

Speeches and statements
by **Daniel J. Caron**

From the pink, green and white copy to ubiquitous information: what role for the information experts?

Introductory remarks for the ARMA conference



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Daniel J. Caron joined the federal public service in 1982. In 2009, he was appointed Librarian and Archivist of Canada. One year later, he launched the modernization initiative to ensure that Library and Archives Canada could meet the multiple challenges of the digital environment. This initiative is a call for collaboration, epistemologically grounded institutional policies and policy driven decisions. In addition to his organizational experience, Mr. Caron is a seasoned author and speaker on public administration and issues related to information and memory both in Canada and abroad. Mr. Caron has also taught in several Canadian universities. He holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Economics from the Université Laval, and obtained a doctorate in Applied Human Sciences from the Université de Montréal.

Introduction

The digital landscape

Today, everyone agrees that advances in technology have brought the “commodification” of information resources to a previously unparalleled and unimagined scale. These advances enable the participation of citizens in the simultaneous creation, production and reuse of information. Liberated from the confines of analogue production, society is creating an unimaginably large, dynamic, and congested digital information “market space.”

Most people also agree that there is a shift in the landscape of information resource and memory development from the controlled, ordered, formal experiences of limited relationships between official mediators, typical of the analogue age, to the uncontrolled, disordered and informal experiences and unlimited communications of cyberspace that characterize the digital age.

Technological developments are not static and will continue to morph as society itself interacts with and harnesses its own technological expertise in unforeseen ways. There is no end in sight to what the future will bring about, and in this environment, information professionals and

the institutions they serve will need to continually reassess their presumptions and business precepts surrounding their understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

I for one believe that it would be foolish to think that the digital age merely brought about an explosion of content that can be mitigated by better and broader conservation and faster research tools. In a society where technological advances eradicate the boundaries between disciplines, we collectively must constantly reassess the function and role of memory institutions. To those who doubt this, I ask how memory institutions will preserve breakthroughs in health sciences such as the marrying of print technology with biophysics and cell biology in order to replicate biological tissue constructs through organ printing technology. Do we need nitrate freezers next to our filing cabinets? Well, maybe we do.



This presentation seeks to explore a few of the changes that are currently occurring in the information world, what is the Government of Canada doing right now to cope with them and what impacts those changes will have on information professionals.

Changes in the Environment

Social transformations

One of the features of the digital age is the opposition of some of the features, of the attributes of the analogue and digital environments. The key distinctions arise upon examination of the characteristics of the emerging multi-generational workforce. Essentially, each new generation brings with it different experiences, social norms, and world views to reinforce a wide diversity in skills, aptitudes



and knowledge. In general, the baby boomer generation (ages 45 to 63) were born into a world of analogue communication, a world based on the value of physical objects: where information and knowledge resources are “contained” in manuscripts, official papers, books, card catalogues, mainframes, and personal desktops.

Conversely, research shows that the environment of the “digital natives” of the Internet generation (ages 19 to 31) have grown up in a very different social and knowledge context, virtually enveloped by it. This generation is decidedly different from previous ones in how its members interact with information, people, institutions, and technology, and how they perform and excel in their work functions. This demographic group is tech-savvy, diverse, media-saturated, and has a fluid lifestyle which contrasts with the value-driven baby boomers who place priority on self-actualization. As well, there are also key differences in values: baby boomers value fulfillment, indulgence, balance, and equity, while the Internet generation values diversity, flexibility, empowerment, and is service oriented.

Anthropological changes

Beyond society as a whole, there are individuals who comprise that evolution. The relationship that the modern

person has with information in the broader sense is transforming rapidly. People no longer write as before or for the same reasons. In the same way, they no longer preserve their records the way they did before. Still more fundamentally, they no longer read the same things. These observations go beyond questions of style and vocabulary, as well as retention capacity and means. Both individual motivations and his or her actions surrounding information are in the process of evolving.

In fact, one might think that if the children of the baby boomers do not understand their parents it is because they do not share their values. Similarly, their grandchildren will not understand them since they do not speak the same language or share the same perspective.

