What is a wiki?

According to Wikipedia (the world’s most famous wiki), a wiki is “a website which allows its users to add, modify, or delete its content via a web browser”. They are designed to facilitate and promote collaborative work by making it as easy as possible to create, edit and link pages via hyperlinks.

While public wikis such as Wikipedia can be read and edited by anyone, internal wikis allow viewing and editing permissions for a given page (or group of pages, known as a space) to be restricted to staff from certain business areas or user groups. This makes them useful repositories for business areas’ documents and knowledge. University of Tasmania wikis use an enterprise wiki platform called Confluence. For more information, see Web and Learning Services’ Wikis page.

Problems with storing records in wikis

While internal wikis are excellent repositories for hosting and sharing documents, they are not true recordkeeping systems and are not fully compliant with the Archives Act 1983, so they should not be used to store records unless you do not have access to HP Records Manager (HPRM). Although they are a superior option to shared drives in many respects, they suffer from some of the same shortcomings, including:

- Lack of recordkeeping functionality, meaning that the authenticity and integrity of records cannot be established to the degree necessary to be able to rely upon the record as evidence.
- Don’t capture all the necessary metadata, such as author, creation date, software application, or details of changes to access permissions.
- Ability for some users (albeit only administrators) to delete records without having to work within a systematic retention and disposal framework.
- Users with permission to edit pages can create pages and vice versa.
- They are often poorly organised, which can lead to duplication and make it hard to find records or determine which version of a record is the most current.
- Potential for obsolete/superseded documents and forms to remain in circulation/use, risking confusion and poor decision-making made on the basis of out-dated information.
Advantages over shared drives

Although internal wikis are not true recordkeeping systems, if you don’t have access to HPRM, then they are probably the best option for storing electronic records and they have a number of advantages over shared drives:

- The University wikis have inbuilt revision histories that automatically store past versions of both wiki pages and any attachments, adding a new revision each time a page is edited or a new version of document is attached, and logging who created or edited pages or attachments.
- Records are better protected from deletion, though protection is lacking compared with HPRM.
- Wikis make linking documents easy, which makes them excellent for linking related records.
- It is easier to set and tailor security permissions for wikis than shared drives.
- Automatic capture of some metadata (title, date registered, date modified, format, registered by, last modified by), though not as comprehensive as HPRM.

Principles to observe when using wikis to store records

While wikis do not have the necessary functionality to be 100% compliant with the Archives Act, there are a number of steps and actions that can be taken to improve their recordkeeping characteristics and make them as compliant as possible.

The most important step is to organise your business area’s wiki space into a logical structure based on business functions and activities and to implement controls such as restricting the ability to create new pages, to avoid the proliferation of unstructured pages such as “Jane’s documents” or “Miscellaneous”, which can make it difficult to locate records and lead to problems with duplication and version control. We strongly recommend creating a folder structure based around the UTAS Business Classification Scheme or the University’s Functional Disposal Schedule (DA 2398), as this will not only provide a consistent and logical structure, but will also ensure that your records are grouped together by disposal class, which will make it much easier to dispose of records.

It is also important to provide clear guidelines and training in how and where to store and retrieve records from the wiki, how the folder structure works, and which formats to save records in. Although wikis are designed to be as easy to use as possible, some training may be required, especially for those staff who will be given administrative rights and responsibilities for the wiki.

Most of the principles outlined for shared drives in Information Sheet 11 also apply, such as filling out document properties in Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat, listing file-paths in document footers, and conducting regular housekeeping checks to cut down on duplication and misfiling.

Further information

To arrange for a wiki to be created for your business area, please contact the Service Desk on 1818 or at service.desk@utas.edu.au.

For more information, please visit our website at www.utas.edu.au/it/records. If you need help, please contact the Records Management Unit at RMU.Staff@utas.edu.au.

Related documents

- Records Management Guidelines
- Information Sheet 11 – Storing Records in Shared Drives