

## DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES

### GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING AND PRESERVING RECORDS OF WEB-BASED ACTIVITIES

#### INTRODUCTION

The use of Internet websites to distribute information, provide services to, and transact business with the citizens of Delaware is fast becoming a preferred method of State and local government. In many cases the information is merely graphic representations of publications previously made available to the public in hard copy (brochures, reports, forms, etc.). However, many website pages published by government agencies exist only in electronic form, and in a multitude of locations and formats. The mounting use of websites adds yet another wrinkle to the spectrum of electronic records management issues facing government agencies.

#### LEGAL BACKGROUND

The need to manage these website resources is the same as for other recordkeeping systems - to ensure compliance with Delaware statutes concerning the creation of, retention of, and continuing access to public records. Since the charge of the Delaware Public Archives (DPA) is to provide for long-term preservation and access to records of long-term historical value, these guidelines were created to provide government agencies with guidance in managing their website records.

29 Delaware Code §502(a) defines a "public record" as "any document, book, photographic image, electronic data recording, paper, sound recording or other material regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to the law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business by any officer or employee of this State or any political subdivision thereof." (Emphasis added.) Website source files meet the definition of a record as they are "made or received pursuant to the law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of public business."

Because they meet the above criteria, all provisions of the Delaware Public Records Law (29 Delaware Code §501-526) apply. State and local government agency heads should ensure that dispositions of these source files be planned, managed, and carried out according to the Delaware Public Records Law's requirements and using procedures of DPA. Public officials should also note that the retention of records maintained in electronic files is the same as for similar records maintained in traditional paper formats unless otherwise specified by an authorized retention schedule. It is the record and its content and function, not the media, which drive retention and disposition decisions, although the same record created in both paper and electronic format may have a different retention requirement for each format.

#### DEFINITIONS

The **Internet** is a system of inter-connected computers world-wide that allows users to communicate information to each other.

**Websites** are collections of information, documents, and databases that are provided to a user community utilizing World Wide Web formats and protocols.

**Web page** is a source file, maintained as ASCII text, provided by a file server, and subsequently executed on a local computer, that uses HTML/XML markup languages and external software tools to produce a representation and provide meaning.

**HTML** is a non-proprietary file format for describing the structure of hypermedia documents - plain text (ASCII) files with embedded codes for logical markup, using tags to structure text into tables, interactive forms, headings, paragraphs, lists, and more. It can be created and processed with a wide range of tools from simple text editors to sophisticated authoring software.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY EXPOSURE ANALYSIS

To help with the analysis of your agency's website, DPA has included an Accountability Exposure Analysis (AEA) table, which will allow you to determine the level of legal and/or managerial risk associated with your website. Your future recordkeeping actions will be determined by the risk level under which you are currently operating.

#### WHY TAKE WEBSITE SNAPSHOTS?

Snapshots will capture the look and feel of active agency websites at particular points in time, and ensure that DPA, per its charge in the Delaware Public Records Law, documents agency use of the Internet over time.

## **FREQUENCY OF CAPTURE**

The frequency of website changes and revisions will vary greatly from agency to agency. Some that publish fairly static versions of policies, publications or images may not see major changes to their website design for months at a time. However, agencies with more advanced services (interactive forms, streaming video, etc.) might undergo major changes a number of times each year. Recognizing those differences, DPA recommends that website snapshots be taken at the time of each major version change to the website (different look, additional features, etc.) or at least once a year, whichever occurs first.

## **WEBSITE DESCRIPTION FORM**

DPA has prepared a standard description form (see attachment) that permits government agencies to easily capture information about the contents, format and technical characteristics of their websites. Submission of this descriptive information, along with copies of all active source files and either electronic or hard copy versions of relevant log files, will allow DPA to provide continuing access to and an historical perspective for the provision of government information and services.

## **WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE WEBSITE SNAPSHOT**

You should include all active documents available to the public that are located on the agency's web server, including copies of agency documents that exist in another form elsewhere EXCEPT:

- 1) Databases
- 2) Files located on a web server external to the agency (e.g., another agency's website)

## **ACCEPTABLE MEDIA FOR SUBMISSION OF WEBSITE SNAPSHOTS**

To ensure ease of transfer and standardization of the media being submitted for preservation, DPA suggests that agencies adhere to the following media specifics when capturing their websites:

1. Use a fresh CD-ROM (CD-R) with capacity of no more than 700 MB.
2. A gold reflective surface is preferred but not required.
3. Source files should **not** be compressed.
4. The CD's case should be appropriately labeled, but the CD itself should not be. A volume label is automatically created during initial use of the CD, and may be edited to reflect your agency's nickname/acronym, date, and/or disc number within the allotted 11 characters. Place this number on the case and all related transfer documentation.
5. The CD writing should comply with the Joliet modifications to ISO 9660 specifications. These settings are available in your CD creation software options.

## **PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION OF WEBSITE SNAPSHOTS TO DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES**

The media/documentation from the website snapshot may be transferred to DPA using the standard DPA Transfer Document (Form RM-3). Complete the form and submit it to DPA for approval. Once it has been approved, you will be contacted to make arrangements for pickup of the media/documentation and its transfer to DPA. A copy of the completed Transfer Document, showing the date of receipt by DPA, will then be returned to you for your file.

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