

## ***How to establish effective Document Control***

*Maintaining access to current documents can make the difference between business efficiency and a business cost.*

If your business is not managing key documents appropriately it may be incurring delays in locating information, staff may be using out of date forms, or old documents and procedures may be used instead of new. Maintaining access to current documents can make the difference between business efficiency and a business cost.

Consider these two situations, both of which resulted in costs to the businesses involved:

### **Case 1**

The schedule of fees and rates which were set by the business for all services had been discounted for a particular job and inadvertently saved back onto the central storage. Without realising there had been changes, the rest of the office staff used the changed schedule for some weeks until the variation was noticed, with the result that a number of clients had been quoted well below the usual price.

### **Case 2**

A "Terms and Conditions" sheet for recruitment services had been carefully drafted and vetted by lawyers. The document was regularly updated to accommodate changes in legislation. Although the document was stored centrally and readily available to all staff, some staff preferred to copy the document onto their hard drives. Although this may have seemed easier for them to access the files it did mean they did not have the latest version available. A dispute arose with one client, and the matter became very confused and difficult when it was realized that the client had signed a version of the "Terms and Conditions" which was out of date.

### **What does your business need to do to avoid these or similar problems?**

Document control, or document management, is a way of managing critical business documentation. It addresses the security and control of document content, as well as distribution of documents to users.

Although it is often done badly, it does not need to be as difficult or cumbersome as many businesses make it. There are a range of products on the market which can manage your documents from creation to storage, file sharing and revision. However even your existing Microsoft Office programs have features which allow you to manage and index a simple document control system.

The key is to design and implement a system which works for the size and structure of your business.

An effective document control system addresses 4 areas:

#### **1. Content**

- ▶ Identify documents to be controlled – include the important ones, but be selective or the system will become too hard to manage.
- ▶ Include security on each doc so it can only be changed by those with the proper authority.
- ▶ Review content regularly and update as required using clear approval authorities.

#### **2. Referencing**

- ▶ Include a reference on all controlled documents which indicate the date or version, perhaps the file name and where the doc can be located.

### 3. Distribution

- ▶ The mechanism you choose will depend on the size and structure of your business. You may find a hard copy folder system sufficient for a small, single office, or folders on a commonly accessible server. Larger businesses may require an intranet with a suitably designed document system.

### 4. Awareness

- ▶ The system will only work if people use it, so they need to understand why it is important, how to use it and how it can help them.
- ▶ Documents will change and be updated. Ensure that people are kept informed of changes.

Like anything, success will depend on developing a system which is appropriate to your needs and keeping it going.

Document Control is considered an essential component for business seeking certification in management standards such as the RCSA Service Delivery System or the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System. In addition to have a document control system which works, the procedure itself must be documented as a management procedure and controlled.

The RCSA is developing a suite of online training modules to assist Members to build or enhance their service delivery management systems. The first of these modules is on Document Control and is now available through [www.learningseat.com/public/rcsa](http://www.learningseat.com/public/rcsa). The training module includes examples of good control systems, steps to implement and tips on what to avoid.

Dianne Gibert is a Director of Fathom Business Architects. Fathom developed the Service Excellence concept, and manages the RCSA Service Delivery Standard on behalf of the RCSA.

For more information on Fathom please view the website at [www.fathombusiness.com.au](http://www.fathombusiness.com.au) or email to [info@fathombusiness.com.au](mailto:info@fathombusiness.com.au). To find out more about the RCSA Service Delivery Standard you can also go to the RCSA website at [www.rcsa.com.au](http://www.rcsa.com.au) and click "Service Delivery Standard".