Public Record Office of Victoria

Australian public record agency adopts PDF as standard format for long-term, reliable document archiving

Public Record Office of Victoria

- Archive authority for the state of Victoria

- Location: North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

- Founded: 1973

- Employees: 80

www.prov.vic.gov.au/vers

Industry
Government

Solution
Document Archiving and Retrieval

Product Used

- Adobe® Acrobat®

- Tower Software Trim Context®

Organization Profile

The Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV), Australia, is the state archives authority. PROV is responsible for the long-term disposition and care of all records produced or held by the state government, including archives of policy guidelines and public safety research that detail government actions past and present. To move from paper-based archiving to a digital system, PROV developed a reliable archival standard called Victorian Electronic Records Strategy (VERS) that incorporates platform- and application-independent Portable Document Format (PDF) files.

Challenges Faced

Reduce archival costs and ensure document integrity
Like government record offices worldwide, PROV has archived documents on paper for years. As the volume of documents has increased, so have the costs and space needed to store them. The result is that PROV and the government agencies submitting materials to be archived must devote more time and resources to preparing and managing archival information. To reduce costs and ensure the integrity of stored documents, PROV needed a way to quickly convert paper documents and materials in a variety of electronic formats to a reliable electronic format that retains the look of the originals.

Provide an archival format that enables easy access to documents now and in the future
Any archival format used by PROV had to provide the assurance that electronic materials would be as easy to access 50 years from now as they are today. Because most electronic formats are proprietary, they are not reliable options for archiving. For PROV, as for all archival agencies, the goal is to standardize on a format that not only preserves the long-term integrity of materials but also ensures that people can access files at any time in the future.

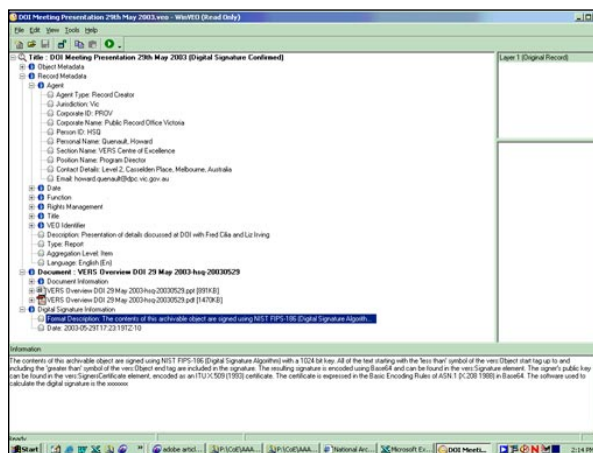**Integrate electronic documents with record management systems**
Having documents preserved in a standard format is only one challenge to cost-effective, reliable document archival. Stored documents must integrate seamlessly with security, tracking, searching, and other controls in record management systems. This integration ensures that archive staff can successfully manage increasing volumes of information, as well as search for and locate materials whenever they are needed. In the case of public records, the ability to easily search archives and retrieve materials online is essential for providing efficient service to constituents.

Success Strategy

PROV standardized on PDF as an archival format for policy documents, industry reports, regulatory guidelines, financial analyses, and other materials submitted by government agencies. The PDF files are part of a collection of files that government agencies send to PROV for archiving.

To enable government staff to create VERS-compliant files, PROV developed an application that allows users to capture in a multiple items in a single file, including video clips and materials

"We want long-term accessibility, so an open, published standard like PDF is essential. With PDF, we know that people can view our archives today and in 50 years."

Howard Quenault,
Program director for Victorian Electronic Records Strategy,
Public Record Office of Victoria

converted to PDF files using Adobe Acrobat software. Each item in the encapsulated VERS file has metadata in XML associated with it to simplify document searching and management. Each VERS file is sealed with a digital signature for proper tracking. For example, the Department of Infrastructure will be able to encapsulate in a VERS file all materials related to a project. "It doesn't matter if it's video, financial reports, or research documents," says Howard Quenault, program director for VERS at PROV. "Everything must be reliably accessible now and in the future." Once created, the VERS electronic records are stored in a TRIM Context record management system from Tower Software.

Saving documents in PDF enhances the management and ease of locating VERS records because the search engines in TRIM Context can access the text in PDF as well as the metadata associated with the VERS files. In addition, PDF files can be linked with the record management system to ensure proper tracking and security at all times.

Business Benefits

• Materials are archived in PDF, a widely accepted, published standard for electronic documents that preserves the integrity of the original material.

• Documents archived today can be accessed reliably now and in the future.

• The use of compact PDF files reduces the costs of managing archives and storing materials.

Materials archived in PDF preserve the content, context, and structure of records—and can be viewed using a freely available viewer. "We want long-term accessibility, so an open, published standard like PDF is essential," says Quenault. "With PDF, we know that people can view our archives today and in 50 years."

The searchable, electronic archives of PDF files streamline access to stored information. With paper-based archiving, government staff and constituents had to wait for requested materials to arrive by mail or had to travel to regional record offices to find information. In contrast, electronic archiving using PDF enables information sharing by letting people search for and find information electronically whenever they need it.

Equally important are the savings VERS has produced. The staff time needed to archive and access records has decreased, and the storage space needed for the archives has been greatly reduced, because electronic archives can be stored and backed up in minimal space compared with the warehouses required for paper-based archives.

"PDF provides a foundation for long-term document archiving," says Quenault. "The format is a worldwide standard, plus it integrates with leading record management systems and numerous third-party tools—it's a natural for preserving documents."

Adobe
Tools for the New Work™