

### Public Records Brief

A RECORDKEEPING UPDATE FOR QUEENSLAND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES – ISSUED AUGUST 2008

## Moving data offline – Implications for public records

Data storage has commonly been regarded as cheap and easily expandable. However, there is growing recognition of the real costs involved with storing data online,<sup>1</sup> especially as agencies look to consolidate storage in data centres. When exploring data storage options, such as offline storage, it is also important for agencies to consider the volume and extent of public records within the data, and the associated recordkeeping requirements.

Offline storage is the storage of data on media separate from a server network. A range of media can be used, including magnetic tape and optical media. Offline storage is usually cheaper than online storage. However, as data in offline storage is less accessible, it is generally used for older data that is not needed on as frequent a basis.

Much of the data captured and kept by public authorities may form public records. A record is information created or received by an entity in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs that provides evidence of the business or affairs, regardless of format. A record can include data in business systems, if it serves as evidence of a business activity.

### Offline storage risks

As information in offline storage is accessed infrequently, it may be subject to less stringent management controls. As a result, some information may be lost due to media degradation.

Another risk is technology obsolescence. Even if the media is in good condition, the hardware and software required to access the information may no longer be readily available. In general, the older the information is, and the less frequently it is accessed, the greater the risk of loss.

### Recordkeeping obligations

Under the *Public Records Act 2002*, the Chief Executive of a public authority is required to ensure that full and accurate records of the public authority's activities are made and kept, regardless of format, and that records in electronic form remain accessible.

The *Public Records Act 2002* prohibits the disposal of public records unless authorised by the State Archivist. This permission is usually given through Retention and Disposal Schedules which set out minimum retention periods for different types of public records.

The application of a Retention and Disposal Schedule to stored data serves two main purposes. It:

- allows agencies to lawfully dispose of temporary records that are no longer required, and
- identifies records that need to be retained for specified periods and may require additional management over time.

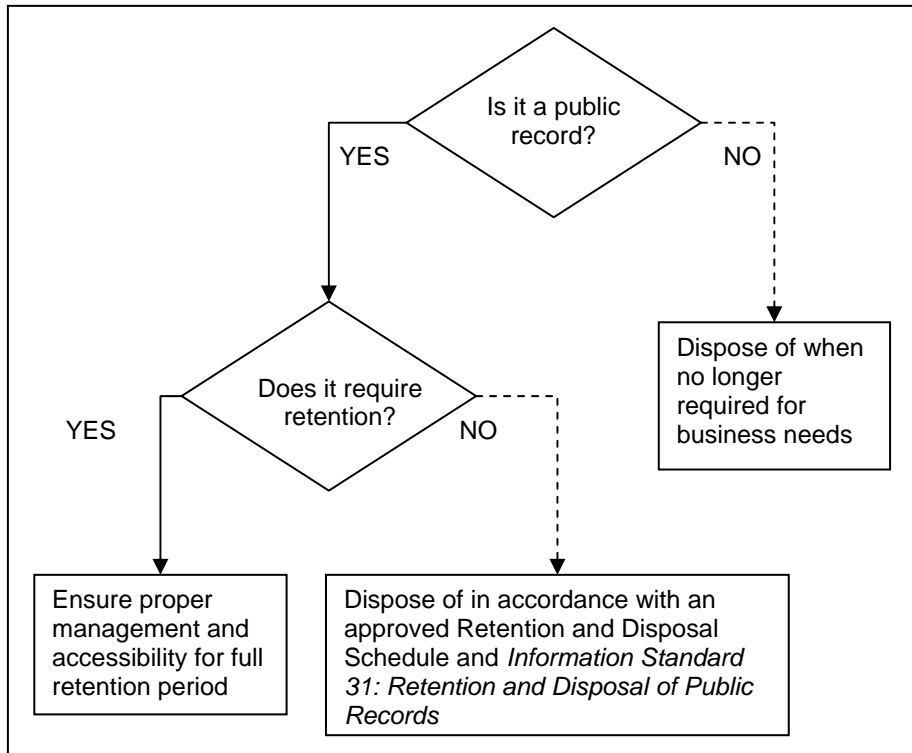
Retention and Disposal Schedules identify records according to the business functions and activities they document, rather than their format.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the term 'online' in this Public Records Brief means storage that is part of a network. It does not mean on the internet.

## Issues to consider when using offline storage

The flow chart outlines a number of issues that agencies may wish to consider prior to moving records to offline storage.



### Identifying public records

Identify the data and applications proposed for offline storage. Analyse the business processes and transactions that the data supports to determine whether it contains public records. This may involve consulting with relevant business owners and records staff. In this process, it is also useful to identify related records in other formats, to identify any overlaps, or whether one set of records are necessary to understand the other. Please note that even if information in the system is duplicated in other records, any disposal must still be in accordance with a Retention and Disposal Schedule authorised by the State Archivist.

### Determining records that require further retention

Use an authorised Retention and Disposal Schedule to determine whether the records still require retention. Depending on the age and retention requirements, it may be possible to dispose of the information under an agency-specific Retention and Disposal Schedule or the *General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records*. For more information, see [Information Standard 31: Retention and Disposal of Public Records](#) and [Guideline for the Implementation of Retention and Disposal Schedules](#). Contact Queensland State Archives if the records are not currently covered in an authorised Schedule.

### Maintaining the accessibility of the records

Records that require further retention must be stored in a way that preserves their integrity and accessibility. This will involve monitoring accessibility over time and may require migration to new software and hardware platforms over time.

### Summary

Offline storage may be a feasible solution for records of short retention value, where media, hardware and software changes are unlikely to affect ongoing accessibility. For records with longer retention periods, consideration of offline storage must be carefully managed due to the risks highlighted above. To ensure that any offline media is not simply 'forgotten', a register of the location and contents of offline media should be kept.

For more detailed guidance on the management of public records, visit the Queensland State Archives' website at <http://www.archives.qld.gov.au>, or contact us on:

Telephone: (07) 3131 7777

Email: [info@archives.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@archives.qld.gov.au)