

# Contents

---

Introduction	vii
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---

## **Chapter 1 Concepts and Issues** **1**

Growth of Electronic Records	3
Importance of Electronic Records	7
Issues and Concerns	9
<i>Inadequate Controls</i>	9
<i>Information Redundancy</i>	10
<i>Unstructured Electronic Records</i>	11
<i>System Dependence</i>	13
<i>Media Stability</i>	14
<i>Transparent Arrangement</i>	14
<i>Remote Access</i>	15
<i>General Concerns</i>	15
Program Components	17
Summary	19

---

## **Chapter 2 Storage Media for Electronic Recordkeeping** **23**

Magnetic Media	25
<i>Hard Disks</i>	25
<i>Removable Hard Disks</i>	28
<i>Floppy Disks</i>	30
<i>Nine-Track Computer Tapes</i>	33
<i>Half-Inch Data Cartridges</i>	34
<i>Digital Linear Tape</i>	36
<i>LTO Ultrium</i>	36
<i>Quarter-Inch Cartridges</i>	37
<i>Eight-Millimeter Data Cartridges</i>	38
<i>Digital Audio Tape</i>	40
<i>Audio Tapes</i>	41

---

<i>Video Tapes</i>	43
<i>Obsolete Magnetic Media</i>	45
Optical Disks	47
<i>Compact Discs</i>	48
<i>DVD Formats</i>	49
<i>MO and UDO Disks</i>	51
<i>Obsolete Optical Disk Formats</i>	52
<i>Other Optical Media</i>	53
Solid State Storage	54
Paper-Based Electronic Media	55
Summary	56

---

## **Chapter 3 File Formats for Electronic Records 59**

Text Files	60
<i>Coding Schemes</i>	61
<i>Word Processing Files</i>	62
<i>Formats for Compound Documents</i>	65
<i>ASCII Text Files</i>	66
<i>E-mail Messages</i>	67
Spreadsheet Files	68
Databases	69
Image Files	70
File Compression	74
Video Recording Standards	77
Audio File Formats	78
Summary	80

---

## **Chapter 4 Inventorying Electronic Records 83**

The Inventory Plan	85
<i>Mapping the IT Infrastructure</i>	85
<i>Defining the Inventory Scope</i>	87
<i>Management Support</i>	89
<i>Inventory Method</i>	90
The Survey Instrument	96
<i>Series Title</i>	97
<i>Summary Description</i>	98
<i>Copies / Backup Practices</i>	98
<i>File Type</i>	99
<i>Dates Covered</i>	99
<i>Arrangement</i>	100
<i>Quantity</i>	100
<i>Estimated Growth</i>	101
<i>Physical Storage Requirements</i>	102
<i>Storage Location(s)</i>	103

<i>Media Characteristics</i>	103
<i>Media Manufacturing Date</i>	103
<i>Hardware Environment</i>	104
<i>Software Environment</i>	104
<i>Reference Activity</i>	105
<i>Sensitivity</i>	106
<i>Retention Requirements</i>	106
<i>Relationship to Nonelectronic Records</i>	107
<i>Supporting Files</i>	107
<i>Vital Record Status</i>	107
Inventory Followup	107
Summary	108

---

## **Chapter 5 Retention Schedules for Electronic Records 111**

Retention Concepts	114
<i>Benefits of Retention Schedules</i>	114
<i>Criteria for Retention Decisions</i>	116
<i>Electronic Records as Official Copies</i>	118
Legally-Mandated Retention Periods	119
Legal Status of Digital Document Images	125
Admissibility of Electronic Records	128
<i>Electronic Records Authentication</i>	129
<i>E-Discovery and the Amended Federal Rules</i>	136
Rule 34(a)	137
Rule 34(b)	138
Rule 16(b) and Rule 26(f)	138
Rule 26(a)(1)	140
Rule 26(b)(2)	141
Other Amended Rules	141
Legal Status of Electronic Signatures	142
Operational Retention Requirements	144
<i>Retention Principles</i>	144
<i>Retention of E-mail</i>	147
Media Stability and System Dependence	153
Data Migration	156
<i>Data Migration Plan</i>	157
<i>Alternatives to Data Migration</i>	158
Summary	159

