LIBRARIES
University of Oregon

Guiding a Campus through the Transition to a Paperless Records System

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Abstract

The “paperless office” concept has been around for decades, and many have cited that the electronic office has instead increased the amount of paper produced. Case studies have shown that a successful “paperless” system requires motivation, ease of use, and cost savings [10]. Paper will co-exist with electronic records for the foreseeable future; however, what happens when the official record of an institution becomes “paperless”? This poster presents a case study describing the efforts in the University of Oregon Office of the President to move to a fully electronic records system, the trickle-down effect to campus units, and the work of the Libraries to preserve the institutional record. The Libraries created a model to solve the immediate needs of the Office of the President addressing issues of workflow and preservation before an ideal system and staffing could be realized. A hands-on approach was employed, focusing on day-to-day work and ease of use for office contacts, and standards and migration plans for archival files using PLATTER [2]. By doing this, a foundation was created for an electronic records system that can be adapted across campus for administrative offices, faculty scholarship, cultural museums, science labs, and student coursework.

Campus Environment

At the University of Oregon, the President is the chief executive officer of the university. During this period, there was widespread use of Microsoft Office products within the Office of the President, including Outlook for e-mail and calendaring, but for preservation purposes all important records were printed in triplicate and filed in chronological, topical and high profile issue files. There was no integration of a digitization project for paper or preservation efforts for the born-digital electronic records within the office until after the close of the presidency.

With the arrival of the new university president on July 1, 2009, there was a new focus on electronic records produced by the Office of the President. Efficiency and use of technology to improve efficiency was emphasized. As a result, not only were important documents not printed in triplicate, but the Office, under the direction of the President, committed itself to going paperless, scanning any documents received in paper format and refraining from printing except when required.

Many campus records are permanent public records [5],[6].

Office Procedures

To help ease this transition into an electronic records system, ensure that standards are met, and that files may be easily transferred to the chosen system with preservation in mind, the University Archivist and Digital Collections Coordinator met with Office staff in fall 2009. This provided an opportunity to jointly conceptualize a campus workflow for the transition of electronic records to University Archives and to identify unforeseen problems.

File Migration

By using tools already at their disposal, the Archivist and the Digital Coordinator were able to demonstrate how to create full text searchable PDF files from Word and other documents using Adobe Acrobat Pro. Staff were also instructed in Adobe Acrobat Pro’s Optical Character Recognition (OCR) engine for scanned documents.

Office records also included: digital audio / visual files, digital photographs, and web files. If there was concern that particularly sensitive information might be changed or modified, a PDF was requested for submission to the Archives as well as the native file format. This allowed the staff to feel more comfortable with the transfer of editable file types.

