse through a folder-based structure.

We customised the header of the webpages in the tool so that a range of photographs of current and former Authority staff engaged in both work and social settings are displayed in the banner across the top of the screen. Whilst many staff will never perceive records management as 'fun', we have managed to personalise the experience and staff notice and comment positively when their photo is displayed in the banner.

Providing access to staff on the go on a range of devices was challenging, but has been a key feature that has been

*Solution:
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well received by our staff. Initially, we implemented, and then decommissioned (when we decommissioned our iPad fleet) Kaphish's goTRIM app. This app provided staff with ready access to our document repository wherever they were and a great deal of positive feedback was received. Now that we have implemented virtual desktop infrastructure (where the computing power is based on the server and the desktop equipment simply provides the 'front-end' where a user can interact with their desktop session) which is available both within and outside our office environment, users simply use DREAMS or the full TRIM client and have access to all of the functions whether they are at their desk, in the field (such as in a Pathology laboratory on a tablet PC) or working from home or an airport lounge.

Migration of electronic records

Business areas and individual staff members were tasked with migrating their records from personal drives, network drives and email accounts into the EDRMS. Specific user education focussing on Normal Administrative Practice (NAP) and how to decipher which records were required to be retained helped to minimise the migration of items which were not records and no longer needed to be stored.

Whilst we examined various migration tools to assist in the process, ultimately we decided not to adopt any of them. We made a clear decision that each team was required to evaluate and then migrate documents into the EDRMS, with those items left behind evaluated by the records manager before destruction.

Monthly organisation wide reporting on team progress with migration occurred and network drives were decommissioned on a regular basis. The implementation of email quotas, personal drive quotas and network drive decommissioning helped to encourage staff to not fall back into old practices and to continue to file items into the EDRMS. Over 90% of the historical contents of network drives were migrated and the drives shut-down.

Migration of active paper-based records

Staff were allocated time to 'clean-up' their existing paper information. This involved filing current and legacy paper information and destroying low value facilitative information, such as printed reference material, under NAP. This increased staff engagement with the project and assisted in identifying what information needed to be digitised.

With assistance from each business area, active files were temporarily closed and moved to a secure location within the office for scanning. This ensured new information was not added to the files while the work was being completed. Quality assurance testing was done to ensure the original paper information would be accurately replicated in the digital version. The paper files were then individually scanned in-house using the standard operating procedure developed during the testing period.

After scanning and quality assurance steps (including both the scanning officer and an independent QA officer reviewing all pages of each migrated file) were completed, the digital version (which was searchable through Optical Character Recognition processes undertaken at the time of scanning) was saved in the EDRMS. A certificate documenting how the file was scanned, and the date and time of the scanning was included for accountability purposes.

Scanned files were retained for three months following scanning and quality assurance tasks, and were then destroyed under the authority of the National Archives of

Australia General Records Authority 31. Given the sensitivity of many of the files, the destruction of all records was undertaken in-house using a secure cross-cut shredder. The volume of files being shredded at the height of the project caused some issues and we commissioned a supplier to build a custom cupboard with the shredder head mounted on top. The cupboard then contained a 240 litre wheelie bin underneath the shredder head and shredded material dropped straight into the bin. We still wonder what the driver of the recycling truck thought we were doing with 78 staff filling nine 240-litre wheelie bins each week with shredded paper!

Migration of inactive paper-based records

In parallel with the migration of active paper-based records, a process to sentence all records stored off-site was undertaken with just over 50% of records sentenced so far. Records with a retention period of 10 years or greater (the majority of our holdings) were then digitised using the same processes and staff which we employed for the active paper-based record migration. Likewise, records due for destruction were destroyed in a similar manner.

During the sentencing process, we noticed that greater than 20% of the storage cartons were significantly damaged, with boot prints, boot-sized holes, torn handles and bird droppings on the lids common-place. We changed service providers to a facility that better met our needs and re-housed all file covers in new storage cartons.

THE OUTCOME

Two years after we commenced, the project is complete and we have transitioned to a business as usual model of operation. The project delivered above and beyond our initial expectations and we have achieved the following:

- ◆ 98.5% of agency records are now created and managed digitally.
- ◆ Staff have access to complete, accurate and authentic information and the ability to work across teams is greatly enhanced.
- ◆ Staff can access over 99% of agency records at any time, from any device and from any location with the EDRMS solution available to all staff from both inside and outside the office. This was made available through the concurrently conducted desktop virtualisation project. The NBA can now operate with minimal disruption even if the agency's only office is unavailable.
- ◆ Storage space has been reduced by 66% with 175 shelf metres (167m off-site and 8m on-site) of records now retained in physical format. The significant reduction in on-site storage has resulted in a decrease of office space requirements of 2.4 square metres per staff member which is saving the agency over \$50,000 in rent per annum.

The greatest achievement is in freeing up our workforce. No longer are they tied to their desks to access our corporate records. Staff can access records from anywhere, at any time on any device. This benefits not only frequent travellers, or road warriors, but also ordinary staff who can now work from home if required with full access to all resources. Since commencing the project, two staff members (2.5% of our workforce) have relocated interstate from Canberra due to family commitments and they have access to all resources as

though they were in our office. Two further staff members are now actively exploring a similar change and, within two years, we expect that up to 15% of our workforce could be based far away from our office in Canberra.

THE FUTURE

With the initial project now complete, the project team would like to take a well-deserved rest. However, there being no rest for the wicked, we are continuing with a range of projects. Over the coming two years, we aim to:

- ◆ upgrade our HP TRIM environment to HP Records Manager
- ◆ continue the digitisation of legacy paper-based records and we are planning to have completely migrated or disposed of our remaining 175 shelf metres of records by 2020
- ◆ implement electronic workflows in HP TRIM for the remaining business processes that have not yet been digitised – our plan is to eliminate ‘wet’ signatures for all internal documents by the end of 2016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter O’Halloran is the National Blood Authority’s Chief Information Officer, responsible for the provision of services to health providers and ICT systems supporting the Australian blood sector. A self-confessed agent of change, Peter uses ICT systems to reform and reshape the Australian blood sector in a collaborative manner that improves patient outcomes whilst saving money. Peter joined the Australian Public Service in 2006 after more than a decade designing and managing service delivery in the university and not-for-profit sectors.



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- ◆ migrate content from line of business applications from the applications into our EDRMS for long-term management
- ◆ commence sentencing of digital records, with a view to commencing the transfer of digital records assessed as ‘Retain as National Archives’ or RNA to the National Archives of Australia. ◆

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