Managing and Archiving Records in the Digital Era: Changing Professional Orientations. NIKLAUS BUTIKOFER, HANS HOFMAN, and SEAMUS ROSS, eds. Baden: Hier + jetzt, Verlag Fur Kulture und Geschicte, 2006. 131 p. ISBN 13-978-3-03919.

Picture this: you are helping your child with homework. He or she is research-ing the Plains of Abraham. To help, you do what millions of people do every-day: Google it and wait for information from around the globe. Some of it is relevant, some partially relevant, and some not so relevant.[1]

You probably remember doing this same report in grade school, using the school, or public library , or the *Encyclopedia Britannica* . If you were lucky enough to live near the Plains of Abraham, you might have been able to visit a museum, historical site, or archives. But today , people do not have to put in long hours in a library or archives to do research.   They let the computer do the searching for them.   And you do not even have to live nearby to see the Plains of Abraham – you can see it from Sydney, BC or Sydney, Australia.[2]

This is the challenge facing archivists today: the Google world and the changes it has wrought. Patrons are accustomed to getting information over-load on whatever topic suits their fancy in the time it takes to click a mouse. Archivists, long accustomed to dealing in the physical (paper , photos, and the like), must now deal with the ethereal (electronic records). Most simply do not know where to begin.

The 2004 ERP ANET[3] workshop, held at the Swiss Federal   Archives in Bern, asked international experts in the fields of archival science and records management six questions that would form a starting point for this issue (p. 7):

1. What are the main challenges when managing and preserving informa-tion and records?
2. Will the new digital order change user needs or expectations of infor-mation, records, and/or archives management?
3. Are the existing archival paradigms adequate to meet the challenges of the new digital order?
4. What new or ganizational or business models does the new technology offer us to organize records and archives management?
5. What impact will the new digital order have on the interaction with

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1   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Plains_of_Abraham;
     http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/2002/5/2002_5_51a.shtml (both accessed 29 August 2007).
2   http://www.ccbn-nbc.gc.ca/_en/index.php (accessed 29 August 2007).
3   The Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network was founded in 2001 to deal with issues surrounding electronic records and archives.

related disciplines, such as information management, libraries, content management, knowledge management, etc.?

6. What impact will all this have on the archival or records management discipline?

Managing and Archiving Records in the Digital Era: Changing Professional Orientations provides readers with expanded versions of the ERPANET workshop presentations and uses the above questions as a jumping-off point to discuss electronic records and archives. The contributors – Eric Ketelaar, Helen R. Tibbo, Angelika Menne-Haritz, Bruno Delmas, Elizabeth Shepherd, Alan Murdock, Barbara Reed, Maria Guercio, Wendy Duff, and Michael Moss – span both the globe, and the archives and records management professions, and their insights provide a frustrating, but interesting, view of the two fields and their relation to the digital world. Frustrating, because there is very little consensus; interesting, because among the essays there is information that is relevant to almost everyone's situation with electronic records, regardless of the type of institution for which they work.

The authors agree on only three points: electronic records are hard to manage, they have and continue to change the way archival and records management work is done, and they have changed the behaviour and expectations of archival patrons. There is not much to be said about the first point; the pathetic state of long-term storage solutions for electronic records is well-known and widely discussed. However, it is in the latter two points where the debate really starts.

Electronic records have and continue to change the way archivists and records managers work, but how? Will they lead to a closer alliance between the fields? Guercio, Shepherd, Duff, and Reed think that they must, because electronic records elevate the importance of the front end (records management) rather than the back end (archives) (pp. 55, 72, 88, and 111). Of course, this is true only if you believe the two fields are not the same thing. Delmas does not – he sees the division between the two fields as an artificial construct of North Americans (p. 39). If they do lead to closer ties, will this be a good idea, as Duff believes (p. 111), or a terrible notion, as Moss and Menne-Haritz think (pp. 120, 38)?

Maybe the whole point will be moot: Ketelaar's essay is entitled "Everyone An Archivist," and perhaps it is down this path that the future lies. Many of the other authors agree with Ketelaar to some degree – but they differ as to whether this is a good thing (Ketelaar himself believes that it will be) (p. 10) or a bad thing (Tibbo is all doom and gloom on the prospect) (p. 18). The essayists do not even agree on how users will behave in this new digital world: Tibbo believes electronic records beget compulsive hoarding (p. 17), while Moss thinks they produce "delete-happy" creators because of risk management and discovery (p. 119).

What of the fate of users in this brave new digital world? Are they grow-

ing ever more sophisticated, as Moss ar gues (p. 1 16), or are they getting unreasonably demanding while at the same time becoming unbelievably sloppy in their work habits, as Tibbo believes (p. 17)?

It is hard to say . There is a grain of truth and a spot of hyperbole in all of the essays. The behaviour of creators and users is as varied as the people themselves. It is in this truth that the book's greatest strengths lay: in the electronic realm, there are few constants because electronic records, like paper records, are created by humans and humans are as heterogeneous as the records they create. The essays encompass a myriad of perspectives that when gathered together will allow a reader to recognize the reality of their own situation. Just like a Google search, some information is relevant, some is partially relevant, and some is not so relevant.

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