

Public Records Brief

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Day Batching of Records

What is day batching?

Day batching is the practice of grouping original paper records for storage according to the date scanned or date received. It is also known as 'day boxing'. It is commonly used as a quick and easy way to organise documents for storage after digitisation. Some organisations that routinely receive large quantities of forms or other routine records also store records in day batches after processing.

The main benefit of day batching is that it is a fast way to organise documents for storage. However, day batching does cause a number of problems. It is very resource intensive to locate records, retrieve them from boxes and then destroy those documents that can be disposed in accordance with an approved disposal schedule each time a file comes due for disposal. While this brief will focus on day batching of digitised records, similar concerns apply to the batching of paper records that have not been digitised.

Why is it a problem?

The main drawback of day batching relates to the implementation of disposal actions. As different records need to be retained for differing lengths of time, a day box may contain some records that can be destroyed before others in the box. This often results in boxes being retained for the longest retention period for documents in the box or indefinitely.

Retaining the entire box for the longest retention period of the records contained within it is an inefficient use of storage space. Additionally, it presents a risk to the integrity of a records retention and disposal program if an entire file or group of related records have been legally destroyed except for loose pieces of original correspondence kept in a day batch.

In addition to the costs of retrieving the originals, another consequence of day batching is that a box which is full when placed in storage may only have one or two documents left in it after 10 years, which is also an inefficient use of storage space.

Example: Disposing of day batched records

A report from your records management system shows that certain files are due for destruction. The digitisation dates for the scanned items in these files are checked. Some files contain a number of scanned documents all with different digitisation dates. The originals will need to be retrieved individually from the different boxes, so they can be destroyed along with the electronic copies.

After doing this, you notice that some boxes, especially the earlier ones, are now mostly empty. However, some have documents in them that need to be kept for 30 years or more. Do you keep empty boxes taking up valuable storage space, or do you spend time and money rearranging and reboxing the originals?



What are the options?

When commencing a digitisation program, or reviewing the management of incoming forms, consideration should be given to the most appropriate method of managing the records. There are three possible approaches:

- ***Day batching***

Day batching, despite the problems outlined above, may be appropriate for a uniform record type with a single retention period, for example, invoices or applications. Checks should be made to ensure that a current approved retention and disposal schedule is in place that relates to the documents being batched prior to implementing the process.

- ***Batching by retention period***

This approach involves batching records according to retention periods. Instead of a single 'day box', a series of boxes are established according to common retention periods such as 2 years, 7 years, etc. However, this approach requires that every document is assigned a retention period at the time of digitisation or other processing. This may not be possible for all types of correspondence. For example, the retention period on a licence application may depend on whether the licence is approved or rejected, or how long it remains current. Problems may also be encountered with records without disposal coverage, or if certain records need to be resentenced due to changes in authorised retention periods.

- ***Maintaining records in structured files***

This approach is based on a hybrid system where originals are captured on a paper file which reflects the classification, file number and eventual retention period of the associated electronic file. If the original is required, it can be easily retrieved through the file number. In addition, related originals will be stored together on the one file, and can be retrieved together, rather than stored in separate boxes. This approach also enables the most straightforward approach to disposal, with subsequent efficiency gains in storage. However, it does require the creation of paper files, the classification of documents at the point of scanning or immediately after, and retrieval of paper files to attach subsequent correspondence.

Selecting an approach

Public authorities should be aware of the benefits and risks in all three approaches and examine the nature of the records involved to determine the most appropriate approach.

For digitisation programs involving general or mixed correspondence, Queensland State Archives recommends maintaining paper originals in structured files as the preferred approach, reflecting best practice in records management.