

## Information Management Advice 27 Managing Email

### Introduction

*Email is a critical communication mechanism for Tasmanian Government Agencies and a fundamental tool for conducting business. Emails, like State records in other formats, should be captured and appropriately managed to preserve evidence of government activity.*

### Why manage Email?

There are a number of benefits for Agencies that effectively manage their messages. These include:

- better management of business
- better quality evidence of business decisions that have been made
- the prevention of illegal destruction of records of ongoing value
- efficient management of physical and network storage space, and
- improved retrieval of records for operational needs.

### Which Emails are records?

Whether a message is a record does not depend on its format or means of communication, rather it depends upon whether it was sent or received in the course of official business. For example, an email confirming that Agency X wishes to purchase goods for the cost of Y is a business record, while the latest email joke is not.

### Types of Email

#### Business Email

Business emails are part of the agency's records. It is email that documents the business activities of the agency and should be saved into RIMS. Examples of emails which form part of an Agency's business records include:

- A communication between staff in which a formal approval is recorded
- A direction for a course of action
- A discussion between staff where the context results in a decision being formulated
- Record of the essential business of the agency
- Business information distributed by email (as attachments) for example original copies of minutes, the master copy of a document from other organisations
- Records of conversations (file notes)
- Business correspondence received from outside or inside the agency

Business email must be retained to provide evidence of business activity and meet legal requirements. Authority to dispose of these records must be obtained from the State Archivist, through the instrument of a Retention and Disposal Authority.

## Short-term Value Email

Short-term email is email which facilitates an agency's business but is of a trivial nature or of such short-term value that it does not support or contribute to the business functions of the agency and does not need to be saved into a recordkeeping system. Examples of this type of email include:

- Notices of meetings;
- Copies of minutes;
- Copies of reports or newsletters;
- Staff movements;
- Advertising material and any other publicly available material;
- Internal work-related email received by „carbon copy” (CC) or “blind carbon copy” (BCC).

Short-term value email can be destroyed as authorised in the *Disposal Schedule for Short-term Value Records DA No. 2158* and does not need to be recorded in the Register of Records Destroyed.

## Personal Email

Personal email is email which relates to a private or personal matter and has nothing to do with the business of the agency. Examples of personal email include email dealing with topics such as:

- Let's do lunch;
- Personal/family arrangements;
- Unsolicited information or newsletters (i.e. not related to staff work responsibilities).

This email can be deleted.

## The Creator is Custodian

The Creator is Custodian of the information they create.

All Government employees are responsible for saving the business emails they create i.e. sent whilst employed by their agency (highlight the previous sentence).

Government employees are expected to regularly review their sent items box and save their business email into their agency's recordkeeping system. They must also save any email received by them from a source external to the agency, or from other government agencies or organisations if required by their agency for business purposes.

If all employees manage their own sent items then this will eliminate duplication within the agency's recordkeeping system.

## Tips for deciding on whether a message is a Business Record

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it approve or authorise actions?
- Is it a formal communication between staff relating to work?
- Does it signify a policy change or development?
- Does it commit my organisation to an arrangement or to a business deal?
- Does it contain advice, provide guidance or constitute formal communications with people inside or outside the organisation?
- Am I required to act upon it?
- Is it external correspondence I have received relating to work?
- Is it something that I have sent for a business purpose?
- Is it something I have used at work to make a decision?
- If I left this job tomorrow, would my successor need the information in this message to continue with this matter?
- Is the matter to which the message relates one which may be reviewed or audited later?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then save the message into an official recordkeeping system.

## **Email systems and risk**

Email systems do not manage emails very well. This is especially true if you have a system where email is regularly purged when mail boxes become too large or when staff members leave. When important corporate records (such as emails which authorise financial decisions or policy changes) are lost, agencies may face increased legal and social risks. For example, they may not be able to justify their own decision making processes because they cannot find supporting documentation. They may be unable to ensure that all staff have access to appropriate information and so decisions may be made which are misinformed or incorrect. These risks can only be managed by assessing the agencies email system and putting in place a strategy (or strategies) to reduce these risks. There are a number of factors which should be taken into account when determining the appropriate strategy for your agency.

