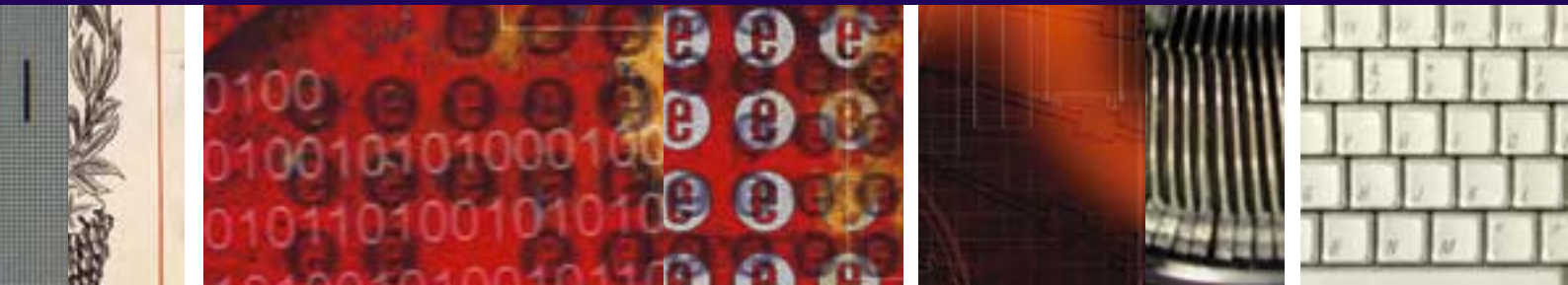


# » MAKING, KEEPING AND USING DIGITAL RECORDS

National Archives of Australia «





The National Archives of Australia has developed a sustainable approach to ensuring that authentic and reliable digital records will be available in the future for the benefit of all Australians.

As the Australian Government's expert adviser on recordkeeping, we believe our leading edge approach will support efficient and accountable e-government in the 21st century.

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## » RECORDS BORN DIGITAL

Australian Government agencies make, keep and use records in many forms, including paper files, maps, plans, films, videotapes and microforms.

An increasing number of government records are created in electronic form as digital records. They include word-processed documents, spreadsheets, multi-media presentations, email, websites, online transactions and databases.

The long-term preservation of these digital records is at risk. The physical carriers of digital information, such as magnetic tape, hard drives and compact disks, are vulnerable to damage and are not as durable as traditional storage media such as paper. In addition, the hardware and software used to access digital information changes constantly. To avoid problems associated with technological obsolescence, it is necessary to continually upgrade systems and renew commercial software licences.





## » DIGITAL RECORDS ARE IMPORTANT

It is vital for digital records to remain authentic and readable to support the business needs of government, to guarantee democratic accountability, to protect the rights and entitlements of citizens, and to support future research. Digital records are subject to the same legislation as other forms of records. These statutory provisions relate to their management, access, privacy and use as evidence.

Government agencies in partnership with the Archives are responsible for determining how long their records need to remain accessible and which records should be selected as national archives. These requirements apply irrespective of the form in which the records are created and maintained.



## » MAKING DIGITAL RECORDS

Systems for making, keeping and using digital records need to be well managed. Government agencies need to make meaningful and authentic records with appropriate recordkeeping metadata that enables their digital records to be used for as long as required.

Our e-permanence suite of tools and guidelines provide the framework for developing systems to make and keep good records – including ‘born digital’ records. The e-permanence suite is based on the concepts and strategies recommended in the Australian Standard for Records Management, AS ISO 15489.

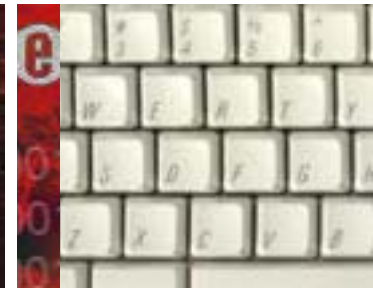
Digital records need to be actively maintained if they are to remain of use to government and researchers in the future. They cannot simply be placed on the shelf and left. The means to access them expires too readily.



## » KEEPING DIGITAL RECORDS

We have looked at various Australian and international approaches to the issue of long-term preservation of digital records. Our research indicates that the best strategy is to convert them into a standard, stable format.

Our approach to preserving digital records uses standardised eXtensible Markup Language (XML). Records such as emails, spreadsheets, and word-processed documents created in commercial software programs are converted and stored in a stable, long-term XML form. This enables records to be read with computers now and into the distant future regardless of the format in which they were created. Agencies can transfer digital records of archival value to the National Archives once their immediate business need has ended, for conversion and storage in our digital repository.



We are developing software called Xena (XML Electronic Normalising of Archives) to convert digital records to standardised XML. The Xena software is primarily an internal digital preservation tool of the Archives. However, we are continuing Xena's development as an open source project to enable other parties to enhance the software and use it for their own digital preservation purposes.

## » USING DIGITAL RECORDS

Once digital records have been converted into a stable archival format, copies can be made available to users in a variety of formats including via the Internet. Our online collection database RecordSearch contains descriptive information about records in our custody, including digital records, to enable users to identify records of interest.





Australian Government  
National Archives of Australia

## For further information

The National Archives continues to examine digital recordkeeping issues through regular bulletins, agency forums, training courses and other educational and promotional events including conferences and workshops. We are also developing partnerships with other government archival institutions through the Digital Recordkeeping Initiative to explore common approaches to making, keeping and using digital records.

We encourage agencies, the profession, industry and other interested parties to examine and discuss our approach to managing digital records.

Visit our website at <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/summary.html>