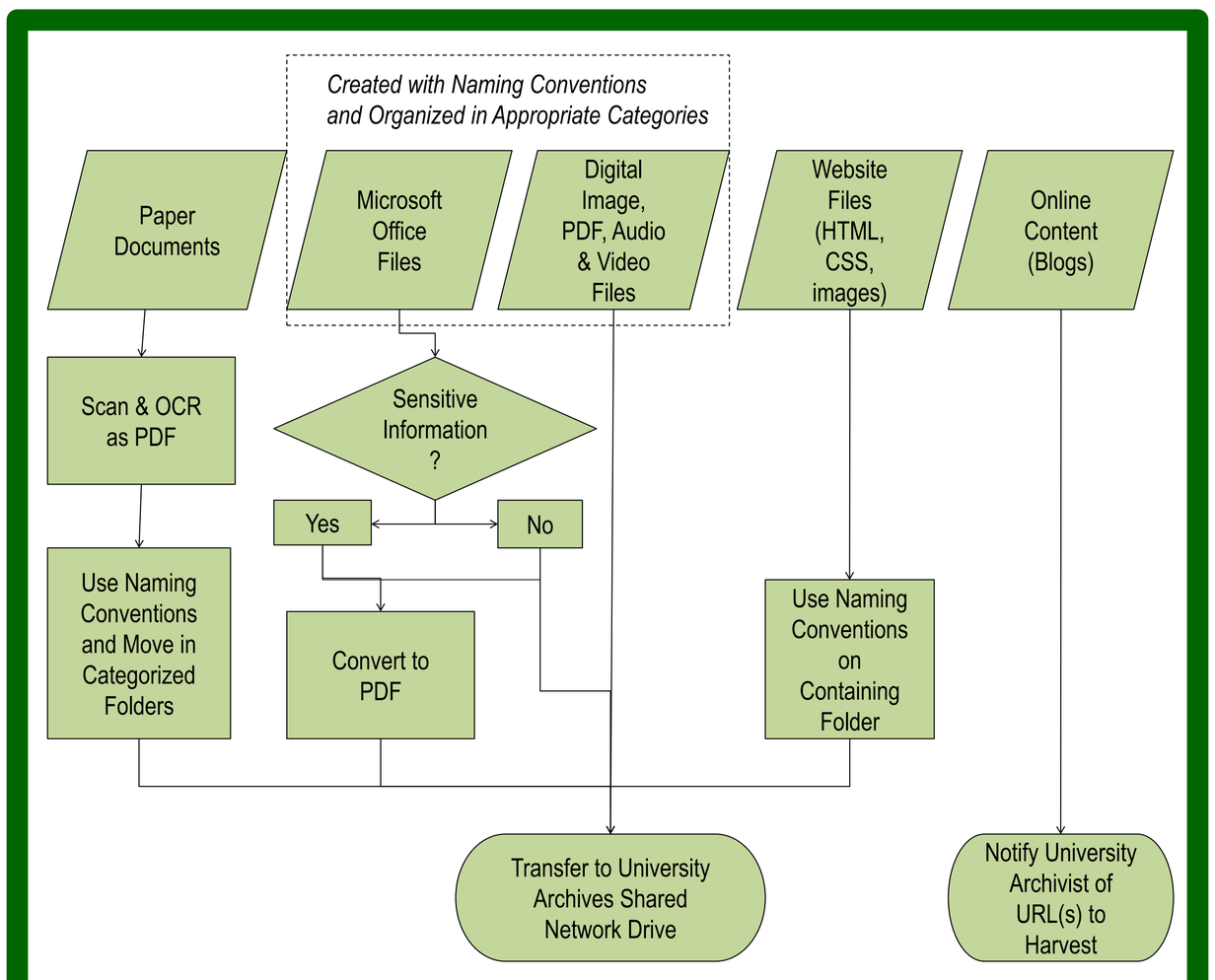

Fig. 1. Workflow from producer to university archives

File Naming

The staff in the Office need to be able to quickly retrieve items as needed; therefore the general principles of uniqueness and easily recognizable file names were already in place. Staff were introduced to a simple Freeware tool, ReNamer [8], with the ability to mass apply file naming changes and strip out unwanted characters. A limit of 15 characters to file names was suggested.

Categorization of Files

The most exciting part of electronic records for the Office staff was the ability to tag and categorize files without having to make triplicate print copies. This was especially valuable in the area of email, where utilizing the tags and flags in Microsoft Outlook could help easily retrieve relevant emails. The staff have begun to make lists of their desired categories in consultation with the University Archivist and Digital Collections Coordinator. The goal is to create a standard list.
Examples of these categories include:

- Correspondence
- Reports
- Speeches
- Athletics
- College of Arts and Sciences, etc.

Planning for Preservation

Principles of the OAIS model [7]were followed as closely as possible, with manual controls in a simple file system. The infrastructure was constructed to easily allow migration to an OAIS compliant repository in the future.

