Filing and Naming Electronic Records

Filing and Naming Documents

Electronic documents need to be filed by their contents (subject matter), not by format (such as Word or Excel). Directory and folder names should be established on network drives containing information that defines the content and follows records retention and disposition schedules. For example, a folder used by Accounting named "Accounts Payable" might contain spreadsheets, presentation slides, word processing documents and possibly e-mail messages concerning accounts payable. When sub-folders and -files simply name the account or vendor, the file name may only be useful to identify content as long as the document continues to reside in the same folder. File names should be meaningful and understandable by all users in and of themselves and should not rely on the folder structure for meaningful information regarding the document content. Should a document need to be moved, it may be placed in another folder without the need to rename the document.

For example, a document named "PCard_Statement_20090131.doc" might be stored (filed) on the agency network drive as follows:

F:\AccountsPayable\PurchasingCard_G102_001\2009_10\PCard_Statement_20090131.doc

The parameters before the actual document name identify the organization (filing structure) and location of the document:

F:	Specific agency network drive
AccountsPayable	Primary folder in the directory structure
PurchasingCard_G102_001	Subfolder within the Primary folder directory structure (Purchasing Card folder with reference to the General Schedule item number)
2009_10	Sub-subfolder within the directory structure (fiscal year)
PCard_Statement_20090131	actual document (file) name (Purchasing Card monthly statement for January 2009)*
.doc	software extension (MS Word Document)

* NOTE: If the document was simply named "Statement_20090131", and the document was moved to a different location, there would be no reference that it was a Purchasing Card Monthly Statement)

In standard desktop applications, the entire path and file name are treated as the name of an item. If the complete name is longer than 255 characters, the system may truncate it and important sections of the name may be lost. It is also advisable **not to use dots or special characters when naming files or folders** as this may cause the files to become unusable or misread.

File Naming Conventions

There are many benefits to the standardization of file names. To name a few, they will allow agencies to:

- name files quickly and easily,
- reduce redundancy of files,
- access files easily and rapidly,
- avoid loss of information,
- find the latest draft or the desired version of a document,
- share files more easily.

There are also many ways that files can be named. However, each file must have a meaningful name that is understandable to all users. The Purchasing Card example used above is one method of naming a file, where the meaningful name is first and the date second; MeaningfulName_Date.FileExtension. For some file types the date may be more important and be listed first. When using dates within the name it is important to consider how the date will be used so that it will sort properly. For instance, most often the date would be sorted by year, month and day; hence yyyymmdd is a standard naming convention. Version, author, form number or other identifying criteria may be important to denote within the name.

Other naming convention examples are:

- Date_MeaningfulName.FileExtension
  20040302_EmailPolicyBackupProc.doc
- MeaningfulName_VersionNumber_Date_Author.FileExtension
  WebITB_V04_20061009_Carson.pdf
  ArchivesAppraisal_V03_20080721_Smith.ppt

Check with your supervisor to see if standard naming conventions are used in your agency or program area and, if not, consider using standard naming conventions and abbreviations for file names. A thesaurus could be created for all abbreviations to be consistent throughout the organization. Examples of Standard Abbreviations might include organizational structure, business processes & functions, form identification and so forth. *Ex:* 20090901_BAM_POS_CRS_Brentwood.doc

Accounts Payable	ACC_PAY
Accounts Receivable	ACC_REC
Benefits Administration & Member Services	BAM
Bureau of Financial Management	BFM
Bureau of Operations & Building Management	BOM
Correspondence – General	CRS
Correspondence - Executive	CRS_EXC
Division of Financial Investments	DFI
Office of Chief Counsel	OCC
Purchase of Service	POS