

# Business Records Management

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SINCE records keeping is only one of the functions of records management but is the essence of archival work, it follows that archival work is subordinate to records management and, therefore, that an archivist is subordinate to a records manager. I venture to say that all the records managers present would like that arrangement—but very few of the archivists.

The trouble with this cozy arrangement is that records keeping does not really have the same meaning for both archivists and records managers. Records keeping in the archival sense means retention of records permanently because of their historical or research value, whereas records keeping in the records management sense means keeping active records readily available for day-to-day use in the business. From these definitions it is evident that the major work of the archivist begins much further along in the life cycle of a record than does the work of a records manager. In fact, the archivist picks up where the records manager leaves off.

I think that in order to place the records manager and the archivist in proper perspective insofar as private business is concerned it would be well to recall some fundamental facts about private business. First and foremost, in order to continue to exist a private business (as opposed to government or government-subsidized business) must operate at a profit. For comparatively short periods of time, of course, profit may be lacking, but over the long haul there must be a profit. Whenever a private company considers spending some dollars the expenditure is carefully evaluated in terms of its effect on the well-being of the company, that is, its profitmaking ability. Thus money for facilities, salaries, materials, and the like is spent with the expectation that ultimately these will contribute to that moneymaking ability. This rule applies even to charitable contributions, because being a good corporate citizen of a community enhances the public image of a company and contributes to its success. The point, of course, is that private enterprise does not ordi-

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narily spend money unless it foresees some present or future tangible benefit.

Another point worth mentioning is this: Private enterprise to a great extent operates under a "time pressure." The rewards go to those who get there first. Latecomers usually get the crumbs. This time pressure puts a premium on manpower expenditures. There is a reluctance to expend man-hours on activities that are not pertinent to the current situation or to the future. Deadlines are the watchword. The expenditure of man-hours that do not help meet these deadlines is looked upon as wasteful, and thus man-hours are assigned reluctantly to anything that is pertinent only to the past.

Into such an atmosphere now come the records manager and the archivist. The records manager can show business how to reduce the costs of creating records by forms control, correspondence and reports control, and similar techniques. He can reduce costs by improving file systems, by moving records from expensive file equipment to an inexpensive storage center, and by scheduling records for early destruction instead of letting them pile up indefinitely. He can show management how to protect its vital information from being lost through a disaster. Records managers are very familiar with these sales pitches, which have a strong appeal to management because they affect the profits of the enterprise by improving utilization of space, facilities, and manpower.

I do not believe that the archivist, at least at the present time, has any comparably appealing sales pitch for business. Management appears to be not very enthusiastic about documenting the past. Pressures of the present and of the onrushing future are too great. Although some larger businesses do have archivists on their staffs, these for the most part appear to be family-dominated businesses, and I suspect that in many cases the family is interested in the history of the business primarily insofar as it reflects the history of the family and not so much for the sake of the business itself. Hopefully, more businesses, particularly the larger ones, will one day realize that they are making history and that it is as important to document their activities as it is for our military and political institutions to document theirs. This realization would logically lead to a need for better understanding and inter-relationship between records managers and archivists in the business world.

One good way to bring this understanding about is just what is taking place here—joint meetings between the two. I think the Society of American Archivists is doing a good job of promoting better understanding by the evident interest it is taking in records management. Its journal, the *American Archivist*, has published

considerable material on records management. Perhaps the Association of Records Executives and Administrators and the American Records Management Association could reciprocate in their publications by featuring an occasional article on archives, especially business archives. Occasional joint meetings at the local level between archivists and records managers would be conducive to better understanding. Reciprocal guest-speaker arrangements could be made. In fact, an eventual blending of the two disciplines could well result, and to the benefit of both. After all, both activities are operating as one organization at the Federal Government level—the National Archives and Records Service. This sort of arrangement conceivably could work well elsewhere.

There is no doubt that a gap exists between the business records manager and the archivist. This is perhaps not so true in a business enterprise having both a records manager and an archivist, although in general it would appear that records managers are only dimly aware of archivists and do not at all realize that archivists are capable of a contribution to business. To an extent, some of the organizations in the two fields contribute to this situation. They tend to be too isolationist—wrapped up in their own specialties. It is thus understandable that the average business-oriented executive envisions an archivist as operating solely in the dark and dusty environs of some remote, museum-like structure, sorting through old papers at a leisurely pace, and little concerned with the present. The executive simply does not see the archivist as being at all pertinent to his present situation.

I think that archivists have a selling job to do here, and I think that some of this selling can be done through existing records management associations. Let archivists give an appealing message to records managers, who will carry it home to their businesses. But the archivist's message must have an appeal for the business *executive*. What can the archival function do for him? How can it help him manage his business better? The business archivist is going to have to develop a stronger sales story. I don't think anyone can or will do it for him.

Now let us consider the business information system and how the records manager and the archivist can make a contribution to the success of the corporate enterprise. Are they both necessary? "Well," one might first ask, "is the records manager necessary?" And the answer would be: "That depends." It depends mostly on the size of the organization in terms of employees or of dollar volume of business. The function of managing records is present in the smallest business organization—even a household. It is only when

the function becomes large that a full-time records manager is required.