---

## **Chapter 6 Managing Vital Electronic Records 161**

Establishing the Vital Records Protection Program	163
Identifying Vital Records	168
Risk Analysis	171
<i>Threats and Vulnerabilities</i>	172

<i>Qualitative Risk Assessment</i>	174
<i>Quantitative Risk Assessment</i>	176
Risk Control	178
<i>Preventive Measures</i>	179
<i>Protective Measures</i>	182
<i>Real-Time Backup</i>	185
<i>Backup Computing Arrangements</i>	185
<i>Auditing for Compliance</i>	188
Summary	188

---

## **Chapter 7 Managing Electronic Files and Media** **191**

Labels and Names	192
Document Management and ECM	197
Records Management Application Software	201
Media Filing Equipment	204
Autochangers and Hierarchical Storage Management	207
Media Management	209
<i>Selecting Blank Media</i>	210
<i>Storage Copies</i>	213
<i>Media Handling</i>	218
Summary	222

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Appendix A: Suggestions for Further Study and Research	225
Appendix B: Glossary	227
Index	239
About the Author	245
About the Association	246



# Introduction to the Fourth Edition

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The amount and variety of recorded information created and maintained in electronic formats has increased dramatically over the past quarter century, and significant continued growth can be expected. Such was the case in 1992, when the first edition of *Managing Electronic Records* was published, and it remains the case today. Given the already widespread and rapidly expanding use of computers, audio recorders, video systems, and other information processing devices, the proliferation of electronic records can only intensify. Historically, records managers in government agencies, corporations, and other organizations directed the majority of their professional efforts toward control of paper documents. Since the late 1980s, however, pressure to address records management problems associated with electronically stored information has been growing. A number of organizations have initiated systematic programs for the storage, retrieval, and control of electronic records. Others can be expected to do so as the growing accumulation of such records demand active professional management. Many records managers view problems posed by electronic records as the most important challenge facing our profession.

The fourth edition of *Managing Electronic Records* provides a comprehensive discussion of records management concepts and methods as they apply to electronic records—that is, to records that contain machine-readable as opposed to human-readable information. It is intended for professional records managers, computer systems professionals, office systems analysts, archivists, administrative system specialists, data center managers, librarians, and others responsible for the creation, maintenance, management, control, and use of electronic records created by computer, audio, and video systems. The treatment is practical rather than theoretical. On completion of this book, the reader should understand:

- The special records management issues and problems associated with electronic records
- The physical and application characteristics of electronic records encountered in offices and other work environments

- Principles and procedures for inventorying electronic records and for determining how long they need to be retained to satisfy legal and operational requirements
- Factors that influence the stability and durability of electronic records
- Methods of protecting vital electronic records against damage and destruction
- Guidelines for the daily management of electronic records as working information resources

Like its predecessors, this edition is organized into seven chapters:

- Chapter 1 defines electronic records and discusses their importance in present and future information systems, their relationship to conventional records, and special issues and concerns associated with their management.
- Chapter 2 presents a detailed survey of the physical and application characteristics of electronic storage media employed by computer, audio, and video systems. It emphasizes magnetic and optical storage media, but it also includes descriptions of solid-state storage as well as obsolete media that may be encountered when inventorying electronic records.
- Chapter 3 discusses file format concepts that records managers must understand in order to effectively deal with computer-processible information. It also includes a discussion of video and audio recording formats.
- Chapters 4 and 5 address the critical issues of inventorying electronic records and preparing retention schedules based on an inventory's findings.
- Chapter 6 discusses vital electronic records.
- Chapter 7 presents guidelines for the storage, care, handling, and labeling of electronic media. It also discusses the role of content management and records management application (RMA) software in organizing, storing, controlling access to, and otherwise managing electronic records.

The first two editions of this book provided a list of books, articles, and other publications for additional reading on specific topics, but those bibliographies were necessarily incomplete and quickly became out of date. Retaining a practice adopted for the third edition, *Appendix A* gives some suggestions for finding additional information about electronic records. Because terminology plays an important role in understanding electronic recordkeeping and communicating records management concepts and requirements to information technology professionals, *Appendix B* provides brief definitions of selected terms and acronyms discussed in the text. Some terms, such as “record” and “archival” are used differently by records managers and information technology specialists. In such situations, this book employs the records management definition. When specific terms are used at meetings or in other situations, definitions should be clarified at the outset to avoid misunderstandings and confusion.