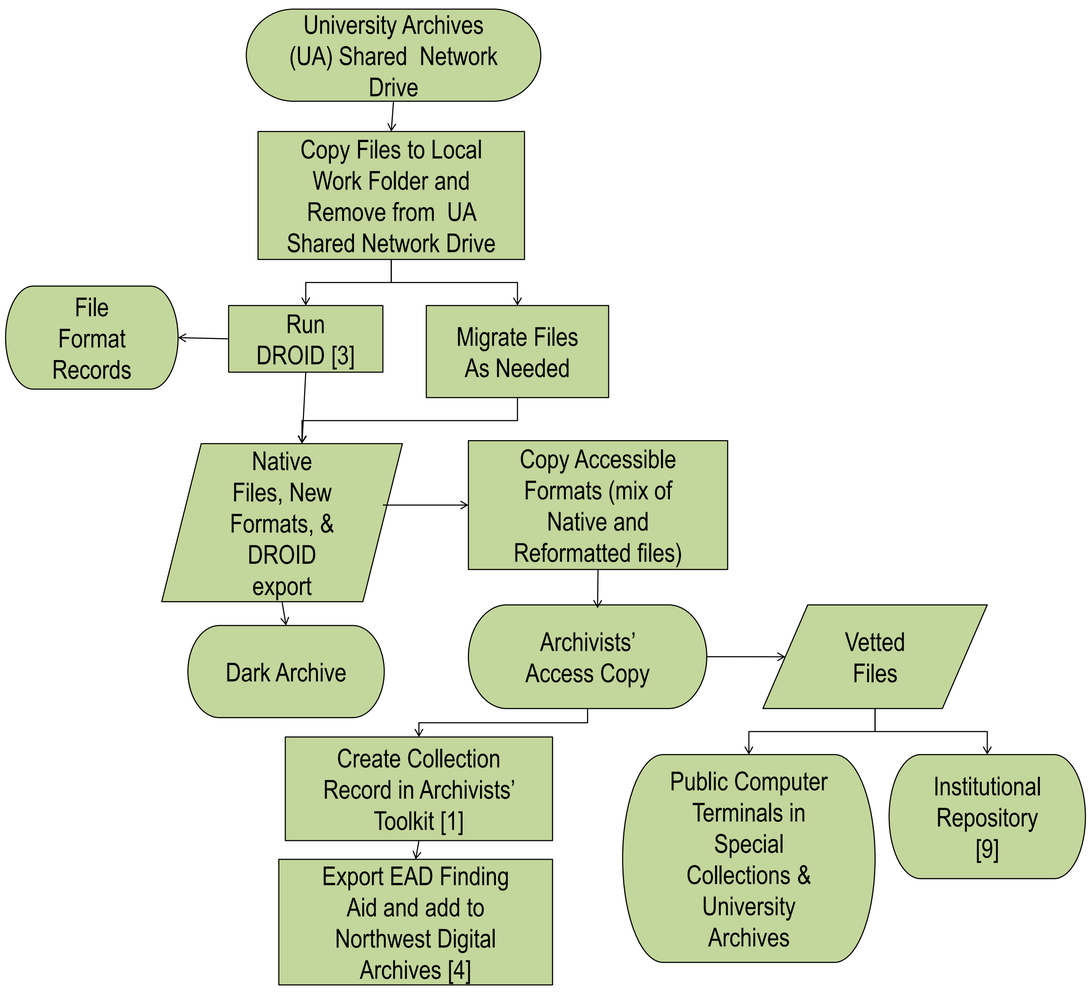

Fig. 2. Workflow for preservation and access systems

Culture of Change

The growth in acceptance of the validity of the electronic record as a “record,” has quickly spread across the UO campus and more units have sought help from the Libraries.
University Senate: meetings captured in digital video and streamed.
Teaching and Students: Web 2.0 tools for collaborative student learning with the creation of blogs for e-portfolios, particularly in business classes and architecture.
Faculty Scholarship: The Dept. of Romance Languages mandated that their faculty deposit electronic versions of their scholarship in the Institutional Repository, Scholars’ Bank. Science faculty have sought advice about the preservation of their data.
Museums: The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural and Cultural History at the University of Oregon have begun looking beyond online exhibits and using digital images only for their own internal searching to creating a digital record of their collections.

Conclusion

With the motivation provided by the new university president, the Libraries is able to assist in an easy to use system and on the way to making a paperless records system successful. The University Archives and Libraries are quickly adapting methodologies, standards, and procedures to ensure the preservation of these materials. We cannot wait for the perfect system or uniform systems to be used across campus. By adapting the conceptual standards of digital preservation and an easy-to-adopt workflow, we will be able to guide the campus through the change to electronic records.

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