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STILL GOT THAT OLD PC?

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ABSTRACT

With more and more data being stored in digital format it is becoming increasingly important to make sure that electronic records are kept safe and accessible. There are legal obligations to store data such as sales and financial information for up to tens of years and other data such as medical data for up to 100 years. However, the preservation of digital data over such timeframes is proving problematic for many companies. Challenges faced by record managers include limited life span of storage media, many different file formats, an exponential increase in data volumes and frequent changes in technology.

Data stored on any type of media including CD-ROM has a limited life expectancy and must be copied to a new medium before the old one becomes unreadable. However the volume of electronic data is growing so quickly, that even when using the most up-to-date storage media and technology, some organisations are generating data faster than they can copy it. There is also considerable cost attached to the process.

Even using the latest technology however, data safety is not guaranteed. Not only must the data be physically preserved but the meaning of it must also be kept. Files created with particular software and hardware must be retrieved and interpreted many years after the software has vanished and the hardware become obsolete. How many of us still have the means to read a WordStar document stored on a DOS formatted 5 1/4 inch floppy disk?

Several solutions to preserve digital data have been suggested including migration, emulation and technology preservation. In migration, digital information is re-encoded into a current format that can be read and used on new systems. Emulation involves creation of new software that mimics old software and hardware. In Technology preservation old hardware and software, including old operating systems, are maintained and used in accessing old data. There are issues with each of these methods and research is on-going with several overseas universities and government organisations taking part in digital data preservation projects.

This poster aims to explore awareness of digital data preservation issues in New Zealand and is the first step in a larger research project to be undertaken later this year. As part of the poster, viewers will be invited to complete a questionnaire about their understanding of the problems associated with changing technology, life expectancy of storage media and long-term data storage. The results of this survey are shown immediately on the poster building up a visual representation of the results for the conference attendees.