## **Business Email should be Accessible**

Emails which form part of the business records should be able to be read by anyone who has sufficient access privileges in their agency's recordkeeping system. That is, authorised staff should be able to read emails which are relevant to their business regardless of which email inbox the email was sent from or to. Many email systems only allow the recipient or the creator of emails to access those messages. Recordkeeping systems have been introduced as the primary method of storing business email to provide access to business information across the agency.

## **Business Email Should Not be altered**

It is important that business emails are not altered (or that alteration can only happen in an authorised fashion), otherwise they may not be considered reliable evidence. Many email systems allow users to alter their messages after they have been sent or received. In the event of a dispute about the content of a particular email, the ability to prove that the version of the email being advanced as the record is identical to the version

that was sent or received is paramount. Thus, a method must be devised that ensures that emails that are business records cannot be altered after dispatch or receipt, or, at least, that any such alterations cannot be made undetectably.

## **Benefits of Classifying Business Emails and keeping them in Recordkeeping Systems**

An important component of email (and therefore records) management is classification. That is, emails should be filed so that they are related to other documents (paper or electronic) on the same business activity. If this is done, it is possible to build up a complete picture over time of events related to a particular business activity, client or project. If this is not done and related emails are scattered across the agency, it is very difficult to guarantee that all emails which are relevant have been found.

Benefits to the individual include:

- access to the records needed to perform a job. The email is registered and classified in a recordkeeping system, making it accessible and manageable
- having email and all related records linked together to produce a complete file. If records are scattered, such as when emails are saved to individual email accounts, a complete file is not possible as there is no common access to the emails

Benefits for the organisation include:

- the email being disposed of in accordance with approved disposal authorities,
- all staff can easily locate records when required, and
- email server space is reduced by the routine deletion of all emails, as official records are accessible from the recordkeeping system.

## **Business Email should be Reliable for the Long Term**

It is highly likely that email kept in most email systems will be unreadable in as little as 5 years time due to technological obsolescence. This may not be important for some records, which are not required for more than 2 or 3 years, but will be very important for other records, especially those which are deemed to be important records of the State which must be preserved forever.

## **Capturing Replies**

If there is an exchange of emails on one topic, originating from one email, then it is best to save the email when the sequence or 'conversation' is complete, saving time and storage space. However, care should be taken to ensure that the sequence is complete.

If the email is long and complex you may wish to capture emails individually, or at appropriate points in the sequence, for example when the subject changes.

Most email systems can be set up so that the reply automatically includes the initial message. If there is an exchange of emails on one topic, include all messages in the sequence, i.e. don't delete the end of the sequence

to make the message shorter. Capture the emails at the end of the sequence so that it need only be captured once. Note: this only applies if the sequence is intact. If not, capture the component parts.

## Capturing Attachments

Attachments to emails should always be captured. There are two ways in which attachments can be captured. The first is to capture the attachment separately from the email and cross reference the attachment with the email so they can be linked together. Capturing attachments separately can also mean easier retrieval.

The second method of capturing attachments is to register the email and attachment as one record. If they are being printed out then the email and the attachment should physically be attached together.

## Email Retention and Destruction

There is no 'blanket' retention period for emails. As with all records, emails need to be kept at minimum for as long as indicated in the relevant General or Functional Retention and Disposal Schedule.

## Deleting Email

- If an email is personal, junk or spam then it may be deleted at any time.
- If an email sent by you needs to be kept as a record you can delete it from your Sent folder once you have captured it into the recordkeeping system.
- If an email needs to be kept as a record and you are the only or main recipient within the Agency, you are responsible for saving the record into the recordkeeping system and then you can delete your copy of the email.
- If you are one of a group of people copied into an email and are not responsible for capturing it, then you can delete the email once you are sure that it has been captured into the recordkeeping system.

## Digital Signatures in an Email

There are two types of digital signatures that may be applied to email. One is an encryption or digital seal, and the other is a scanned image of an actual signature.

When dealing with encrypted email it is best to save the email to a recordkeeping system once the email has been unencrypted. If the email contains a scanned copy of a signature, ensure that the signature can be seen once registered into a recordkeeping system. If the signature cannot be seen, it is recommended to print the email and maintain a paper or scanned version which shows the image of the signature.

