

How 'Spring Cleaning' Your Document Destruction Policy Can Help Safeguard Confidential Information

In this issue we will examine the realities of document security within businesses and how “spring cleaning” your document destruction policy can help your company comply with regulation when disposing of sensitive information. Security firm Symantec has shown that 31 per cent of all data breaches are a result of negligence, providing evidence that there is a lack of awareness of the necessity to implement such procedures in the work place for all employees to follow¹.

For many businesses, setting a schedule for clearing out old files can help destroy outdated or unnecessary documents and create space around the office. This practice can also help businesses reduce their risk of leaking confidential data. Businesses should apply a “spring cleaning” policy to their own business practice to ensure that old, outdated and unwanted sensitive information is securely destroyed. Doing so will help organisations avoid exposing confidential information that can increase the potential risk of a data breach, resulting in fraud or identity theft of the company itself or its customers.



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Know when to store and when to dispose



Many businesses are required by law to keep confidential client information, as well as employee or company data for a minimum amount of time. There are numerous business records that should be held for up to a minimum of six years, which can include employee agreements, business loan documentation, litigation records, as well as general expense reports and records including overhead expenses and professional consultation fees.

Other documents may be kept for shorter, longer or an indefinite period of time and it's important to know what legal requirements are enforced for your industry to not only stay compliant, but to also dispose of documents you may no longer need.

Regularly maintaining filing cabinets and securely disposing of old documents can help minimise risk of sensitive information being accessed by unauthorised personnel. The risks of keeping old documents containing sensitive data can be high, possibly resulting in identity theft, fraud and potential financial loss or reputational damage.

Here are some tips for how your company can implement organisational information security policies for employees:

- **Create a retention policy:** Determine which documents need to be kept and for how long. Limit the number of personnel who have access to files and storage cupboards and practice a company-wide commitment to this practice.
- **Clearly mark a destruction date:** The destruction date should be clearly marked on all records that are in storage. All file boxes should contain complete lists of their contents in a visible location on the outside of the box so it is easily identifiable.
- **Hire a reliable third-party vendor** for your document destruction needs that will provide you with a certificate of destruction upon completion and also provide an opportunity for this material to be recycled once destroyed.
- **Out with the old, in with the new.** Implement document destruction processes on a regular basis. Overhauling your current disposal process with a commitment to continuously destroying confidential data in a secure manner is one of the ways to mitigate the risks associated with data breaches.

Here are ways you can incorporate a 'spring cleaning' mentality into your company's every day processes:



Paper: Don't throw old papers or files into the recycling bin. Loose paper is often unattended before it has been recycled and can leave your organisation vulnerable to potential security breaches. Papers in recycling bins can be misplaced or stolen. Instead, ensure you dispose of loose paper in a secure, locked console that cannot be accessed until it is ready to be shredded by a reliable professional.



Electronic sources: Erasing disks and drives is no guarantee that the data will be wholly eliminated. Physical destruction, rendering the object unreadable by any machine is the safest option.



Shred-all: Implementing a "shred-all" policy for the disposal process when all unneeded documents are fully destroyed on a regular basis. This dramatically minimises any potential risk or exposure.

Developing a clear set of guidelines and aligning the disposal policies throughout the business will ensure that the decision to destroy is taken out of the hands of individual employees, minimising the risk of a data breach for the organisation. Whether intentional or unintentional, leaked information can be preyed upon by criminal groups in order to commit fraud and identity theft crimes. It is therefore important to maintain regular secure disposal of both paper and electronic records.

About Shred-it

In the UK alone, Shred-it has 16 branches, employs over 400 people and operates over 120 shredding trucks, providing the most secure and trustworthy data destruction services possible for its customers. Shred-it UK has customers which span the sectors, from government agencies to financial and legal institutions, taking each customer's unique needs into account and bringing secure on-site document destruction services direct to their door, thus ensuring total confidentiality in security and shredding. Shred-it is a world-leading document destruction company that ensures the security and integrity of our customers' private information. The company operates 140 branches in 16 countries worldwide, servicing over 150,000 global, national and local businesses, including the world's top intelligence and security agencies and more than 500 police forces, 1,500 hospitals, 8,500 bank branches and 1,200 universities and colleges.

To learn more about Shred-it document destruction service, contact us at:
0800 028 1164

Or visit our website at
www.shredit.co.uk

We'll be happy to hear what you think and what other information security topics you are interested in.

Please email us at:
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Your Free Security Survey

With Spring season now officially underway, it's a good time to apply the concept of "spring cleaning" to business polices to ensure outdated or unwanted documents are securely disposed of and to help stay on track with sensitive information policies.

To learn more about Shred-it services or to book your FREE security survey, visit www.shredit.co.uk.

¹ http://www.symantec.com/en/uk/about/news/release/article.jsp?prid=20110321_11&om_ext_cid=biz_socmed_twitter_facebook_marketwire_linkedin_2011Mar_worldwide_costofdatabreach