Documentary moment: a concept that is evolving rapidly

In the past, information professionals have exercised the sole responsibility of ensuring the fate of our collective memory and documentary heritage. They decided what will be preserved, and what will be remembered, now and in future generations. The nature and dimensions of this critical decision-making

experience as it relates to the selection of documentary heritage is what many of these professionals would typically term “appraisal” or “acquisition,” but it is probably best described by the term, “the documentary moment.” In summary, the concept of the documentary moment relates to the construction of public memory by dedicated institutions and civil society within what is now a primarily digital environment.

On closer examination, the documentary moment is a seamless moment of time and space within the remembering process and occurs when communities become aware of and confront the instability, fragility, and ephemeral nature of memory. This is the moment when society must make decisions about the communication, capture, treatment, and management of its information resources, in relation to its understanding of their continuing purpose, value, utility, impact, or legacy. This is the moment when collectivities must finally, very deliberately and self-consciously, invest in and provide for the preservation of information, initially as a social or economic asset and subsequently, as an accessible civic good of public memory bringing meaning to society over time.

The onset of the digital age has completely transformed the documentary moment. It has contracted or reshaped the contemplative time-space and brought

many new factors forward into our decision making around memory value. Decisions that could be delayed for thirty years are now being evaluated before, during, and immediately after the act of creation.

Recordkeeping in the Government of Canada

The recordkeeping regime

Recordkeeping is about establishing ways and means for organizations to effectively capitalize on corporate information as a key business asset and enabler in support of decision making, and to document business activity to satisfy stewardship, accountability and legal requirements. Under the *Library and Archives of Canada Act*, Parliament has assigned the Librarian and Archivist of Canada the responsibility of providing advice and guidance to departments and agencies on the management of records and the authority to control the disposition of records within government institutions.

Effective recordkeeping establishes core-essential administrative and business coherence within government for decision making, the development of policy, and the delivery of

programs and services to Canadians. Fundamentally, it also rests at the very core of ministerial and managerial accountability within Canada's democratic process. It provides ministers and deputies with the capacity to render an account of decisions and actions through the presentation of evidence in the form of records and documentation, and affords citizens through Parliament and its officers or committees the documentary means to assess organizational results or measure performance, to understand decision making, or to evaluate the soundness and propriety of policy and actions. In short, to quote a seminal Canadian observation on the rudiments of modern public sector accountability, "records must be created, maintained and preserved in such a way that a contemporary democratic government can be held fully accountable to the public for its activities" (J. Grant Glassco, *Report of the Royal Commission on Government Organization*, 1962).



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Fundamentally, the regime is based on the development of documentation standards for recordkeeping within institutions linked to program activities, business lines, and assigned roles and responsibilities. The standards will be developed internally by departments and agencies to guide their decision making related to the creation and management of records, and to establish delegated authorities for the disposition of records as required by Parliament. The regime is also based on several key strategies, including the management of records having ongoing business value at the point of their creation (versus the previous business model which typically managed records at the point of their destruction).

This substantial shift in strategic approach will enable departments and agencies to focus resources on the management of key business records in a differentiated manner rather than attempting to manage and maintain accessibility to all records regardless of their value to government or the public interest, which is becoming increasingly costly with the growing number of electronic records.

The Government of Canada recordkeeping directive

The *Directive on Recordkeeping*, which came into force in June 2009, places

the responsibility for good record-keeping on program managers in government. Compliant recordkeeping involves defining information resources (including published and unpublished information in any medium or format) of business value in relation to the mandate of the department, and then management of those resources by such means as a classification scheme or taxonomy, capture in a repository, documented destruction, etc. The concept of business value is connected to the value framework mentioned above, but requires a definition of value at the moment of creation of an information resource.

Clear roles and responsibilities for accountability and the duty to document are stipulated for the Government of Canada and preference was given to the creation and maintenance of information in electronic form. In addition, the governance structure for the management of information in government has been revised and renewed to include consultation with business program managers. Canada's Treasury Board Secretariat takes the lead on implementing the IM Policy and Directive, and consults with IM experts in government through a series of interdepartmental committees that it co-chairs with representatives from Library and Archives Canada.

To introduce a new culture of documentary discipline in support of public

business enterprise—which focuses on the creation and capture of information resources for the purposes of accountability and transparency—the Government of Canada recently took steps to introduce the following:

- Deputy Minister Roundtable and Assistant Deputy Minister Taskforce on Recordkeeping
- Renewal of Information Management Policy
- Information Management Directive
- Recordkeeping Directive and Management Accountability Framework (Linking Recordkeeping to Business Enterprise Architecture through the Management Accountability Framework and Management, Resources and Results Structure)

All of this led to the establishment of a regulatory regime of recordkeeping based on documentation standards for program management and service delivery.

Trusted digital repository

Increasingly, the documentary heritage of Canada is being born digital and made accessible to Canadians in digital form. The rapid move to a digital environment has changed everything the Library and Archives Canada mandate touches—publishing, government, research, learning, and culture. Library and Archives Canada has therefore set as a primary objective

to become a truly digital institution. Library and Archives Canada acquires a large scale and broad range of digital content including digital publications, selective websites, large Web domains, blogs, electronic government records, digital photos and art, digital audiovisual, geomatics, electronic theses from Canadian universities, digital technical and architectural drawings, private textual electronic records, broadcast data, etc. As well, Library and Archives Canada generates considerable digital content with a large-scale digitization program.

As Canada moves forward in meeting the challenges of preserving its digital documentary heritage, we need to develop a pan-Canadian network of Trusted Digital Repositories—electronic vaults—where digital content can be hosted and distributed in both the short and medium term. This content will be carefully selected to determine what should be preserved and made available in the long term. Library and Archives Canada is currently developing the appropriate policies, standards, work processes and technologies to enable it to become a Trusted Digital Repository by 2017 and thereby to ensure long-term access to this country's digital heritage. In this way, we are truly becoming a twenty-first century library and archives.

The Impact on Information Management Professionals within the Government and beyond

Cultural shift required

Government has traditionally considered records management to be a technical activity concerned with the archiving of records. This view has not recognized the link to business operations in departments and is far from the contemporary view of recordkeeping.

Information management and information technology functional specialists will need to understand how the information resources of business value can be visualized, modelled, or mapped to the departmental information architecture. As you know, this understanding improves the overall efficiency of program delivery, meets the government's high-level business objectives, and provides greater administrative and business coherence across government.

It is worth noting that although it can be used to provide a structure of the information assets and their inter-relationship to business processes, and can serve as a foundation for a department's information architecture,

these guidelines are independent of technology, tools, and systems.

Establishing business value criteria for information resources

Information resources created and/or produced by public servants in the course of daily operational business are the intellectual property of the Government of Canada and are subject to legislative, regulatory, and policy requirements regarding their use, management, security, and disposal. Information resources otherwise acquired (purchased, donated) in the course of daily operational business are the physical property of the department and are similarly subject to legislative, regulatory and policy requirements.

Since not all information resources have inherent and equal business value in and of themselves, departments must make decisions about the value of the information resources they create or acquire, and focus their resources on managing only those that have business value and are captured within repositories. These information resources of business value are defined in relation to two imperatives:

- the mandated and legislated functions and activities that necessitated their creation or acquisition; and

- the business performance requirements of the federal public administration (e.g., contribution to administrative coherence and continuity within financial, planning, performance measurement, and reporting processes).

Selective information preservation

Society is not in the midst of an information management crisis; we are in the midst of an “information value crisis.” The decision making about the value of information resources and its continuous preservation upstream means a single process of evaluation and decision making about the persistence of information resources over time. We need to make proactive decisions about the value of information, and government is working on this issue within a series of value propositions, i.e., a Treasury Board Guide to the Value of Business Information.

handle. Today, we must look at the future thinking it is going to yield a lot of everything and anything. To adapt, information professionals must become highly versatile and must learn to base their decisions bearing in mind who they serve and why. This will inevitably bring them to assess and preserve information based on renewed relevancy criteria. Failure to do so will translate into a severely eroded collective memory and that will surely bring our memory institutions into disrepute.

Thank you

Conclusion

For decades, information professionals have looked to the future thinking it would simply yield a lot more of the same—with a little twist perhaps, but nothing a better computer can't