Archives as Intermediary

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Today I’m going to talk about collaborating with our Information Technology department and describe how I think archives can function as a valuable intermediary between records creators and IT.

Agenda

On the agenda is some quick background information, a description of a joint IT/Archives electronic records management project, and two examples of collaboration.

Background

The Cleveland Museum of Art Archives has 2.5 full time employees. We run the records management program and hold over 2,000 feet of analog records and about 800 GB of electronic records with considerable additional materials on disc.

The department of information management and technology services has 14 full time employees and a broad range of responsibilities including media services, help desk support, collections systems, gallery one (which is an interactive technology enhanced gallery), and business systems. They are all very busy people.

“Clean File Team”

The electronic records cleanup project is an example of a joint IT/Archives initiative at CMA. This project came about because in 2012 the CMA’s internal servers were just about full, backups were running constantly and were starting to overlap, and there was no money in the budget for significant additional storage space. It’s been an ongoing project since then. The team is made up of four members of IT (the network engineer, the head of support services, the director of application services, and the chief information officer) as well as me and the Archivist and Records Manager.

This project led to outcomes like updating the records policy to include specific language regarding electronic records. We also created procedures and policies for email appraisal and transfer. We trained staff on electronic records management – we went to almost every department and held trainings on how to organize files, what to keep and what to delete, and how and when to transfer files to archives.

We also instituted caps on shared server space – this is an important one because it has led to lots of transfers of electronic records to archives. Unlimited storage had created a situation where there was no systematic management of electronic records. There was no incentive to clean out files or send appropriate inactive files to archives. It also meant a loss of context for very old files that had been sitting around on servers for so long that no one remembered what they were.

Finally, this project was an important step in getting to know each other and allowed IT staff to understand what it is that an archivist does and how we can help them.

Example #1
My first example has to do with server space caps. Recently IT received an email from a new staff member in the marketing department asking for more space. IT responded, “No, you will need to either archive or delete in accordance with records retention schedules. I’ll put you in touch with archives for help.” Archives then met with the new staff member, introduced her to records management, and looked at the way the department organized their files. Based on that new information we made modifications to the records schedule. This all led to the transfer of over 9,000 files to archives.

This example illustrates how having archivists as the intermediary between records creators and IT can benefit everyone.

Good for IT: They don’t have to deal with trying to provide more space or trying to figure out what to get off of the server

Good for Archives: We get in touch with the department and look at the files earlier in the lifecycle, help them manage the stuff before it’s too old for anyone to remember what it is, get timely transfers of materials to archives, raise awareness of records management

Good for the staff: They don’t know what to keep and what to delete. We can help.

Example #2

A second example also illustrates a situation where archives served as an intermediary between IT and records creators. Recently, IT migrated our email to Microsoft Cloud Storage but one account was too big to migrate, it was over 50 GB and was sitting on its own email server after everyone else’s account was migrated. IT contacted the staff member regarding the problem and miscommunication ensued. IT then contacted archives for help.

Through no fault of their own, IT didn’t quite understand the types of records that were in the email account or how the staff member uses the account in the course of business. The staff member searches the email account at least weekly for very old messages so it was not an option to just export portions of the account to PST, which are difficult to access while working remotely via VPN. So after meeting with the staff member to determine her needs, archives met with IT to figure out solutions. IT came up with the idea of exporting attachments from the account. Armed with that idea Archives again met with the staff member to see if that solution would work and to determine criteria for attachment export and put in place a yearly attachment extraction procedure to guard against the account becoming too big again. Once everyone was on the same page the attachments were extracted, and the account was migrated.

Again, having archives as intermediary was beneficial.

Good for IT: They do not have time, nor is it in their job description, to understand how everyone works and what electronic files are more important than others. Their job is to manage the data and make sure it’s safe.

Good for Archives: Since we already had a relationship with the staff member because of our records management program, we understood where she was coming from and were able to communicate her needs to IT in a way that they could more easily understand. We can now document the methods being used to reduce the size so that when the account eventually comes to archives we will understand the context.
Good for the staff member: The staff member felt more confident about the email migration because she was able to offer her input and understands more about the solution.