

Which is Better: Film or Electronic Archiving? Or Both?

Companies often times present this high level question at the beginning stages of archiving projects or implementing a "Business Continuity" plan to anticipate recovery from natural or technological disasters. The best solution often, however, is defined by the needs and requirements of the particular organization. Moreover, the preservation of critical paper and electronic records has taken on renewed relevance in light of corporate scandals and changes in regulatory, legal, and auditing practices including [HIPAA](#), [Sarbanes-Oxley Act](#), and the [Patriot Act](#) (click each for more information).

Film: While many companies promote their internal use of "latest and greatest" technology, there are some instances where film, considered by some to be "retro-tech", is the *better* choice. Film archiving (microfiche and microfilm) of records may be the critical component in satisfying high-quality image standards and legal liability requirements of storing documents with a perpetual lifespan. Insurance and property records are excellent examples of documents with notable "legacy value" that is preserved by storing on film. Government agencies and cultural organizations also recognize that film storage answers the unique preservation needs of *historical/cultural artifacts and documents*.

Above and beyond those priorities, the cost and significance of regulatory mandates associated with corporate compliance, *particularly records management*, have increased notably in recent years. As a result, many more companies, not just those in traditionally regulated environments such as pharmaceuticals and aerospace are finding that they need to change from a departmental plan or ad hoc approach to an enterprise-wide compliance strategy. Organizations must be prepared to meet the regulatory requirements of [HIPAA](#), the **DoD 5015.2 Standard**, the [Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002](#), or the **SEC's Rule 17a**.

Additionally, the longevity benefits of film storage are realized only when archives are stored correctly. For example, companies should keep a **silver master film** of documents that is rarely if ever used for document retrieval, relying instead on a **duplicate copy film** of the master for regular retrieval. A copy film offers access to records and, with proper care, offers a reasonably long service life.

Electronic Storage: In a nutshell, electronic storage is the process by which paper and/or electronic documents are archived into a common electronic format, such as Adobe Acrobat PDF or if using the Mercury Viewer then the documents can be stored in their native formats. These documents can then be indexed and retrieved using a single common interface, often a web browser or an application with similar navigation and search functionality. The clear advantage of electronic storage is **speed of retrieval**. In other words, vast archives are available in seconds with no staff required to retrieve and load films from libraries, a workflow problem that can easily congest a business' processes.

Electronically stored documents may be archived on CD's, DVD's, remote or local servers, web-accessed or locally networked affording a variety of capital infrastructure options related to maintaining archives. In most cases, different documents can be stored in a common format such as PDF. In cases where data may need to be extracted from an archive for database purposes for example, data can be extracted and repurposed through the use of text files affording **increased versatility**.

The Verdict: Clearly, there are advantages to each approach. Archiving with film is the better choice for companies that seek a long-term storage solution with superior imaging characteristics. Electronic storage offers easy and immediate retrieval access to data and is available anywhere with standard network infrastructure. Companies that don't yet have the need for electronic storage solutions-or can't afford them-

may opt to bide their time with a secure archive on film that can be flexibly adapted to future migrations to electronic formats.

Many organizations opt for a **hybrid approach**. By using elements of both solutions, a company can reduce workflow barriers to access by using electronic storage for regularly retrieved stores of documents. At the same time, legal liabilities are diminished by preserving documents using film solutions and, consequently, keeping a long-term, fail-safe alternative back-up. Ultimately, a company needs to assess its archiving needs according to a cost/value matrix that takes the following into the account:

- Is speed of retrieval important to efficient business processes?
 - CSR applications via the phone may be forced into quicker responses via web access to control expensive call backs or talk time on the phone as information is retrieved.
- Do internal or external regulatory requirements mandate long term archiving?
 - Film solutions are the least expensive long term archive and as regulations continue to change film can change as the policy changes.
- Are there laws governing the maintenance and storage of documents to be archived?
 - As technology changes, electronic records may not change with newer technology.
- Do cultural/historical requirements necessitate a high-quality long-term storage solution?
 - All records that have an archive of 25 years or greater should include a film copy.
- Is there a staffing budget to support the maintenance and retrieval requests of a film archive?
 - Film is more labor intense assuming the technical resources are available for electronic record keeping.
- Can the IT infrastructure handle the bandwidth load of electronic data retrieval?
 - It can be outsourced to third party if IT infrastructure and/or resources are not available.

With the 2010 acquisition of Anacomp, DocuLynx is in position to help public and private sector organizations chart a course in document data archiving that addresses their present and anticipated demands and needs.