So it would be with an archivist. The archival function is present (although not necessarily identified as such) in even the smallest organization. How well or badly it is performed depends upon management's attitude toward it. I should think, however, that a full-time archivist would be justified only in the larger businesses, and it would seem that the business would have to be larger to justify a full-time archivist than it need be to justify a full-time records manager. I say this because the scope of an archivist's responsibility is narrower than that of the records manager.

Assuming an organization large enough to justify both a records manager and an archivist, it would seem that responsibilities should be divided somewhat as follows:

#### RECORDS MANAGER

1. Forms Control.
2. Reports Control.
3. Correspondence Control.
4. File Equipment and Methods.
5. Intermediate Storage of Inactive Records.
6. Records Retention Scheduling.
7. Records Disposal.
8. Vital Records Protection.

#### ARCHIVIST

1. Identification of records for incorporation into the company archives.
2. Operation of the archives.
3. Compilation of the company history.

I have given the archivist the task of compiling the company history because I think that the addition of a historian would not be looked upon with much favor by most managers of business today, especially in a business already paying an archivist and possibly also a records manager.

There is another area of responsibility that I think could very well be given to the business archivist, although strictly speaking it is not normally considered archival work. Most businesses, but particularly manufacturing enterprises, generate or acquire artifacts that over the years take on historical significance. These might range from the first model of a product line to the desk used by the first chairman of the board. There is very little organized effort in business these days to retain and preserve such physical mementos. They are preserved more by accident than by design and often cannot be found when an occasion, such as an anniversary or a trade

exhibition, requires their use for promotional or publicity purposes. A logical extension of a business archivist's interests could well take him into the area of artifact preservation.

We are in the midst of a revolution in records making and records keeping that will have a tremendous impact on the work of both the records manager and the archivist. The archivist, if he does not do so already, may have to deal with records in the form of tape, film, sound recordings, and whatever else will come down the road in the future. Of necessity he will have to retain also the equipment necessary to reproduce nontextual information in a usable form. So I envision that the business archivist would be, in effect, operating a kind of "archives-museum"—a collection of stored information, the equipment required to put it in usable form, and physical mementos of the business.

Organizational placement of a business archivist in the administrative area and within the records management functions would seem to be most logical. I say this because it appears that in business as it exists today the archival function is simply the concluding phase of the records cycle. I do not think that it yet warrants being set up as a separate function, nor do I think that business is yet ready to accept it as such.

Now let us come down the scale a bit. We've been considering very large businesses. As we go down, it would seem logical to consolidate the responsibilities of the records manager and the archivist into one position. I think this consolidation would place all responsibility with the records manager, who would necessarily have to acquire some of the "know how" of the archivist. The reason for this is that the skills of the records manager are more pertinent to the day-to-day operation of a business than are the skills of the archivist. Coming down the scale further and getting into the area of small businesses, which cannot support even full-time records managers, the functions of both the records manager and the archivist would be a part of another job—perhaps in the systems organization. No matter how small is a business, however, I think that functions of the records manager and the archivist are still present although possibly not recognized.

Just a few words about the various societies and associations operating within each field. There seems to be a feeling that somehow these organizations have contributed to an existing gap between the archivist and the records manager. If any such contribution was made in the past or is being made today, it appears to be unintentional. That is to say, each organization went its own way, largely ignoring others. It is my impression that this is more true

in business than in government, but it is being remedied in any event, as this conference and others like it certainly show. This is not to say that there are no problems in the relationship between business archivists and records managers. The foremost problem, I think, is a lack of understanding and appreciation on the part of business *management* of the archivist's objectives—how he can make a contribution to the business community. I think many business records managers also do not have this understanding and appreciation. Business archivists, therefore, have a selling job in confronting business management and business records managers.

Another problem could arise between the records manager and the archivist. The records manager is trained to hold down the creation of records and to get rid of existing records as soon as possible. The archivist probably would like to preserve better documentation, and therefore he is less inclined than is the records manager to dispose of records without determining whether they possess historical or other values. Here a mutual understanding of each other's objectives and problems will have to be reached. It's largely a matter of an exchange of information. I don't think there is or will be any real argument between the two. I do think that more positive steps should be taken to exchange ideas and requirements. Again, conferences such as this one are a step in the right direction.

I have tried to give you a picture of the relationship between the business records manager and the business archivist as viewed through the eyes of one records manager. Other records managers may, and probably do, see a different picture. I am sure that the picture the archivist sees is a different one.

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**“... not for himself ... but for others ...”**

It may be useful at this point to remind the reader that the function of the archivist is to trace, acquire, list, retrieve and make available the records of the past, not for himself as a writer of history (as is a popular misconception), but for others to use for a great variety of purposes. One may go further, so far as this County is concerned, and add that the basic conception behind the provision of easy access to all old records is that those who seek information shall come to find it for themselves, in person, and be prepared in many cases for a lengthy task.

—*Twenty First Report of the County Archivist [of Worcester]—Annual Report for 1964*, p. 4.

THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST