Guidance on Managing and Archiving Web Content

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Issue

Consumers of Government of Canada (GC) web content expect it to be accurate and up to date. They need to be able to easily differentiate current content from older content provided strictly for reference purposes.

Context

This guidance provides information management (IM) best practices for managing and archiving web content in support of section 4.3 of the *Directive on Service and Digital*. The principles of good IM must apply to all information that is created and used within the GC, including web content.

From an IM perspective, most web content is transitory. It is the source document, that is created and stored in a corporate repository, that is managed through its life cycle according to these IM principles.

Web archiving is an IM best practice that can be used to provide users with access to older content for reference purposes or to provide context for current content. Note that this guidance does not apply to the Open Government Portal.

Web content can be divided into three categories:

1. Current Web Content is information that is up to date, accurate and required on a website

2. Archived Web Content is information that is no longer current but is retained on a website for reference or to provide context to current content

3. Legacy Web Content is information that has been revised or superseded by more recent web content, has been removed from the site, and may have been moved into a corporate repository for IM purposes

Guidance

To effectively manage web content, the following considerations should be addressed:

1. Before identifying web content to be archived, a thorough evaluation of the entire site should be completed. It is recommended that departments ensure ongoing content review and management of redundant, outdated and trivial (ROT) content.

2. A Web Content Review Plan should be developed that outlines the lifespan of all web content based on usage, accuracy and currency. This plan should establish retention schedules for current web content and for archived web content. These schedules can be the same as the retention schedules for the source content, but web content may also have regular review and refresh cycles within the retention period.

3. Web managers, IM functional specialists and business owners should be involved in the review and evaluation of web content.

4. Clear authorities for the approval to archive content (business owners in consultation with the departmental official delegated by the chief information officer) need to be established, documented and communicated.

5. Retention schedules should clearly identify the date that previously **archived web content** should be removed from the department's website. These schedules need to be aligned with the department's approved records retention and disposition schedules.

6. Archived web content must be clearly marked on the website as being archived, as set out in _Guidance on Implementing the Standard on Web Usability_. Archiving web content includes updating the metadata elements.

7. Details on where or how users can access web archived content, and how long this content will remain accessible online, should be communicated to potential users via the website.

8. The Web Content Review Plan should include:

    ○ documented business rules that apply to specific content

    ○ rules that should be applied to content in general

    These processes should be automated wherever possible through the use of standardized metadata. Examples of business rules for the web archiving of content include the following:

    a. Web content that is also available on another site should be removed, not web archived. Instead, pointers and links should be provided to the other site.

       Example: Departmental Plans and Departmental Results Reports

       ▪ Departments could keep one or two years of previous reports to provide context to the current reports. Older reports should be accessed on the Government of Canada Publications site, as set out in the _Procedures for Publishing_.

    b. Information should generally be kept on the web for the same period of time as the related source information is maintained

for recordkeeping purposes, with the exception of proactive publications that fall under Part 2 of the _Access to Information Act_. Refer to the _Directive on Proactive Publication under the Access to Information Act_ for more information.

c. Technical capacity limitations, recent usage statistics and relevance should be considered when determining how long to keep information on the web.

Example: News releases and notices

- Analytics show that the rate of online access drops dramatically after two years. Departments should remove news releases and notices from current web content after two years. Departments may keep them longer, either web archived or within their corporate repositories, for internal reference and recordkeeping.

d. In cases where there is a legislative or policy requirement to provide long-term access to particular information, departments need to provide a notice that advises visitors that the information has been removed and that the content can be provided to users upon request.

Further information

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