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Playing it Safe:
Document Destruction
Best Practices

All organisations possess confidential information about their own operations and about their customers which increases the risk of becoming a target for identity theft and fraud. According to Ernst and Young's 2013 Global Information Security Survey[1], they found that despite economic pressures, organisations are spending more to address information security challenges, including those related to delivering security in a borderless environment. 43 per cent of the survey respondents indicated that their annual investment in information security is increasing.

"Accessibility to documents that contain confidential data poses a serious threat to the business and reputational integrity of any organisation," says Michael Skidmore, Chief Security Officer at Shred-it. "It's only common sense that organisations should do what it takes to prevent any compromises of their information, identifying security loopholes and implementing effective and reliable measures to address them."

Secure document destruction is one of these measures. Based on its 25-plus years of experience in this business, Shred-it shares some tricks of the trade and practical tips on how to make sure your confidential information stays confidential.

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1   Ernst and Young, Under cyber attack EY's Global Information Security Survey 2013, www.ey.com

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Secure document destruction at a glance

Best practices in document destruction can be summed up in three general guidelines that are easy to understand and implement:

- **Shred all and shred regularly** — and avoid the risks of human error or poor judgment about what needs to be shredded. Discourage any accumulation of confidential paper waste that is stored in different parts of your office, creating a security risk.

- **Shred before recycling** — and spare yourself from worrying about what happens to your confidential paper waste once it is at the recycler or in transit to them.

- **Shred using a professional service** — and ensure there are no security loopholes anywhere in the process. Outsourcing also saves the time and resources of your employees.

When implemented in a strategic and integrated method, these principles will dramatically increase the security of your documents, your business and your customers. But let's look at them one at a time.

Best practice #1: Shred it all on a regular basis

A **"shred-all" policy** is one of the most critical steps you can take towards total information security. It means a company-wide commitment to shredding all documents on a regular basis. Standardising document destruction procedures will allow your organisation to align its rules and regulations with its information security goals and needs.

A shred-all policy is a way to make sure there are no leaks — intentional or unintentional — of your organisation's sensitive information to outside sources, potentially including criminal groups that feed on this sensitive information to commit fraud, including identity theft crimes. In turn, regular disposal of paper waste means it does not accumulate in an uncontrolled manner, reducing the potential for security breaches brought about through negligence or malicious intent.

Since the Information Commissioner's Office (the UK government's Data Protection watchdog) had its powers increased in 2010, it has issued over £6 million in fines for serious breaches of the Data Protection Act. Some estimates have put the total cost of a data security breach — including reputational damage and loss of business — at over £2 million per incident.[2] All of this leads to the conclusion that information disposal is already one of the largest concerns to consumers and businesses, and avoiding the consequences of improper disposal is of major importance when selecting a partner to process and destroy the information.

2   Ponemon Institute/IBM, 2014 Cost of Data Breach Study: United Kingdom, www.ponemon.org

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Tips for successfully implementing a shred-all policy:

- Conduct regular information security risk assessments to help you identify areas of vulnerability and potential risks in your office. Take time to document the flow of confidential information in your company; where it is created, stored and accessed.

- Update your document destruction policies accordingly, based on your findings and new or updated legislation.

- Train your staff in secure document destruction procedures. Show them your commitment to the cause and help them understand the importance of protecting your customers' — and your company's — confidential information.

Full cooperation by your employees is paramount, but a word of caution is in order. While most security threats may be perceived to be outside of your organisation, don't overlook the potential for internal threats. Your staff may actually be one of them.

Best Practice #2: Shred before recycling

You may think you are doing your part for the environment by throwing paper documents into the recycling bin. However, are you recycling in a security-conscious manner? Remember: loose paper is often unattended before it has been recycled, and it can leave your organisation vulnerable to potential security breaches. For example, unguarded paper in recycling containers can be misplaced or stolen. Or, it can simply fall out of the recycling collection vehicle onto the street.

There is a way to meet both needs — serving the environment and following responsible business practices — by recycling documents while also keeping your customers' information confidential. You can achieve both goals by outsourcing document destruction to a reliable service provider with high security standards and a strong environmental record.

You might find it interesting to know that, working with Shred-it, organisations save one tree through recycling every time they fill up two Shred-it security consoles with paper. Shred-it even offers customers an annual Environmental Certificate, which states how many trees they saved. What's more, using recyclable, biodegradable, hydraulic fuels for its vehicles, Shred-it reinforces its commitment to continuing to improve its environmental practices.

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Best practice #3: Shred with a reliable supplier

Implementing all these measures, you'll come a long way toward the ultimate goal — total security of your customer, employee and business information. However, one question remains — should you hire a third-party provider or try pursuing these measures on your own? Here are a few pointers to help you ponder this question:

- When you outsource document destruction, you **free up your staff to concentrate on what matters the most** — your business and the bottom line. This means productivity savings of up to 15 – 20 per cent, according to Shred-it's analysis of the number of employees generating and shredding paper, the time it takes them and their hourly wage.

- **Most organisations do not have the expertise to ensure total security** of the document destruction process. Nor do they have the equipment necessary for storing and shredding sensitive documents, such as locked security consoles and industrial-standard, multi-edge, cross-cut shredding machines. Finally, they do not have the human resources needed to support the tight chain of custody around the document destruction process.

Shred-it's on site locked document storage consoles ensure that once documents are ready to be discarded, they remain secure and protected until Shred-it personnel arrive. Those documents are then moved to a Shred-it truck, following a secure chain of custody. There, at your location, they are fully shredded, leaving only small confetti-like pieces of paper that cannot be reassembled. Shred-it completes the process, issuing a Certificate of Destruction to provide verification that documents have been securely destroyed.

By outsourcing your document destruction needs, you can gain access to years of experience and comprehensive expertise of a professional document destruction service provider. In doing so, you significantly reduce the risk of costly and damaging mishaps or accidents, potentially leading to security breaches, data protection violations and identity theft and fraud.

Your FREE security consultation

To conduct your own information security self-assessment, Shred-it has developed an online survey to help businesses better understand security gaps. You can access it via the following link: shredit.co.uk/information-security-best-practices-and-checklist

You can also visit Shred-it on Facebook and Linkedin or follow us on Twitter @Shredit_UK.

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