



Digitisation is hot on the agenda for Government and private organisations. In order to preserve important records at risk of format obsolescence and deterioration, organisations are converting microfiche, film and paper records to soft copy formats in what is a race against time.

TECHNOLOGY DRIVING CHANGE

Eamonn Donohoe of DatacomIT (pictured with Chris Wilson of Warringah Council, above) says ' Archivists and records departments face many problems that can be alleviated by digitisation. Digitisation outcomes may include: the ability to quickly locate documents by multiple users simultaneously with a few keywords; eliminating the risk of valuable documents being misplaced, lost or damaged; reduced labour time spent on document retrieval, releasing valuable staff time to be devoted to other tasks; being able to republish records online; and reduced need for expensive storage'.

WARRINGAH COUNCIL digitises records with datacomIT.

Councils are increasingly looking to streamline their processes, and Warringah Council, on Sydney's North Shore is one of them.

Warringah Council initiated a tender process to find the most suitable partner for their digitisation projects. The Council's aims were to improve efficiency and customer service in accordance with its Business Excellence program. The digitisation process was also an important step in its ongoing Business Continuity agenda. The Council contracts were awarded to one of Australia's leading imaging solutions providers, DatacomIT. Chris Wilson, records manager at Warringah Council, said that he believed DatacomIT was "able to deliver a high quality product within the desired timeframe and at a sensible price."

THE PATH TO DIGITISATION

Established in 1906, Warringah Council is responsible for an area of 152 square km on Sydney's northern beaches, with building applications and development applications being submitted constantly, as well as keeping payroll and rates records. The need to have these files digitised became increasingly important as the demand for access to these records grew, and the council's microfilm reader was inefficient to use and ageing.

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Warringah Council had digitisation on the agenda for several years, but it was not until funding had become available towards the end of the 2011 financial year that the project could proceed. Up until recently, records were accessed by referencing a number of systems to locate the metadata and facilitate finding the specific microfiche record. Microfiche jackets were then read using an ageing analogue fiche reader. With development applications, along with planning applications, rates and payroll information being the most requested retrievals; it was difficult to respond to requests in a timely manner.

To undertake the project, datacomIT utilised the DRS microfiche digitisation equipment pictured. This technology is the only one of its kind in Australia, and has the ability to independently scan up to 200 fiche automatically, in a single batch.

Lam Truong, Operations Manager (pictured below) at DatacomIT advises his team was able to complete 120,000 microfiche containing over 5 million images within a 3 month period utilising the capabilities of the companies specialist digitisation facility, which operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This timeframe included all required functions; cataloguing, scanning, quality assurance, OCR processing, data entry and all image post processing.



DatacomIT ensured that each digitised record was titled to mirror that of the fiche jacket, including OCR conversion to ensure that all embedded text was captured. The record was then saved as a high resolution TIFF file and converted into a PDF(A) document. All files then had metadata applied and were indexed according to Warringah Council's records management standards.

With this information now available digitally via the council's TRIM - Electronic Document Records Management System (TRIM is an EDRMS system utilised by many councils), Warringah Council employees can now retrieve the information with a few keywords, without leaving their desks. This has provided significant cost savings and efficiencies where council staff no longer needs to visit their records depots spread across two separate locations. In the future, the Warringah Council also hopes to make these records available to the public online, as an extension of their services.

Warringah Council's decision to digitise their records is an example of a progressive council that is taking part in the growing trend in digitisation as they recognise the benefits of this efficient and cost effective service.