



Why You Need More Than Backups to Preserve Records

From the Council of State Archivists

www.statearchivists.org

“Why worry about electronic records? That’s IT’s job”

“If we scan everything we can get rid of the paper and solve our records problem.”

“We’re fine, we back everything up.”

Anyone in a modern workplace has likely heard comments like these. Misconceptions abound surrounding the long-term management and preservation of electronic records. While good backups play a role, much more is needed to ensure records remain accessible far into the future.

Backups serve to guarantee short-term continuity of an organization’s operations. They capture a snapshot of electronic records and other information at a certain moment in time, allowing quick restoration after data loss, system crashes, or natural or man-made disasters. They are typically run on cycles where the storage medium (tapes, hard drives, etc.) is reused after a set period of time.

Digital Preservation ensures the long-term accessibility, authenticity, integrity and trustworthiness of electronic records so that they can meet the long-term needs of operational mandates, audits, and future research. Digital preservation seeks to manage records so that they will remain usable through many successive generations of technological advancement.

Good backups are a component of any digital preservation system, as are many other aspects of a well-managed IT environment. Those are just the infrastructure surrounding the actual records, however. Digital preservation relies on a system of management where electronic records are tracked, validated, protected and migrated over time. Preservation may involve a combination of software and hardware tools and manual processes, and deals with issues of software and hardware obsolescence, security and file integrity, and the access needs of many different user groups.

Does your organization have a digital preservation strategy to deal with your long-term electronic records?

Help and advice is available from the below organizations and others. Check with your state or local archives to find out how you can move from simply backing up your records to preserving them.

CoSA PERTTS Portal: <https://www.statearchivists.org/pertts/>

Library of Congress Digital Preservation: <http://www.digitalpreservation.gov>

MIT Libraries Digital Preservation Management: <http://www.dpworkshop.org/>

Society of American Archivists Electronic Records Section blog: <https://saaers.wordpress.com/>