## Email Archiving Solution

There are some advantages to keeping email in an email archiving solution (also known as email vaults or email archiving systems), mainly relating to freeing up storage space from email inboxes; however these systems are often not suitable for the management of emails as records. Email archiving solutions can be found lacking when differentiating between business critical informational and other kind of emails. If stored in an email archiving

system, the email is kept unrelated from records in other formats and systems and generally only the sender, recipient or email administrator can access the email. This means that other staff may not know of the existence and a gap may occur in the record. Other problems that may be encountered when saving emails in an email archiving system is that automated classification of content is not fool proof and it can be difficult to assign retention periods to the emails.

## **Use of Personal Storage Tables (PST) Files to store email**

Personal Storage Tables or PST file is an open, proprietary file format used to store messages, calendar events, and other items within Microsoft software such as Microsoft Exchange Client, Windows Messaging, and Microsoft Outlook. The use of the files is not encouraged as they are very easily deleted when desktop computers are upgraded as the PST files are stored on the PC local drive. PST files are not an appropriate archiving solution as it is difficult to assign retention periods to the email and they are separated from other records which add context to the business of the agency. Email for permanent retention should be saved in the agencies recordkeeping system.

## **Strategies for Improving the Management of Email**

### **Establish a Corporate Policy**

It is the responsibility of all Tasmanian government agencies to ensure that email is appropriately saved as a record. Corporate policies must be established for the successful integration of email management into your records management program. The corporate policies should include information on managing emails, assigning responsibility and addressing the issues of education and training regarding email management. Incorporating recordkeeping requirements into Acceptable Use of Email policies is another tactic.

### **Assign Responsibilities for Managing Email**

Responsibility for managing messages is shared between users, records managers, and system administrators. The agency Secretary has overall responsibility for the agency's compliance with the requirements of the Archives Act.

The following table sets out the typical responsibilities relating to managing messages.

Agency Member	Responsibilities
Staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending and receiving message</li> <li>• Complying with agency records management policy and procedure</li> <li>• Capturing messages into recordkeeping systems</li> </ul>
Records Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing training on managing records</li> <li>• Implementing policies, procedures and tools for records management</li> <li>• Monitoring the capture and maintenance of records in recordkeeping systems (May be responsible for capture in a centralised system for smaller agencies)</li> </ul>
System Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing appropriate security and protection measures for electronic systems</li> <li>• Monitoring system reliability</li> <li>• Establish rules for email system management</li> </ul>

## Train and Educate Staff

Raising awareness of what staff need to do is important for improving the management of all records, including managing email. Awareness raising may take the form of:

- staff briefings or training sessions
- leaflets
- newsletter items
- Intranet information, and
- presentations at staff meetings

## Records Management Software

Email systems make records but they do not effectively manage them for long term accessibility.

Recordkeeping systems are designed to manage records for the long term. Save all of your agency's business records into a recordkeeping system.

Many records and document management products can be integrated directly with email systems to enable the seamless capture of emails. Even in entirely paper-based environments, these products are a key part of effective recordkeeping systems, in that they support the management of files onto which paper-based messages are saved.

## Further Advice

For more detailed advice please contact:

Government Information Strategy Unit  
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office  
91 Murray Street  
HOBART TASMANIA 7000  
Telephone: 03 6165 5581  
Email: [gisu@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:gisu@education.tas.gov.au)

## Acknowledgements

- State Records NSW Guideline 7 - *Managing the message: Guidelines on managing formal and informal communications as records*
- Wikipedia
- Public Records Office of Victoria Email as Records: *Advice to Victorian Government Agencies*
- Queensland State Archives *Managing Emails that are Public Records*

## Information Security Classification

This document has been security classified using the Tasmanian Government Information Security classification standard as PUBLIC and will be managed according to the requirements of the Tasmanian Government Information Security Policy.

## Document Development History

### Build Status

Version	Date	Author	Reason	Sections
2.0	March 2015	Christine Woods	Template	All
1.0	31-10-2012	Allegra Huxtable	Initial Release	All

### Amendments in this Release

Section Title	Section Number	Amendment Summary
All	All	Document imported into new template

**Issued: October 2012**

**Ross Latham**  
State Archivist